

**UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND**

Faculty of Social Sciences and Business Studies

Business School

**EASTERN FINLAND SERVICE PROVIDERS PERCEPTION ON  
WELLNESS TOURISM**

Master's thesis,

Tourism Marketing & Management

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# ABSTRACT

UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

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<b>Title</b> Eastern Finland service providers perception on Wellness Tourism			
<b>Main subject</b> Tourism Marketing and Management	<b>Level</b> Master's thesis	<b>Date</b> 16.10.2020	<b>Number of pages</b> 63+1
<b>Abstract</b> <p>This study's purpose is to clarify wellness tourism service providers' perceptions in Eastern Finland, more accurately the North Karelia, North Savonia and Kainuu region, of the concept "wellness tourism" in the region of Karelian wellness project and to create a definition and content for Karelian wellness tourism offering. Today wellness and health related tourism is growing faster than the tourism business as a whole, and target group is larger than ever before. Wellness tourism is contextual and changes according to time, culture, and place. In Finland, wellness tourism perception is wide, and nature has significant role in product and services. The terms which are related to wellness tourism are overlapping between concepts. Part of the reason for this are linguistic problems. Especially in Finland there is only one term "hyvinvointimatkailu" for all wellness-, wellbeing- and health tourism. This study utilize definition of previous studies for wellness concept and present definition for wellness tourism product from Eastern Finland.</p> <p>The research was carried out using qualitative methods and data consist of half structure interviews, which were in total 18.</p> <p>The data was analyzed with qualitative content analysis, where clear themes were repeated as the study progressed. According to research results Eastern Finland service providers perception was that the term "wellness" means hedonic and overall wellbeing, which consist of mind, body and spirit well-being. Karelian wellness product should consist of lakes, sauna, quiet and peaceful nature and it surroundings, local food, relaxing time in forest, also Karelian culture and Karelian hospitality.</p> <p>Compared to previous studies importance of Karelian culture and local food were remarkable. This study offers a confirmation for that wellness concept is multidimensional and means different things in different countries and context.</p>			
<b>Key words:</b> Wellness tourism, Wellbeing tourism, Finnish Wellbeing, Karelian wellness, new product/service development,			

TIIVISTELMÄ  
ITÄ-SUOMEN YLIOPISTO

<b>Tiedekunta</b> Yhteiskuntatieteiden ja kauppatieteiden tiedekunta	<b>Yksikkö</b> Kauppatieteiden laitos		
<b>Tekijä</b> Elisa Sulkinoja	<b>Ohjaaja</b> Raija Komppula		
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<b>Pääaine</b> Matkailun markkinointi ja johtaminen	<b>Työn laji</b> Pro-gradu tutkielma	<b>Aika</b> 16.10.2020	<b>Sivuja</b> 63+1
<b>Tiivistelmä</b> <p>Tutkimuksen tarkoitus on selvittää Itä-Suomen, erityisesti Pohjois-Karjalan, Pohjois-Savon ja Kainuun hyvinvointimatkailupalveluja tarjoavien yritysten käsitys käsitteestä ”wellness” sekä luoda määritelmä ja sisältö Karelian Wellness-tuotteelle. Wellness- ja hyvinvointimatkailu on nopeitten kasvava sektori koko matkailualalla (Global Wellness Institute, 2018) ja kohderyhmä on laajempi kuin koskaan aiemmin.</p> <p>Wellness-matkailu on kontekstisidonnainen ja sen sisältö vaihtelee riippuen paikasta ja kulttuurista. Suomessa Wellness-matkailu nähdään laajana ja luonnolla on tärkeä rooli palveluissa ja tuotteissa. Wellness-matkailuun liittyvien käsitteiden käyttö on jokseenkin sekavaa, osaksi kielellisestä syistä johtuen. Wellness on vailla määritelmää globaalissa mittakaavassa ja esimerkiksi englanninkieliset termit <i>wellness</i>-, <i>wellbeing</i>-, <i>healthtourism</i> mielletään kaikki Suomen kielessä <i>hyvinvointimatkailuksi</i>. Tässä tutkimuksessa hyödynnetään aikaisempien tutkimusten määritelmää Wellness konseptille ja esitetään määritelmä Itä-Suomalaiselle tuotteelle.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisin menetelmin ja data koostui puolistrukturoiduista haastatteluista, joita oli yhteensä 18 kappaletta. Data analysoitiin aineistolähtöisen sisällönanalyysin mukaan, josta toistui selkeät teemat tutkimuksen edetessä.</p> <p>Tutkimustulosten mukaan termi ”wellness” tarkoittaa Itä-Suomalaisten palveluntarjoajien kesken kokonaisvaltaista hyvinvointia, joka koostuu mielen, kehon ja sielun hyvinvoinnista. Karelian-Wellness tuotteen pitäisi haastattelujen mukaan koostua; järvistä, saunasta, hiljaisesta luonnosta ja ympäristöstä, puhtaasta paikallisesta ruuasta, metsässä vietetystä rentouttavasta ajasta sekä Karjalaisesta kulttuurista ja vieraanvaraisuudesta.</p> <p>Aiempiin alueelliseen tutkimuksiin nähden karjalaisen kulttuurin ja paikallisen ruuan tärkeys nousi merkittäväksi. Tämä tutkimus vahvistaa aikaisemmin toteutettuja tutkimuksia koko Suomen mittakaavassa.</p>			
<b>Avainsanat:</b> Hyvinvointimatkailu, wellness matkailu, Finnish Wellbeing Karelian wellness, matkailutuotteen kehitys			

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and Description of Research

Today wellness tourism is growing 9% faster than the tourism business as a whole, and wellness tourists spend more money than average tourists (Global Wellness institute, 2018). Wellness is about holistic well-being that is also seen as a way of life that guides everyday consumption habits. The main purpose of wellness is to promote maintaining overall well-being. (Grénman, Rääkkönen & Wilska, 2014). According to Smith & Puczkó (2009), wellness tourism has long roots in history and people have traveled for centuries for well-being. Wellness tourists may not realize that some treatments or cosmetics might be from 1000 BC and for example the earliest evidence of spas with healing water is from about 1700 BC. Greeks, Romans, and Ottomans brought the spas to the other Europeans. The history of health, well-being and wellness tourism in Europe was based around spa and seawater treatments, and pampering. (Smith & Puczkó, 2009) Wellness tourism has developed from ancient healing and medical practices to mind and spirit wellness. (Grénman, 2019)

Wellness tourism is a growing trend worldwide, the tourists' goal being promoting their own well-being. (Global Wellness Institute, 2018) The popularity of wellness tourism is influenced by the fact that modern humans live in a hectic and performance-oriented society and therefore more and more people are seeking wellbeing and leisure as a balance. People value time, peace and quiet. (Visit Finland, 2020) Finland's tourism strategy for 2015-2025 emphasizes the importance of wellness tourism. Time spent in the woods has clear effects to health such as lower blood pressure, lower heartbeat, like forest is the place where body and mind can relax. (Visit Finland, 2020) Finland wants to emphasize nature, sauna and traditional treatments in wellness tourism and considers these elements to be its biggest selling point. (Business Finland, 2019) Wellness tourism in Eastern Finland is somewhat unprofiled and therefore this thesis aims to produce data and analysis of the region's service providers' perception of wellness tourism and what they consider as the regional strengths, as well as examine their interpretation of wellness as a concept. This thesis's theoretical objective is to examine the definition of wellness and wellness tourism.

There are several different terms for wellness and individual wellbeing, and it is quite difficult to define. Terms "wellness" and "wellbeing" are overlapping with each other in different concepts and in some languages, there is only one term for the words "wellness", "wellbeing" and "welfare". This is the case in the Finnish language. In Finnish each of the three previously mentioned terms are

translated into “*hyvinvointi*”. (Smith & Puczkó, 2009) In addition, the term “wellness” varies in different concepts and it is strongly tied to time, place, culture, and context. (Grénman & Rääkkönen, 2015) There has been a lot of confusion in tourism industry about when to correctly use the term “wellness” or “wellbeing” in tourism contexts and sometimes these words are used as a synonym. (Konu, Tuohino & Björk, 2011) The National tourism organization Visit Finland has decided that wellbeing products and services produced in Finland are called “Finnish wellbeing”, which consists of forests, lakes, sauna, Northern exotic and peace of nature. (Visit Finland, 2019) According to research literature the wellness concept is a multidimensional phenomenon, and it can be understood in different ways in different cultures. (Global Wellness Institute, 2018)

Where the research literature defines wellness in several different ways, the wellness products and services on the market also differ. Wellness products vary from region to region and may be contextual in tourism marketing. Alpine wellness, rural wellness and lake wellness can be used as excellent examples of regional and contextual products. Alpine wellness is characterized by its geographical location in German-speaking Europe in the Alpine region. Alpine wellness is about local architecture, local fresh food, the surrounding nature, unique landscapes, and spa experiences. Several hotels in the area market directly a product called Alpine wellness which consist of the above-mentioned elements. (Fischer & Pechlaner, 2015) There has been a study conducted in the Eastern Finland region which profiled Eastern Finland's wellness tourism as a Lake Wellness concept. Lakes and the surrounding nature serve as the basis and resource of the product called Lake Wellness. (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010) Often, wellness tourism takes place in sparsely populated residential areas and e.g. rural wellbeing tourism product is strongly associated specifically with sparsely populated areas where peace, quiet and nature play a major role. In Finland rural wellbeing means everyday things to many Finns, such as spending time in a cottage, peaceful surroundings, sauna experience and fresh local food. (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010) Regionally profiled wellness products' common factors are that they are based on existing strengths and resources, such as the Alps and lakes. (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010)

At a state level, one of the goals of Finland's tourism strategy is to make Finland a leading country in wellness tourism on an international scale. (Business Finland, 2019) That is why it is also important to explain and find out more special characteristics in the strengths of the Finnish wellness tourism. In this thesis the focus is on a regional level and how the wellness concept is seen among the local service providers who operate in Eastern Finland.

