



PERSPECTIVES TO RECREATION AND NATURE-BASED TOURISM IN FINLAND

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Forest recreation as part of Finnish lifestyle

Forest-based recreation is an essential part of life of Finns: 96 % of the population participates in outdoor recreation and majority of visits are made into forests. Recreational visits concentrate on urban and peri-urban forests in southern Finland, where majority of population lives. Finnish outdoor recreation is also featured by large number of visits to second homes: there are 490 000 second homes mainly located in the lake- district, coastal areas and in Lapland. Moreover, nature-based tourism is an example of non-timber forest services that has an increasing role as a means of livelihood in rural and peripheral areas. In Finnish

Lapland tourism has become the most important economic sector, providing more jobs than the forest sector.

In Finland, access to nature is guaranteed through everyman's right as well as the provision of nature areas in and around urban areas. Moreover, network of national parks (37 in total), hiking areas and regional recreation areas provide recreation opportunities for the general public, and also serve nature-based tourism entrepreneurs as a platform for their business. Everyman's right gives free access to nature areas for recreation and applies on all, undeveloped land and water areas including private lands. About 70% of the total forest land is privately owned in Finland.

Research needs for nature-based recreation and tourism arise from increasing

urbanization, decreasing job opportunities in traditional rural livelihoods such as forestry as well increasing need to provide health and well-being benefits for urbanizing societies. Comprehensive research information linked to recreation and nature-based tourism has been produced in a national research program 'Wellbeing from forests' (2008–2013) at METLA.

Health and wellbeing for urban people

The potential of nature areas in reducing stress and thus enhancing the quality of life has been increasingly recognized. Natural settings within living environments have importance in reducing stress and help in recovering from work.



Figure 1. Field experiment conducted in Helsinki

Information linked to health benefits are needed to improve urban planning and in justifying the provision and maintenance of public green and other nature areas. Research suggests that in particular extensively managed areas such as forests help in reducing stress and enhance psychological and physiological rehabilitation (e.g. Lee et al. 2012; Korpela et al 2010).

Health benefits of nature are studied in Metlas' research project GREENHEALTH (Green infrastructures for health in the future living environments, 2012–2015) funded by Academy of Finland. Psychological and physiological responses of outdoor recreation visits have been studied in a controlled field experiment. The experiment conducted in Helsinki consisted of viewing and walking sessions in three study sites: urban park, urban woodland and the city centre. The preliminary results show that both nature areas have clear stress reducing effects

compared to built-up environment. The differences between the urban park and a large woodland area were smaller, however, the urban woodland had more restorative qualities.

Nature-based tourism and forestry: synergy or conflict?

The growth of nature-based tourism has expanded recreation activities from protected areas also into commercial forests. This has created demands to modify the forest management regimes that have negative effects on the landscape, in particular forest regeneration practices. Large body of forest landscape preferences studies show that recreationists appreciate lightly managed forests, with no direct signs of forest management. Currently, effective models for distributing tourism income and incentives for the provision of amenity values by private landowners are missing.

Models for landscape and recreation values trading in private lands have been suggested to balance the provision of landscape and recreation benefits from forests. Financing would be collected from the users in connection to the prices of tourism services such as accommodation. Forest owners would be rewarded with payments for maintenance and enhancement of scenic and recreational values of their forests. The rationale behind creating the markets for amenity benefits of forests is that the beneficiaries have a measurable willingness to pay for the services. A recent study conducted in Ruka-Kuusamo tourism area located in northeastern Finland show that both foreign and domestic tourists were willing to pay for amenity benefits of forests, in terms of less frequent clear-cutting and site preparation areas along the routes, as well as for increased biodiversity (Tyrväinen et al 2013).