Leaning on the contexts presented earlier, this thesis is interested in what would be a product called “Karelian Wellness” from the local service providers’ perspective. The word “wellness” has been deliberately chosen for this study, although it contradicts the word “wellbeing” defined by the Finnish tourism board Visit Finland. This thesis has been inspired by the ongoing Karelian Wellness project, whose purpose is to strengthen cross-border cooperation with Russian Karelia and explore the potential of a wellness tourism product in Eastern Finland. The project area consists of North Savonia, Kainuu, North Karelia and Russian Karelia. (University of Eastern Finland, 2020) The research provides information on how well the regional tourism service providers know this significant market and what their understanding of the wellness concept is.

The global wellness institute (GWI) defines wellness tourism as ‘*all travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one’s personal wellbeing*’. The wellness tourism economy includes all expenditures that tourists make during a trip to improve or maintain their wellbeing. (Global Wellness Institute, 2018)

## **1.2 Objective of the study and research questions**

The aim of this thesis is to explore wellness tourism service providers’ perceptions in Eastern Finland, more accurately the North Karelia, North Savonia and Kainuu region, of the concept “wellness tourism” in the region of Karelian wellness project and to create a definition and content for Karelian wellness tourism offering.

In this study the term “wellness tourism” is defined as comprehensive wellbeing which consists of mental and physical wellbeing and as a point that the individuals who strive for holistic well-being also consciously and unconsciously make choices that bring wellbeing to themselves and the result is a wellbeing ‘me’. Wellness is thus somehow also perceived as a way of life that includes self-development, environmental aspects and life with respect for other people. Wellness tourism is part of wellbeing tourism. (Konu, Tuohino, & Björk, 2011)

According to the research literature which will be presented in this thesis when wellbeing includes wellness, it is not possible to make clear distinction between these two contexts. It is not possible to have one without the other.

Research questions:

1. How do Eastern Finland service providers perceive and define the term “*wellness*”?
2. What would be idea and content of Karelian wellness product?
3. What would be strengths and weaknesses in providing the Karelian wellness tourism offering?

### 1.3 Description of the Context

Earlier research proves that Nordic countries as a tourism destination has become more popular in the last decades. The Nordic countries differentiate themselves from other destinations by the landscape, climate and activities, nature playing an important role. (Hjalager, et al., 2011) Finland as a country wants to profile itself as a wellness tourism destination and has decided to focus on natural resources and as well as cultural resources. According to Kangas & Tuohino (2007) and Visit Finland (2019) nature and its products are seen as Finland's strengths and attractions in their wellness tourism. According to research literature the Finnish nature is suitable for various activities and not just for simply being and staying in nature. It has also been recognized that the Finnish nature serves as a good facility, without any additional action, as a place of silence and relaxation. (Kangas & Tuohino, 2008; Visit Finland, 2019) The Finnish sauna is part of the local culture and for decades it has been part of physical and mental wellbeing. Finnish sauna health effects are not just beliefs or superstition. (Keast, 2000)

Unfortunately, the wellness tourism in Eastern Finland is still somewhat unprofiled. (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010) Visit Karelia (2020), which is the local destination management company (DMC), does not focus clearly on wellness tourism on their website or in their marketing material. The DMC marketing message is more focused on the rural and nature-based tourism. Nature, culture, cabins, and Karelian kitchen are on the foreground in their marketing. (Visit Karelia, 2020) Eastern Finland is a region where untouchable nature and sparsely populated areas create excellent surroundings for a wellness tourist who is seeking peace and quiet. (Komppula, Konu & Vikman, 2017) One of the most significant elements of the area is the nature and especially its lakes. According to Kangas and Tuohino (2008), it would be possible to develop a concept called Lake Wellness. (Kangas & Tuohino, 2008)

On its website, Visit Finland (2020) promotes Finnish well-being with silence and peace *“Sauna, a walk in a forest, and pure, clean food from Finland’s arctic nature are all you need to unwind from the stress of modern life. Is there a better reason to go on a holiday than to improve wellbeing?”*

Finnish well-being stems from the lifestyle from hundreds of years ago and from Finnish natural and everyday matters (Visit Finland, 2020)

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Definitions of wellness tourism**

The concept of wellness was developed by Halbert Dunn in 1959 and the term ‘wellness’ comes from the words ‘wellbeing’ and ‘fitness’. (Smith & Puczkó, 2009) The definition of health and wellness means complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and as a term wellness is completeness with body, mind and environment. (Dunn, 1959) Dunn’s model suggests that overall wellbeing consists of one’s body, spirit and mind, and is dependent on his/her environment. According to Dunn, wellness emphasizes nature’s impact on wellbeing. Dunn (1959) talked also about ‘high-level wellness’ and for an individual it is defined as *“an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. It requires that the individual maintain a continuum of balance and purposeful direction within the environment where is the functioning.”* (Dunn, 1959, p. 447) Thus, according to him it can be seen that promoting one’s own well-being is a continuum and something that should be pursued. Grénman (2019) who tackled wellness definitions in her doctor thesis suggests that after the Dunn (1959) wellness model Travis (1972) developed a wellness model of two-dimensional illness-wellness continuum. In this model illness and wellness are opposites of each other and the illness-wellness continuum highlights the responsibility of an individual when pursuing optimal health. According to Travis (1972) wellness is an ongoing process from unwell towards to wellness which includes awareness, educations, and personal growth. The difference between Dunn (1959) and Travis (1972) is that Travis emphasized more self-responsibility in the pursuit of well-being. (Grénman, 2019)

For decades, researchers have been aware that the wellness concept is diverse and includes many different aspects that support each other. In addition to Dunn (1961) and Travis (1972) one of the wellness “founding fathers” Ardell’s (1977) interpretation was that wellness can be presented as a circular model with three primary dimensions. (Grénman, 2019)

1. Physical domain: exercising, fitness, appearance, nutrition, and way of life
2. Mental domain: emotional intelligence, stress management, factual knowledge, mental health, and effective decisions
3. Meaning and purpose: humor, relationship, and play

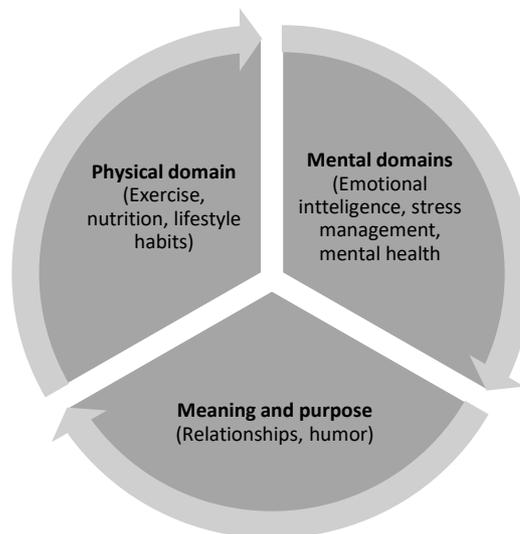


Figure 1. Adapted version from circular model of wellness by Ardell (1977) (cited in Grénman, 2019)

Ardell's wellness model is "dynamic or ever-changing, fluctuating state of being" and Ardell (1977) states that wellness is about freedom which appears in different contexts. Also, it is about self-development and that an individual thrives to be the best version of one-self. (Ardell, 1977, cited in Grénman, 2019) Ardell (1977) stated that *"Wellness is about perspective, about balance and about the big picture. It is a lifestyle and a personalized approach to living your life in such a way that you enjoy maximum freedom, including freedom from illness/disability and premature death to the extent possible, and freedom to experience life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."* (World health organization, 2009)

Müller and Lanz Kaufmann (2000) have expanded Ardell's (1977) wellness model by placing self-responsibility in the center of it. Müller and Lanz Kaufmann (2000) define wellness as a state of harmony of body, mind, and soul, responsibility for one's own self, physical fitness and beauty treatment, healthy diet, relaxation, meditation and consensus with environment and social contacts. (Müller & Kaufmann, 2000) In Müller and Lanz Kaufmann's (2000) model same dimensions are mentioned as in Ardell's (1977) model, but this model is wider including self-responsibility, environmental sensitivity, social contacts and also beauty treatments. Figure 2. below represents expanded wellness model by Müller and Lanz Kaufmann (2000).

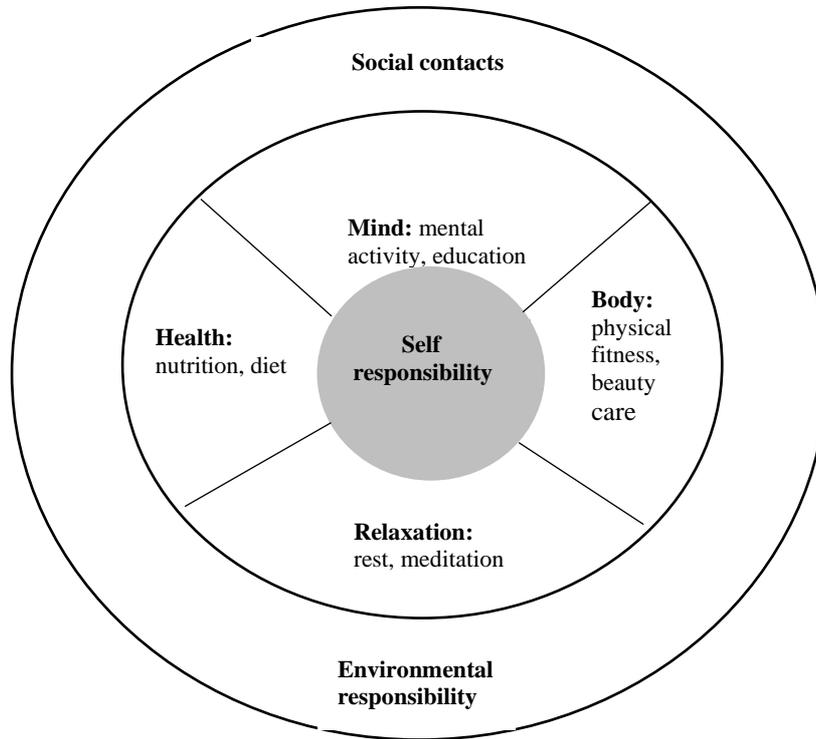


Figure 2. Adapted Expanded wellbeing model by Müller and Lanz Kaufmann (2000)

In addition to the wellness models mentioned above, one of the relevant wellness models and theories is Bill Hettler's (1984) model which differentiates from the earlier models by having an additional dimension for spiritualism. Hettler (1984) presents a wellness model with six dimensions and this model is most widely recognized and considered in the industry. Hettler is also one of the co-founders of the National Wellness Institute and therefore these six dimensions of wellness are widely used in NWI's presentations. (National wellness institute, 2020) The physical wellness dimension focuses on healthy lifestyle, taking care of one's body and physical activities. The emotional wellness dimension is about one's attitudes towards life, positive feelings, and relationships. The emotional dimension also includes responsibility for one's own actions. The social wellness dimension is about general communication, interaction with others and surrounding life. The spiritual wellness involves the process of finding meaning and purpose in life. It contains deeper spiritual connection with the universe. The intellectual wellness dimension is about personal growth and positive development of the society. The occupational wellness dimension focuses on expressing values and personal satisfaction in working life, and is related to one's attitude to work. When occupational wellness is in balance one's individual development at work is notably better. The sixth part is the social dimension

which encourages contributing to the environment and community on a personal level. The social dimension highlights one's importance to multiple environments. (National Wellness Institute, 2020)

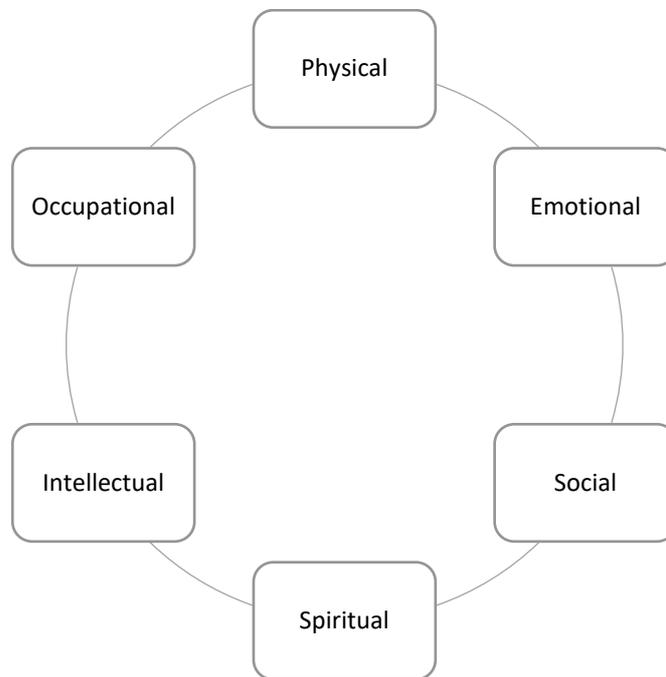


Figure 3. Adapted version from Hettler's (1984) and NWI's wellness model

Referring to the above-mentioned wellness models and perceptions, it seems that the perception of wellness has expanded over time and is perceived to cover a very wide area.

Table 1. present the summary of wellness definitions

Dunn (1961)	<i>'High-level wellness' and for the individual it is defined as "an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. It requires that the individual maintain a continuum of balance and purposeful direction within the environment where is the functioning."</i> Dunn, (1961)
Travis (1972)	Wellness encompass a process which include awareness, education, and personal growth. (Grénman, 2019;Travis 1972)

Ardell (1977)	<i>“Wellness is about perspective, about balance and about the big picture. It is a lifestyle and a personalized approach to living your life in such a way that you enjoy maximum freedom, including freedom from illness/disability and premature death to the extent possible, and freedom to experience life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. “Ardell, (1977)</i>
Hettler (1980)	Wellness is an active process through which individuals become aware and make conscious choices toward to wellness. (Hettler, 1980)
Global Wellness institute (2020)	The active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health. (GWI, 2020)

Wellness covers the mind and body, but studies also show that the pursuit of well-being and its achievement has become a status symbol. Consumers are interested in services that foster their own health and well-being. Consumption has shifted towards the pursuit of intangible wellbeing, self-development, and the search for experiences. (Grénman, Räikkönen & Wilska, 2014) Quality of life (QoL) is often also related to wellness and the definition includes things that make life good, such as, good relationships, being physically pain-free, leisure and good living conditions. (Smith & Puczkó, 2009) Quality of life can be divided into subjective and objective indicators. Objective indicators can be employment status, education, or legal rights whereas subjective indicators can be happiness, job satisfaction and sense of safety. (Smith & Puczkó, 2009)

Wellness services and wellness products attract people who seek services that support and benefit their wellbeing. (Suontausta & Tyni, 2005) Previously wellness tourism used to be strongly associated with luxury services and products but today wellness tourism is more about overall wellbeing and being down to earth. (Konu, Tuohino & Björk, 2011) In addition, wellness is subjective and can mean different things and values to different people. The factors are not permanent and can vary depending on individual’s life situation. (Suontausta & Tyni, 2005) Smith and Puczkó (2009) give a very practical example on how different continents and cultures differ from each other; when Asians search wellness from spiritual actions, people from central Europe use spa services. Finns use Sauna for physical and mental healing and Americans might use beauty treatments and cosmetic surgery for physical and mental healing. Hence, concept of wellness means different things to different countries and context. (Smith & Puczkó, 2009)

## 2.2 Health, medical or wellness tourism

Main purpose of Wellness tourism is to promote one's health and well-being through physical, mental and spiritual activities. (Global Wellness institute, 2018) GWI (2018) predict that wellness tourism is growing globally faster than any other tourism sector and consumers are becoming more and more aware of wellness services and products. (Global Wellness institute, 2018) Wellness is seen differently depending on a country, culture, and history. It is a completely contextual concept and phenomenon. It is obvious, that different values also change the perception of well-being. (Smith & Puczko, 2009). In Europe, wellness tourism industry respects traditions, but at the same time new wellness concepts are being built as demand grows. (Global Wellness Institute, 2018) Generally, in Europe, wellness ideology has been developed and taken forward specifically in tourism research and has been equated with pampering, luxury, and enjoyment. (Grénman, Räikkönen & Wilska, 2014) Because of hectic lifestyles and meritocracy, people are looking for more relaxation and wellness on their vacation, and wellness products aim to produce mental and physical pleasure. (Smith & Puczko, 2009) Wellness is one of the global trends and more remarkable than ever. (Grénman & Räikkönen , 2015)

Health tourism is an umbrella concept for all health-related tourism. The health tourism concept consists of wellness, wellbeing, and medical tourism. (Konu, 2017) Treatment of an existing disease is the driving factor in medical tourism. Thus, we see a clear difference in relation to wellness and wellbeing tourism. Wellness and wellbeing tourism are about disease prevention while medical tourism is about treating diseases. (Pasanen & Tuohino, 2016) In medical tourism doctors play an important role as well as medical actions and operations do. (Reisman, 2010) The term wellbeing tourism is a more well-known and widely defined than wellness tourism. Well-being includes pampering, relaxation and physical body care. (Pasanen & Tuohino, 2016) Wellbeing tourism is based on hedonic and eudemonic spectrums. (Smith & Diekmann, 2017) The biggest difference between wellness tourism and wellbeing tourism is the fact that wellness also involves responsibility for oneself. It can be considered as a way of life and it is considered that wellness tourism can also have transformative effects. (Grénman & Räikkönen , 2015) Medical tourism and health tourism that cure existing illness or trauma are not considered as wellness tourism in this study, even though these concepts overlap in some context.

As can be seen from the wellness models presented earlier, wellness is a multidimensional concept. In this case it is necessary to make a clear distinction between all health-related tourism because terms overlap in certain context. The first step is to clarify the difference between medical and wellness tourism, because both strive for wellbeing even though the starting points are different. According to Travis (1972) and GWI (2018) one way to understand the wellness concept is to see wellness as a continuum of health - ranging from illness to optimal well-being. A clear distinction here is made by the fact that those people who are ill have to seek out doctors and medical services, while “wellness people” work proactively by adopting attitudes and lifestyles, that lead to a better quality of life and overall well-being. (Global Wellness Institute, 2018)

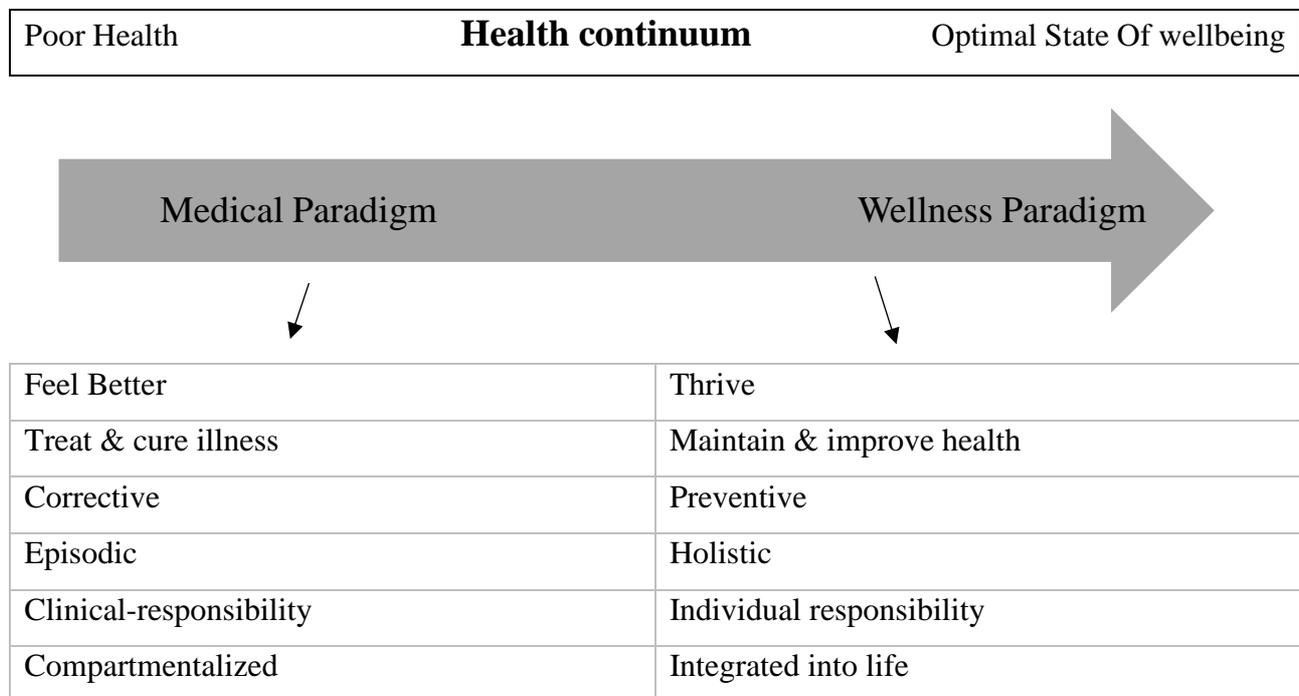


Figure 4. Adapted version from Travis (1972) and GWI’s (2018) model to understand wellness tourist’s lifestyle and values. (Global Wellness Institute, 2018)

Wellness tourism is at times difficult to identify and it has caused confusion between customers and service providers. It is possible that sometimes *wellness services* or *wellness tourism* have been replaced with the term *health services* or *health tourism*, when e.g. a service provider offers wellness products and services in addition to medical services. (Global Wellness Institute, 2018) Wellness tourism and medical tourism are sub-concepts of health tourism. However, the clearest difference is

the motivation of the tourists. (Konu, Tuohino & Björk, 2011) The figure x below clearly presents the difference between medical and wellness tourism.

Reactive	Proactive
<b>Medical tourism</b>	<b>Wellness tourism</b>
Travel to receive treatment for a diagnosed disease or to seek enhancement.	Travel to maintain, manage or improve health and wellbeing.
Motivated by desire for lower costs of care, higher quality care, better access to care or care not available at home.	Motivated by desire for healthy living, disease prevention, stress reduction, management of poor lifestyle habits and authentic experiences
Activities are reactive to illness, medically necessary, invasive and overseen by doctor.	Activities are proactive and voluntary

Figure 5. Adapted version of understanding the difference between wellness tourism and medical tourism. (Global Wellness Institute's (2018, p.11)

The common view expressed in different ways is that the goal of a wellness holiday is the customer's comprehensive wellbeing. (Tuohino, Konu & Eronen, 2015) Values and lifestyle guide wellness tourist's choices instead of the destination of the vacation. (Global Wellness Institute, 2018) The actions of the tourist are guided by different needs. The need is an internal force that directs various actions to satisfy it. (Suontausta & Tyni, 2005) Global wellness institute argues that when traveler is making decisions during vacation that lead and support comprehensive wellbeing and health, it is considered to be wellness tourism. (Global Wellness Institute, 2018)

### **2.3 Wellbeing or Wellness tourism**

The terms “wellness” and “wellbeing” overlap in research literature but there are differences. Part of the reason for this are linguistic problems. Very often tourism is perceived to be international and the common language is English, and in the English language these terms differ from each other. The concept of wellbeing consists of basics of life that are vital to human needs such as food and other significant services, as well as wellbeing also having subjective perspective which examines individual's quality of life. (Grénman & Rääkkönen , 2015) Quality of life consists of things that

make life good e.g. good relationships, being free from pain, leisure and education. (Smith & Puczkó, 2009) Wellness is an overall aspect of health and in the center of it there is individual's responsibility for her/his self and her/his well-being. (Müller & Kaufmann, 2000) It is a way of life, and an active process and objective towards a healthier life. One clear difference to wellbeing is that when an individual is striving for wellness lifestyle, one's well-being is being promoted by different products, services, and experiences. (Grénman, Räikkönen & Wilska, 2014) The difference between wellbeing and wellness is that wellness also refers to self-responsibility and can indicate a complete lifestyle, meaning that those individuals' values lead to certain actions, and taking care of their health and well-being. Individuals' health and well-being are being cherished with beauty care, nutrition, physical exercise, stress management and environmental aspects. (Grénman & Räikkönen, 2015) Wellness tourism is part of wellbeing tourism (Konu, Tuohino & Björk, 2011) and according to the research literature in this thesis when wellbeing includes wellness it is not possible to make a clear distinction between these two contexts because you cannot have one without the other. According to Grénman & Räikkönen (2015) among these two concepts, wellbeing and wellness, there are common characteristics which are the previously mentioned physical, mental and social wellbeing, and the fact that both concepts' starting points are to prevent diseases and to promote health. However, the main difference between these two concepts is that wellbeing is more related to material and economic factor, and abstract aspects such as freedom. Whereas wellness is related to a lifestyle of self-discovery and hedonistic consumption such as experiences and luxury. (Grénman & Räikkönen, 2015) Merriam-Webster dictionary has made an apt distinction stating that well-being is the state of being happy, healthy or successful, and wellness is the quality of being healthy.

Figure 6. below presents how wellbeing and wellness differentiate from each other.

<b>Common characteristics:</b>	
Physical, mental, and social wellbeing. Preventing illness and promoting health and overall wellbeing.	
<b>Wellbeing:</b>	<b>Wellness:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Material and economic factors</li> <li>- Subjective wellbeing, quality of life</li> <li>- Non-material wellbeing, relaxation, peace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-responsibility</li> <li>- Material wellbeing</li> <li>- High quality, luxury</li> <li>- Pampering</li> </ul>

- Activities, physical training	- Experiences
---------------------------------	---------------

Figure 6. adapted version about differences between wellbeing and wellness. (Grénman & Rääkkönen , 2015)

Often wellness tourism also refers to luxurious facilities. That is the reason why especially in Nordic countries the term ‘wellbeing’ and wellbeing tourism were considered to be more suitable than wellness and wellness tourism. “Well-being tourism” is believed to include products and services on a wider scale such as pampering, activities and luxury experiences, although not necessarily only in five-star hotels. (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010)

The Figure 1. below is clarifying how the concept of wellness tourism theory applied in this thesis and how it is seen as part of the theoretical framework.

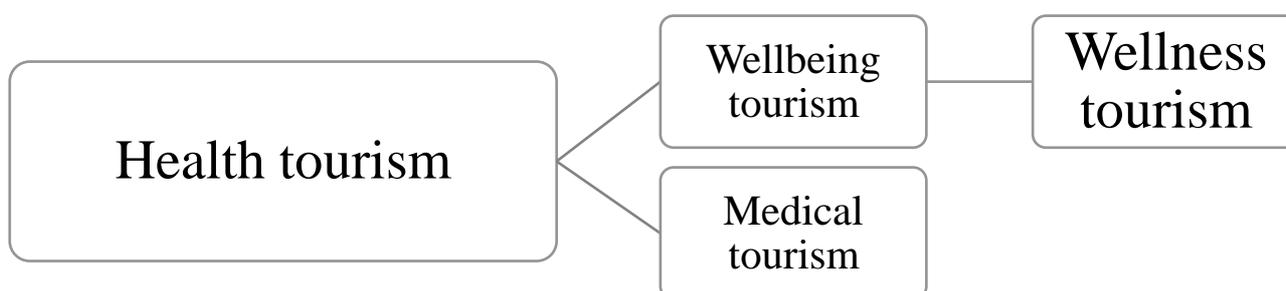


Figure 7. Own illustration of Health – Wellbeing – Medical – Wellness tourism

As mentioned above, health tourism is an umbrella concept but according to Konu et. al. (2011) wellbeing and wellness tourism are also related to medical and health care tourism concepts, and the boundaries between these different concepts are not clear. In health or medical tourism the main motive is to cure and heal illness, and in wellness tourism the main motive is to prevent and maintain wellbeing. (Konu, Tuohino & Björk, 2011)

## **2.4 Wellness tourism product**

### **2.4.1 A descriptive model for a tourism product**

Another key topic of this thesis is to find ideas and content for the Karelian Wellness product, and what characteristics the local service providers associate with. However, the Karelian wellness product is not currently on the market, hence it is a matter of a new service or product development. Customer orientation is a key word in tourism product development. A demand varies between customer segments. Products and services need changes depending on culture, time and age group. These elements should be considered in product development. (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010) All experiential products are intangible and are based on expectations, memories, and experiences. (Clarke & Middleton, 2001) Enjoyable experiences and quality are the main objectives for tourists and tourism managers. From a tourism manager's perspective, the goal is to get customers to repurchase. (Komppula, 2005) A wellness tourism product's main purpose is to promote and maintain well-being. In general, a tourism product is an emotional experience which is always subjective. The presumption is that it cannot be produced, yet it may provide prerequisites for services. (Komppula, 2005) A customer has certain expectations from the product. In the case of tourism products, the key factor is that expectations are met or even exceeded. Customer value refers to the difference between the benefits which customer receives from the product and the cost of obtaining the product. (Kotler, Bowen, Makens, & Baloglu, 2016) The main goal in tourism product and service development is to develop the best possible prerequisites for well-functioning customer processes and pleasant customer outcomes. (Komppula, 2005)

Several different theories have been proposed about tourism product and service development. This thesis follows a model that was used in the development of previously introduced Lake wellness product. A tourism product can be described as a three-level model. These three levels are a service concept, service process, and service system. (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010) This model can be used when creating and developing new customer-oriented tourism products. The service concept is the core and in the center, there is the idea of customers' needs and how those customers' needs will be satisfied, resulting in customer value. When looking for an answer to the value expected by customers, the answer is in the service concept. Core's is the starting point for whole tourism product where is the experience. This section contains the feelings and experiences that customers seek from

the product. The purpose is to satisfy customers' primary and secondary needs. When it comes to customer needs and motivations, it is also about customer value and expected customer value that the customer receives from the product. A service process is built around a service concept. The service process is vital for the whole concept (process) because it influences the core and through that the customer. The process creating a service consists of components that can be either visible or invisible to the customer. The service process refers to concrete things to a customer, such as what services and products are available. The service process also includes product design and pricing. The customer feels that the product is good value for money and from a business perspective, it is a profitable business for the company.

The service system wraps above the previously mentioned elements, the service concept and the services process, inside it. The service system consists of those resources, which are significant for the whole process e.g. staff and physical/technical environment. (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010) The service system includes visible and tangible elements to consumers, also known as a service scape. Loureiro (2015) presents in her article Booms and Bitner's (1981) define the service scape as *"the environment in which the service is assembled and in which seller and consumer interact, combined with tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of the service"*. The service scape includes three dimensions of a physical environment. First are ambient conditions like music and air quality. Second is spatial layout and functionality like equipment, layout, and signs. Third one is symbols and artefacts like style and decoration. (Loureiro, 2015) According to research literature the service scape's characteristics influence customer's satisfaction in the whole process. The service scape plays a major role especially in hedonic services with atmosphere. Because wellness products and services are hedonic services, it can be assumed, that the service process and the service scape play a major role in wellness products.

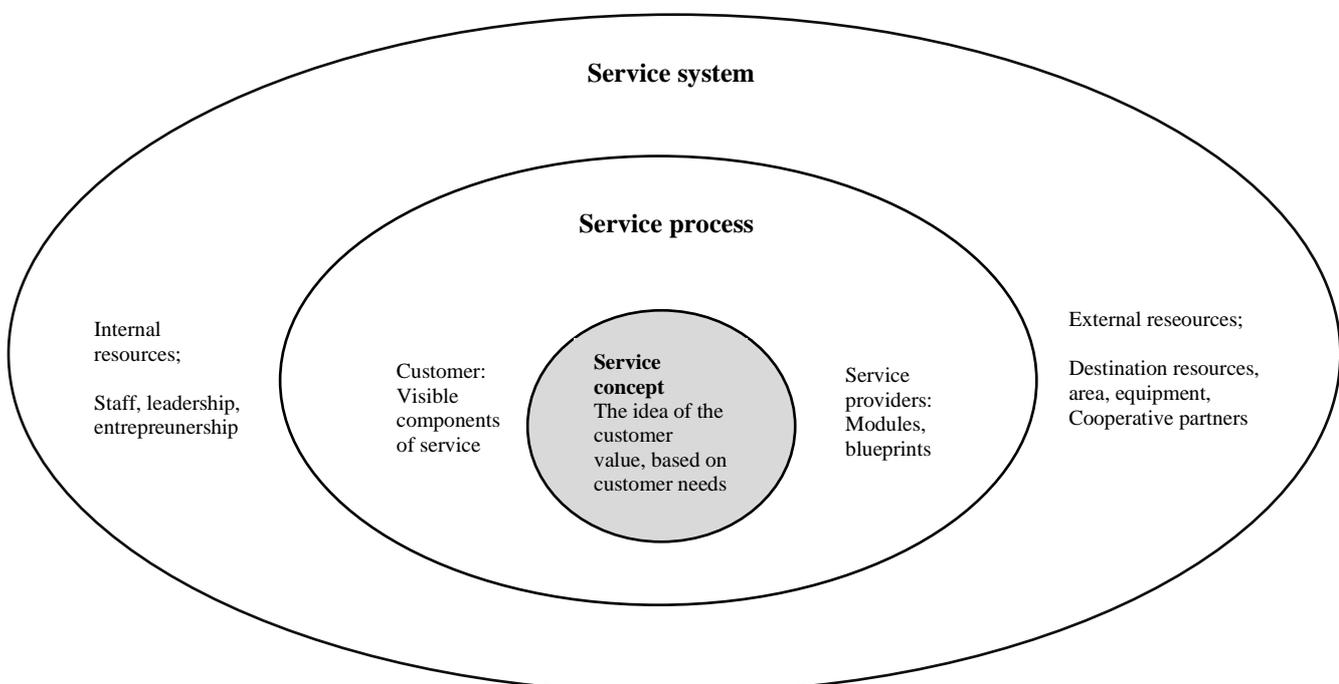


Fig 8. Adapted version of the prerequisites of customer-oriented tourism product and service. (Konu, Komppula & Tuohino, 2010; Komppula & Boxberg, 2002)

According to Clarke and Middleton (2001) tourism product's main purpose is to create value to customers. The purpose is to satisfy customer needs and desires, as well as to provide quality service and value for money. The tourism product itself is a process during which value is brought to the customer in different situations from start to finish. The tourism product is multi-dimensional. The tourism product starts to form at the stage when the customer starts planning the trip and ends when the customer returns from the trip. (Clarke & Middleton, 2001; Kruczek, 2013) The tourism products are a diverse entity in which individuals carry out various functions. The tourism product walks hand in hand with customer value, which is *"the perceived benefits provided to meet the customer's needs and wants, quality of service received and the value for money"* (Clarke & Middleton, 2001) It can be said, that the tourism product is very much based on the experiences of individuals, and that service providers do not sell specific services, but opportunities to experiences, which are related to unique customer processes. To be more accurate e.g. it is not possible to sell silence, relaxation or a self-developing experience, but it is possible to sell facilities and opportunities to experience those things because experiences are so personal. Various services and tools are used and utilized to achieve the desired result. Value is produced for the customer throughout the product process and the customer experience is combined with the value and quality. (Komppula, 2007) For a customer, the tourist product is a complex experience, which consists of production process with facilities and services. Value for the customer is added along the production process. (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula) A functioning tourism product as a whole requires management and perception of several different areas. In other words, for example if certain area or place had potential to become a tourism product, a customer orientated perspective is required to make the product satisfactory to all parties. Service concept, service process and service system together create the prerequisites for the tourist experience which is an augmented product with customers' intangible expectations (Komppula, 2007).

Product development is almost mandatory in the tourism industry because a product should satisfy the ever-changing requirements of customer needs in a way that it is profitable for the business. Ideally, the tourism product would always meet consumer demand in line with the company's profitable business, respecting natural resources. (Smith S. L., 1994) A wellness tourism product is built in the same way as any tourism product with the focus on customer needs. Wellness traveler's choices are guided specifically by values and lifestyle and the transformational effects are often longer and more desirable. Global wellness institute (2018) stated that wellness tourists are very

valuable customers for the destination, as they consume on average more than the average tourist. In addition to this they believe that wellness tourism could slow down or prevent over tourism. (Global Wellness Institute, 2018) According to Müller and Lanz Kaufmann (2001),” *Wellness tourism is the sum of all the relationships and phenomena resulting from a journey and residence by people whose main motive is to preserve or promote their health.*” Wellness travelers use holiday resorts and accommodation services who invest in well-being and usually require comprehensive service packages, with products that promote physical and mental well-being. (Müller & Lanz Kaufmann, 2001)

#### **2.4.2 The service concept of a wellness tourism product**

Based on this thesis double barreled research question, *what would be idea and content of Karelian wellness product?* This chapter focuses on an *idea* which refers to tourism product core. Service development is conceptual, and in the centre there is the tourism product development’s first stage, service concept. According to previously presented figure 8. page 2, the core of tourism product, service concept is based on customer’s needs and the idea of that value that customer receives from the product and motives of the customer travel. (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010) From a marketing perspective, it is necessary to understand needs and preferences so that the service provider’s product and services match to customers’ expectations. (Voigt, Brown & Howat, 2011) According Voigt et. al. (2008) earlier studies reveal that wellness tourists’ main motives are transcendence, physical health and appearance, escape, relaxation, and novelty. Also re-establishing self-esteem and indulgence are some of the main motives. (Voigt, Brown & Howat, 2011) Chen, Chang and Wu’s (2013) research results reveal that seven general motives among wellness tourists are relaxation, pursuing multiple activities, recreation, experiencing nature, affordable activity, social activities, and effortless activity. (Chen, Prebensen & Huan, 2008) In tourism research motivation has been a major topic for a long time. Konu & Laukkanen (2010) in their research connect tourist’s motivation to Crompton (1979) push and pull factor which shows that tourists’ choice of a travel destinations can be influenced with push and pull factor. To be precise the push factor is the reason and relates to the motives for why customers travel. Pull factors are destinations’ attributes or specific services or products that pull customers to certain destinations. According to Konu & Laukkanen (2010) push factors are often intangible desires e.g. ‘*dream fulfilment, rest and relaxation, health and fitness, desire for escape, adventure seeking, novelty seeking, prestige and socialization*’. (Konu & Laukkanen, 2010)

Presumption is that the needs expected to be satisfied. Voigt (2014) in her book exposes Müller and Lanz Kaufmann's (2009) assertion that wellness travel is undertaken by "*people whose main motive is to preserve and promote their health*" and she also reveals Sheldon & Bushell's (2009) view that wellness tourists are on a "quest for physical health, beauty or longevity, and a heightening of consciousness or spiritual awareness and connection with community, nature, or the divine mystery" (Voigt, 2014)

The concept of customer value is associated with pricing, consumer behavior and strategy. Customer value concept is strongly connected with customer satisfaction and these concepts complement each other even though value and satisfactions are separate constructs. (Komppula, 2005) As in wellness tourism product, satisfaction and value confront when pricing, expected value and experienced value redeem or even exceed expectations. Komppula (2005) presents an adapted version from Woodruff (1997) model where value can consist of different elements, and the three most known variation are a trade-off of 'give' and 'get' elements, how quality and price confront, as well as benefits and sacrifices. In the case of tourism product, the value concept can be divided in three different parts, expected value, perceived value and experienced value (Komppula, 2005).

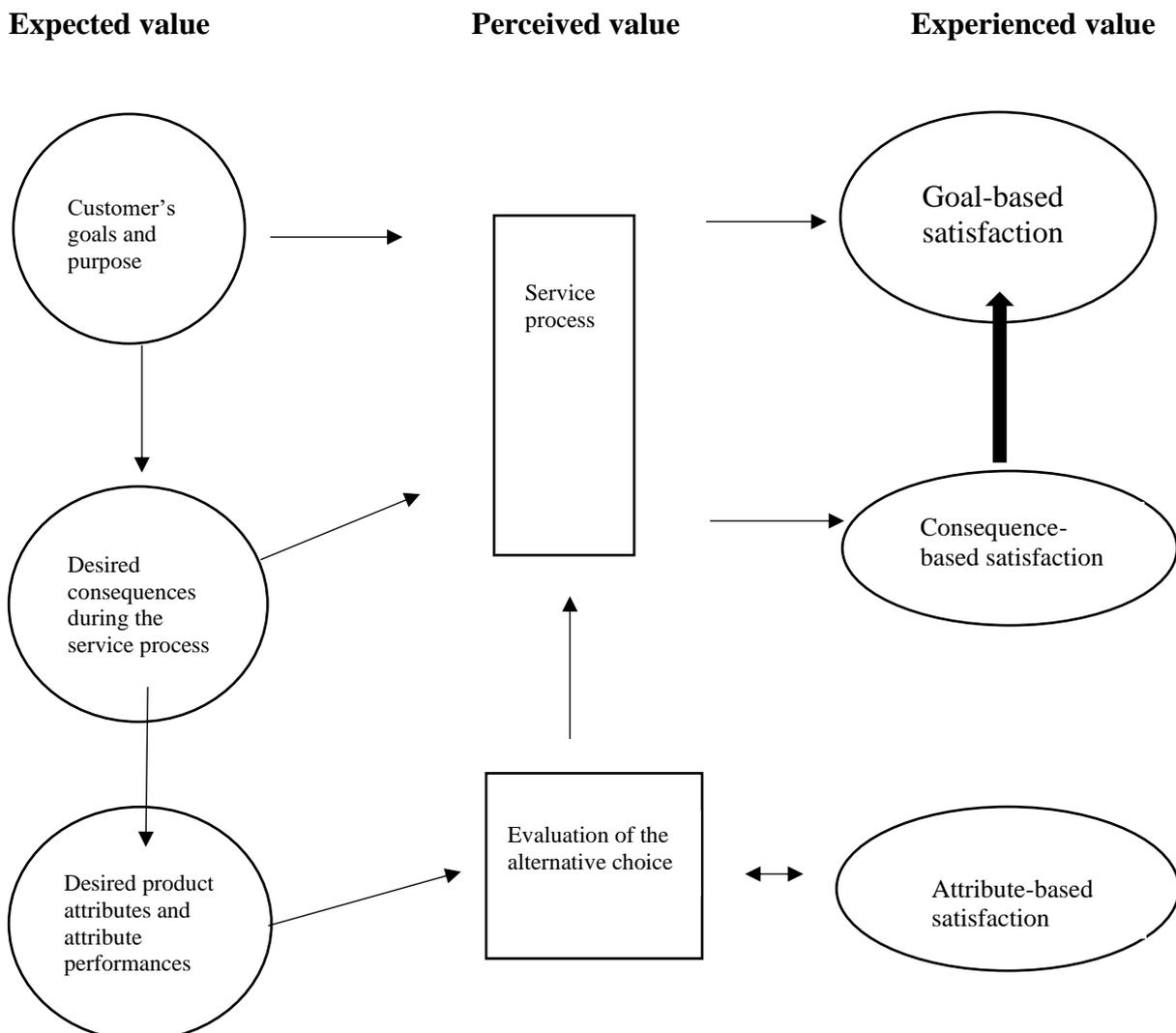


Figure 9. Adapted version from Komppula (2005) (Woodruff 1997) Customer value process.

Figure 9. illustrates the value process of the customer. The expected value refers to needs, desired value of the customer and how customer expectations are satisfied. The customer value process starts from customer's needs and motivations, and in order to satisfy these needs the customer looks for different alternatives. Needs and motivations can be e.g. needing to relax, escape from everyday stress, promote wellbeing and pampering oneself. (Konu & Laukkanen, 2009; Smith & Puczkó, 2009) which are usually needs in wellness tourism. The goal is to be released from everyday stress and routines, maybe also emphasizing individual wellbeing, and this guides the purchase decision. The customer can behave differently in different situations to satisfy their needs, and factors that influence the behavior can be e.g. money, available time, company, and state of health. These factors influence customer's goals and mindset and define how customer achieves the desired outcome. Therefore, the customer can strive to achieve desired consequences during the service process (Komppula, 2005) which in the wellness context can be idleness, finding a peaceful place and being alone. Desired consequence defines those attributes that the customer expects of the product, and the benefits they imagine getting in comparison to an alternative product. The factors influencing the decision-making process between alternative products are information and knowledge of a specific product that will fulfill customers' expectations. (Komppula, 2005) To give a practical example a customer makes a purchase decision based on e.g. where is the best price-quality ratio for his/her needs if there is small budget.

Perceived value can be divided into two different components which consist of experiences which are created before and during the service process. These can be the purchase experience or making a reservation which happen before the customer enters facilities to the service provider. Those experiences which the customer encounters during a stay e.g. checking in/out, guest service and physical facilities are part of perceived value. During the service process the customer will evaluate every single service module and every episode in each module. During different episodes customer will perceive the value of the whole process and the eventual value of the tourist product will be determined whether the experience has been satisfying in relation to the original purpose and goal. (Komppula, 2005)

The third part of the customer value process is the experienced value. This value forms from the experiences which are gathered during the service process, after the customer has departed and reflects on the satisfaction compared with the received value. According to Chen & Petrick (2013) experienced value is also dependent on perceived psychological well-being and satisfaction at the end of process. (Chen & Petrick, 2013)

To give a practical example in the context of wellness tourism product; Customer push factors and motives are a desire to relax and promote holistic well-being (Smith & Puczkó, 2009). The goal is to feel relaxed and energetic after holiday. A customer chooses the best possible product for her/him from alternative products taking into account the cost and the company. From this point onwards the customer has certain expectations (Komppula, 2005). The customer books a wellness holiday and finally enters a wellness resort. During the service process every service module will be evaluated by the customer and she/he perceives the value of the process. At the end the customer rates the experienced value, all the way from the idea to travel to the moment when customer evaluates if her/his needs and goals were satisfied (Komppula, 2005). Good service, social interaction, unforgettable moments and physical environment influence the customer experience. However it is notable that according to Komppula & Konu's (2012) study wellness tourists do not always expect to experience something extraordinary, and these findings are in line with Kim et al. (2012) study. The ability to break daily routines and simply relax is enough. (Komppula & Konu, 2012)

#### **2.4.3 Wellness tourism service process and service system**

Earlier wellness services and products were grouped with luxury or something special that was only provided for a niche market. For a long time both tourists and service providers thought that users of wellness products and services were a small elite group. (Global Wellness Institute, 2018) Luxury hotels which offer rejuvenating and pampering services were wellness tourism destinations for a long time. (Komppula & Konu, 2012) However according to research literature e.g. Alpine wellness and Lake Wellness destinations are often located in rural surroundings offering nature, culture, peace and quiet. (Komppula & Konu, 2012) Thus, the assumption is that nowadays wellness concept refers to a wider concept than only luxury elements. The concept of wellness services has grown constantly. One reason for that is the stressful work life and that people are looking for well-being and relaxation from their holiday. (Konu & Laukkanen, 2009) New wellness products are being developed for constantly growing needs, and efforts are being made to utilize the region's existing resources as part of the product development.

The previous chapter focused on the research question's part about the *idea* of a tourism product, this chapter reflects on what would be the *content* of a tourism product. In the case of wellness tourism product, both the service process and the service system refer to the content. The previously mentioned pull factor is related to the service process and service system whose purpose is to describe what are the characteristics that pull customers towards a specific destination. Compared to the push

factors pull factors are tangible and usually connected to destination attractiveness. For instance, resort facilities, theme parks, national parks and high-quality accommodation, are all places and quality attributes that a tourist is interested in. (Konu & Laukkanen, 2010) Also, the destination's image influences customers' expectations and the satisfactions process. (Komppula, 2005) There is very little existing data about the pull factors in wellness tourism. There have been a lot studies related to spa tourism which is evidently part of the wellness tourism, but not about the wellness tourism concept in general. In spa tourism the general pull factors are e.g. spa services, retreats and leisure activities, (Smith & Puczko, 2009) and in the Lake wellness concept, the pull factors are nature, lakes, peace and solitude. (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010) In general pull factors are those attributes that affect a destination's attractiveness, and the destination's purpose is to deliver individual benefits and produce overall satisfaction for the tourist. (Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz, 2013)

However, pull the factor theory does not separate the service process and service system from each other. To be precise, the service process refers to service modules such as activities, meals and accommodation (Komppula, Ilves & Airey, 2016). In wellness tourism the activities are e.g. body and facial beauty treatments, sauna, yoga, bathing, meals, pampering services and massages. (Voigt & Pforr, 2014) Through these service modules the customer builds personal experiences when operating in a physical environment. The physical environment is usually provided by the service provider and in this context refers to a service system. Thus, the service process is switched to a service system where the service system consists of physical experience elements. (Komppula, Ilves & Airey, 2016) According to a study about wellness tourism service systems, Medina-Muñoz et. al (2013) present in their article Lee et. al (2009) a description of destination attributes '*tourist attractions e.g. natural endowments, cultural, historical assets, artificial resources. Supporting tourism infrastructure e.g. accommodation and food, accessibility (travel distance and cost) and ancillary services and facilities e.g. safety and security, and information.*' (Medina-Muñoz & Medina-Muñoz, 2013)

To sum up, in wellness tourism the product pull factors are physical experience elements and human interaction elements that lead to relaxation and a well-being individual. (Smith & Puczko, 2009; Komppula, Ilves & Airey, 2016)

As already mentioned, wellness tourism also refers to luxury and whereas wellbeing tourism is more down to earth and therefore the pull factors can also differ between these two concepts. The service modules of wellness tourism product range from the service process to single services and products. According to Smith and Puczko (2009) age and economic situation influence whether a wellness tourist is looking for products with a touch of luxury or more down to earth wellness products that might be inexpensive compared to luxury spas and beauty salons. (Smith & Puczko, 2009)

According to Voigt & Pforr (2014) wellness tourism services and products are changing and developing all the time. From a Western point of view wellness services are strongly related to spa culture but these above-mentioned products are part of today's wellness tourism. They represent how wide the wellness service sector is (Voigt & Pforr, 2014) and which services can be part of the wellness tourism product service process.

<i>Body and facial treatments</i>	e.g. Body scrubs, manicure
<i>Water based and sweat-bathing treatments</i>	e.g. Sauna, thalassotherapy, pool
<i>Manual-pressure based and manipulative body-based therapies</i>	e.g. Massages, cupping
<i>Herbal medicine and natural remedies</i>	e.g. Natural cosmetics, aromatherapy
<i>Healthy nutrition and diet</i>	e.g. Cooking with natural products, detoxing
<i>Exercise and fitness</i>	e.g. Outdoor activities, personal trainer
<i>Mind and body interventions</i>	e.g. Yoga, pilates
<i>Meditation and relaxation techniques</i>	e.g. Meditation
<i>Expressive therapies and creative arts</i>	e.g. Dance therapy, creative painting
<i>Energy therapies and New age</i>	e.g. Magnet therapy, tarot card readings
<i>Educational activities</i>	e.g. work life balance, stress management

Table 1. Service modules constituting the wellness tourism product (Voigt & Pforr, 2014)

This list indicates that wellness tourism services can be very multidimensional, and it is about an overall experience. (Voigt & Pforr, 2014) Wellness services consist of products where mental and psychological health promotion and maintenance is the main thing although the product supply varies around the world. (Konu, 2017) The experience is a sum of single modules from the service process and service system.

#### **2.4.4. Wellness products and services in Eastern Finland**

As mentioned earlier, the perception of wellness and wellness products is conceptual and changes according to the region and culture. It is appropriate to point out what previous studies have shown when looking at Finland and more closely Eastern Finland from the perspective of wellness tourism. One of the cornerstones of the Finnish wellness tourism is wellbeing which stems from the Finnish

nature, (Visit Finland, 2020) and according to previous regional studies, nature is also of great importance when looking at wellness tourism and its products in the region of Eastern Finland. (Konu & Tuohino, 2008)

In Finland, the offer of wellness products is wide and varied, and the services are aimed at both individuals and groups. According to a study by National tourism organization, Finnish service providers classified products into six distinct categories which are: Active wellbeing, Finnish sauna experience, silence programs, spa and recreational programs, traditional treatments and wellbeing from nature. (Visit Finland 2019) Hiking, walking, and spending time in the nature improves people's well-being and health. Earlier researches show that the time spent in nature has tangible effects, such as lower blood pressure and leveling the heart rate. Researcher Edward O. Wilson states that the connection to nature is genetic and according to his theory, the inherent attachment to all living is the reason why we have been able to achieve sustainable ways of life. (Konttinen, Särkkä & Sjöstedt, 2013) Nature is seen as very diverse in Finland, but the most significant element is the greenery, i.e. forests and lakes. (Luke Natural resources institute Finland, 2020) According to research literature, nature and our specific environment offer solutions to development of wellness services and thereby provide a good starting point for a competitive service business. It is difficult to set an apparent value to the intangible value of nature, but together with services and technology, it can be combined into a multi-sensory service entity. (Konttinen, Särkkä & Sjöstedt, 2013)

Finnish wellness product's aim is to provide a product which serves customers completely. (Tuohino, Konu & Eronen, 2015) The traveler appreciates simple things along the way such as sensing nature and listening to the sound of silence. (Komppula, Konu, & Vikman, 2017) In the context of wellness tourism and in this thesis, silence only refers to the sounds of nature, excluding sounds from industrial noise, traffic or construction, or any industrially produced sounds. Komppula et al. (2017) argue that the sound of nature's silence comes from the wind blowing, leaves of trees swaying or waves hitting the shore. (Komppula, Konu & Vikman, 2017)

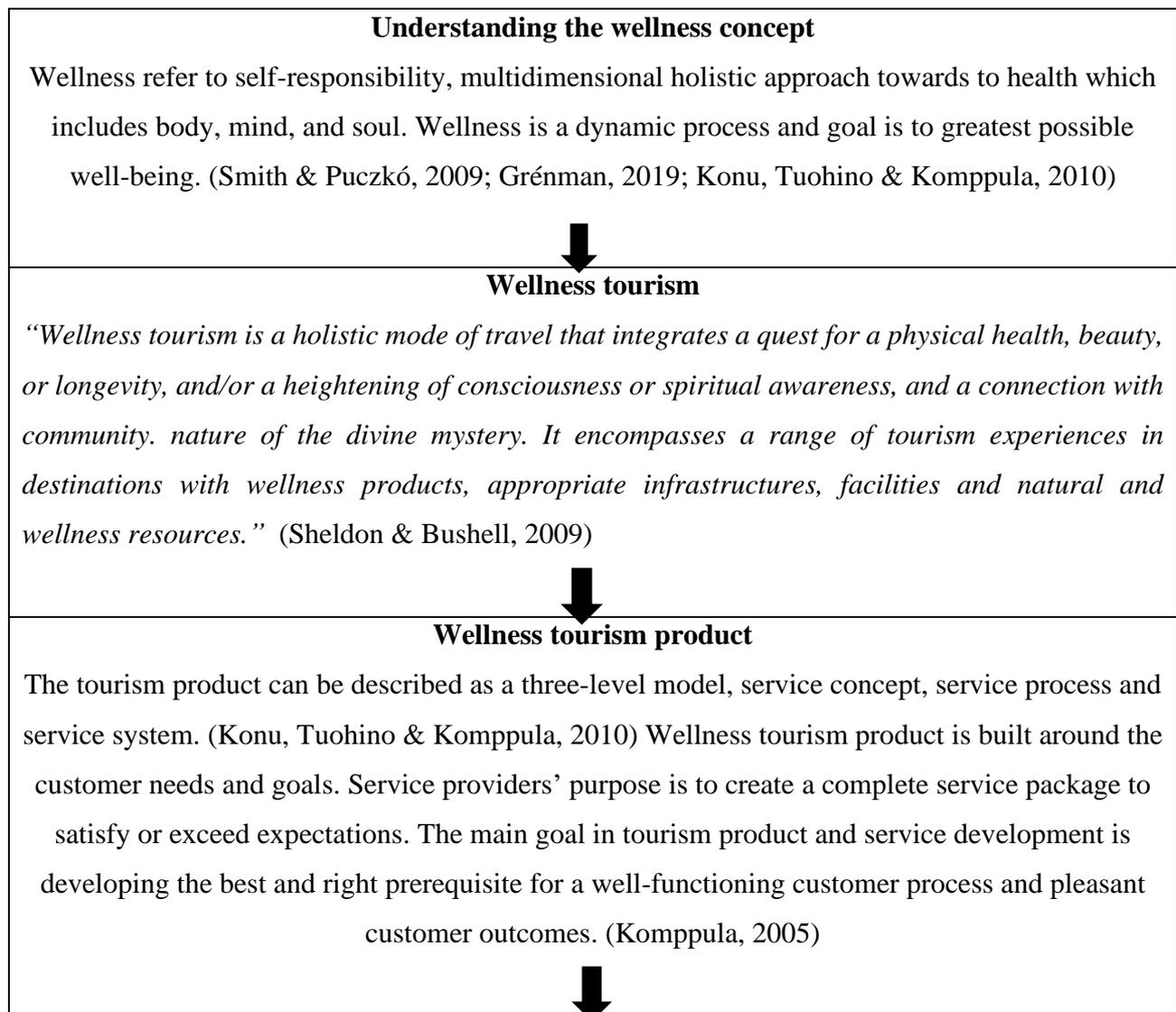
According to research conducted in the region of Eastern Finland, lakes and landscapes are significant resources that serve and provide an environment for experiences. The experience environment involves functional, physical, symbolic, and cultural imagery. (Kangas & Tuohino, 2008) Clean, quiet and diverse nature is the pull factor in Finnish wellness tourism and this element improves individual's well-being. (Kuuluvainen, 2016)

In tourism industry hospitality plays a major role and for example in the customer-oriented tourism product and service model that were introduced earlier, hospitality is part of the service system. (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010) Hospitality is related to the quality of the service, but quality of the service it is not enough. The difference between service and hospitality can be difficult to define

in practice. Service is easier to manage and assess than hospitality because hospitality is more subjective than service. (Smith S. L., 1994) Hospitality is part of the tourism product and plays a major role in wellness tourism products. Komppula & Boxberg (2005) argue that in addition to the physical location, the customer's purchase decision is also influenced by hospitality and service. (Komppula & Boxberg, 2005) Altogether it can be stated that the Finnish wellness product is based on the same themes throughout Finland but because of the diverse nature, vertical and water ways (lakes and sea), strengths can vary significantly.

## 2.5 Framework

Figure 10. below summaries the theoretical framework of this study.



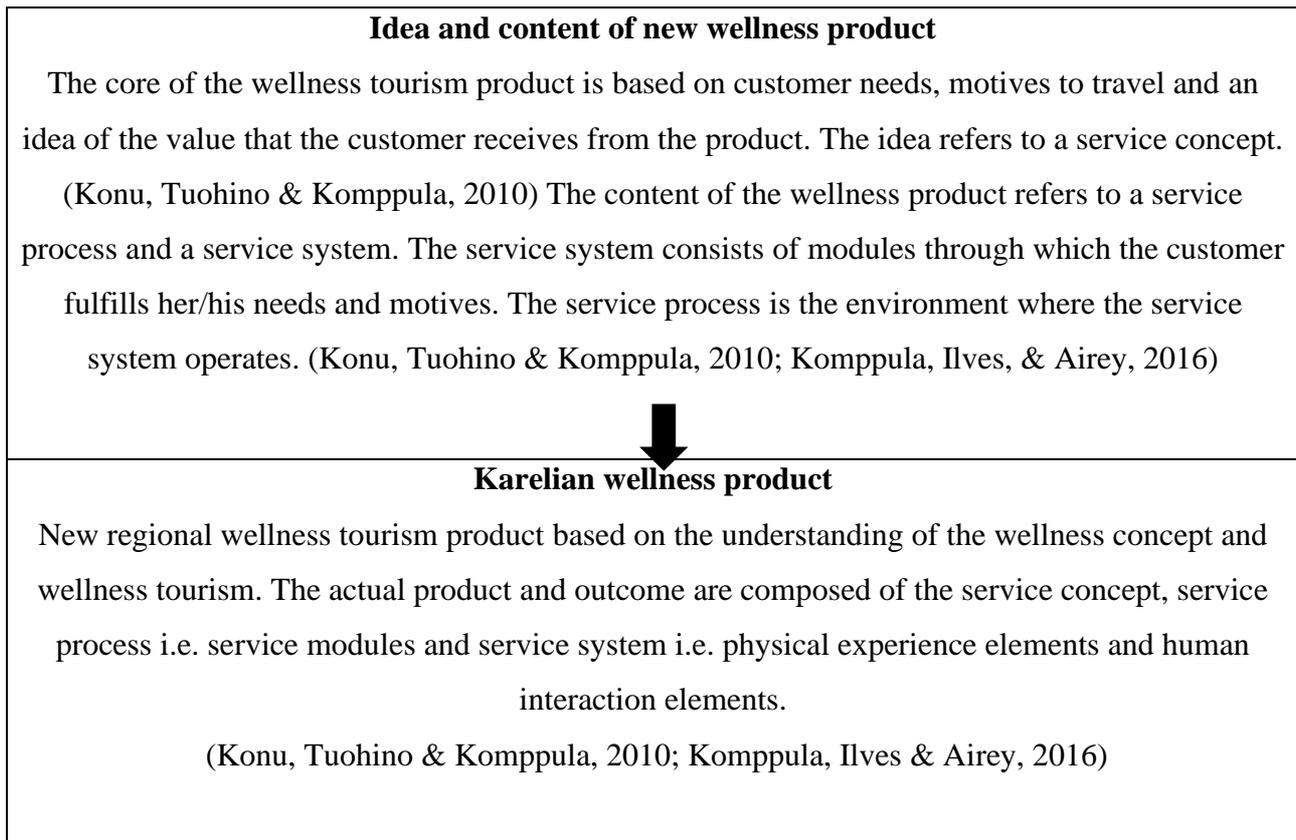


Figure 10. Framework of the research

### 3. DATA AND METHODS

#### 3.1 Scientific approach

The scientific approach for this study is a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach is chosen when a study requires a deep understanding of a specific phenomenon or title. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) The qualitative research method was chosen precisely on those grounds because the purpose of this study is to find out what is the Eastern Finland, particularly North Karelia, North Savonia ja Kainuu, service providers' perception of wellness tourism, and trying to create a definition for the Karelian wellness product. Qualitative studies deal with social and cultural constructions whereas quantitative studies are more vulnerable to structured, standardized, and abstracted modes of data collection and analysis. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) This study uses intensive case study method, which is an appropriate method when a study's purpose is to understand a specific phenomenon and to answer questions 'how' and 'why'. The aim of an intensive case study is not to produce generalized knowledge or information, the objective is to understand a phenomenon. The objective of this thesis is understanding the local service providers' perspective. This research

includes features of the emotionalism (known also as a subjectivism) research approach, in which the interview questions do not focus on information but on the interviewee's conceptions, views, understandings, and perceived things. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016)

### **3.2 Data collection methods**

The most common data collection methods for qualitative research are interviews, questionnaires, observations and information gathered from various documents. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) In this thesis the method of data collection is semi-structured interviews because it was believed that using interviews the most informative data could be collected. In this research interviews are the primary data source. Interviews have been conducted as part of the Karelia CBC project, called Karelian Wellness. The Karelian Wellness project aims to increase business and interaction in the wellness service sector in Finnish and Russian Karelia. The project will offer a new approach to the wellness tourism service development, design and services selection and thus help the entrepreneurs to better reach their potential customers on both sides of the border. (University of Eastern Finland, 2020)

Interviewing has been found to be a very flexible method of data collection, as the questions can be repeated and clarified if necessary, as well as corrected if the interviewee misunderstands them. A conversation-like interview also removes a certain amount of tension and prevents the interviewee from having to think about right or wrong answers. (Sarajärvi & Tuomi, 2018) As in this study, repeating and refining the questions was very important. Ethics in interviews are not a completely seamless topic in the field of research but what matters is the honesty of the researcher and the issues involved in publishing the results. (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998) In this study, interviewees were told in advance about the length of the interview, where the research results of the interview will be used, and a permission was separately requested to record the interview. In addition, the interviewees were told that the interviews would be transcribed and then the recorded interviews would be destroyed. The interviewees were reminded that identification data would not be revealed in this study.

Companies and service providers that already offer wellness services and product from different starting points were selected to this study intentionally so that the results would show as wide as possible understanding of the wellness tourism in Eastern Finland region (North Karelia, North Savonia and Kainuu). Interviewees were CEO's, hotel managers or people at the executive level in micro companies. A total of 18 service providers from the wellness tourism sector were interviewed

for this thesis and it was considered to reach saturation. Qualitative research is not a question of what and how much material is considered enough. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) in case studies it is not a matter of seeking general information but of understanding specific cases. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016)

Table 3. Participant information

Position	I1 Entrepreneur	I2 Entrepreneur	I3 Entrepreneur	I4 Entrepreneur	I5 Entrepreneur	I6 CEO	I7 Entrepreneur	I8 Entrepreneur	I9 Chairman	I10 Divisional Director	
Industry	Welfare/wellness/spiritual services, therapy	Welfare/wellness services, Accommodation,	Welfare services, Accommodation,	Program service	Day spa, Beauty salon	Holiday resort	Wellness service, accommodation	Wellness services (Work and self-development)	Sauna, Water based treatment (Association)	Holiday resort, spa, accommodation	
I11 Development manager	I12 CEO		I13 International Sales manager	I14 Director of rehabilitation and wellness services		I15 CEO	I16 CEO		I17 CEO	I18 Entrepreneur	
Projects of developing wellness services	Holiday resort, spa		Holiday resort	Holiday resort		Spa and wellness services	Tourism center, wellness services,		Spa and wellness services	wellness services, accommodation	

Table 4. Details of the interviews

Code	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10
Duration (min,sec)	17,14	27,15	28,20	34,20	31,31	30,13	11,53	18,58	20,42	44,09
Date	5.3.2020	19.3.2020	27.3.2020	2.4.2020	3.4.2020	3.4.2020	21.4.2020	21.4.2020	23.4.2020	11.5.2020

I11	I12	I13	I14	I15	I16	I17	I18
25,34	14,17	38,04	19,49	17,42	36,54	32,52	29,20
15.5.2020	19.5.2020	5.6.2020	23.6.2020	25.6.2020	21.8.2020	21.8.2020	24.8.2020

Recording of the interview started at the stage when the first question was asked, and the recording stopped when the interviewee answered the last question. Afterwards there was general discussion on the topic and the researcher made notes supporting the interview.

Interviews are usually conducted face to face and between two people, the interviewer and interviewee (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) and for this thesis the original plan was to conduct interviews face to face, however the situation did not allow it. The interviews were conducted by phone or Skype video calls. The data collection for this study was hampered by the global virus

pandemic Covid-19, which at the time was a new and unknown virus in the world. (Finnish institute of health and welfare, 2020) During the spring 2020 the Finnish government imposed various restrictions due to which any non-mandatory appointments had to be minimized and traveling was limited even between provinces. For this reason, the interviews could not be conducted face-to-face and, in addition, some of the agreed research interviews had to be canceled. The tourism industry was in crisis and that affected how many people were willing to participate in the research interviews. The global crisis clearly influenced the willingness to participate, altogether 34 wellness service providers were contacted and only 10 participated. All interviews were recorded and before they could be analyzed they needed to be transcribed.

This thesis concentrates on the business study field and therefore the transcribed data does not have to include every laugh or hum, only spoken text is necessary to write down in transcribed texts. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) The interviews were conducted in Finnish and the quotations from the interviewees have been translated from Finnish to English by the researcher. In this research there were three different themes, Understanding and awareness, Current state of business and existing services, and the future prospects of the company and wellness services. The interview questions can be found in the appendix.

### **3.3 Data analysis methods**

The data was analyzed with qualitative content analysis. The purpose in qualitative content analysis is to provide the ‘big picture’ of the subject that is being studied. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016)

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. From the transcribed interviews the analysis happened by coding and finding themes, connected subjects, and similarities. In qualitative content analysis coding can be done with tagging or labeling parts of the data e.g. words, phrases, and sentences, as was done in this study. Coding however is not the only way to do qualitative content analysis, intuition, mind mapping, memo writing, and close reading of the text can also help with the interpretation. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) For this thesis the content analysis methods were chosen because the purpose was to obtain a clear description in a concise manner of the studied subject. The aim of the content analysis is to organize the material in a concise and clear format without losing its information. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018)

This study proceeded according to the process below:

↓	1. Transcription of recorded interviews
↓	2. Each transcription and note were read through several times
↓	3. Individual words or expressions that were relevant to the study were underlined from the data material. Different colors were used to underline individual words or phrases. The division of words and expressions from the analysis point of view was quite simple, as very similar types of answers emerged from the material.
↓	4. Based on the words and expressions underlined earlier, the theme was designed with new colors

Simply put, this process involves first breaking down the material into small parts and then logically combining them to obtain holistic answers to the research questions.

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Current state of business**

For this thesis it was important to know what kind of services local service providers offer currently as further processing and utilization of existing products would be efficient, especially among those products that are already popular. As the table x below shows, most service providers produce some sort of water based sweat bathing services. In addition, local service providers produce a surprising amount of educational activities, which, however, were not specifically mentioned to be part of the wellness services by the interviewees in the interviews. Local service providers offer “well-being at work”-courses, various activities on how to manage work stress, meditation and healthy nutrition and diet services. These services are strongly related to occupational wellness dimension (NWI 2019).

Table 5. The current services that interviewees served in March 2020 – August 2020.

	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10	I11	I12	I13	I14	I15	I16	I17	I18
Body and facial treatments					x	x				x		x	x	x			x	
Water based and sweat-bathing treatments		x	x	x		x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Manual-pressure based and manipulative body-based therapies					x	x				x		x	x	x		x	x	x
Herbal medicine and natural remedies		x	x		x					x								x
Healthy nutrition and diet		x	x			x	x			x				x		x	x	
Exercise and fitness						x			x	x		x	x		x	x	x	
Mind and body interventions			x			x												x
Meditation and relaxation techniques	x		x			x		x								x	x	x
Expressive therapies and creative arts		x	x															x
Energy therapies and New age	x																	x
Educational activities	x		x		x	x		x					x	x			x	
Service program												x	x		x	x	x	
Rehabilitation						x								x	x	x	x	

Interviewee 6,10,12,13,14,15 and 17 can be categorized as wellness resorts which offer water-based and sweat-bathing treatments, such as saunas and swimming pools, hot tubs, and other spa services. Interviewee 9 is an association that is specialized to water and sauna treatments but does not offer any other facilities e.g. accommodation or food. Interviewees 1,2,3,4,7,8,16 and 18 offer experiences and services which are strongly connect to nature and the actual tourism product is in one way or another using nature in the product and services. Nature serves as an operating environment for activities and e.g. wild plants are used in cooking and in facial treatments. Educational activities offerings are diverse as I1, I3, I5 offer self-development, I6, I8, I12, I13 and I17 offer lectures and

instructions related to wellness. These service providers usually produce educational activities on request for associations and companies.

## 4.2 Wellness concept

The first research question in this thesis was How do Eastern Finland service providers perceive and define the term “*wellness*”? Service providers were almost all aware of what the term wellness means, although it received different interpretations. The first interview question was an open-ended question about how service providers understand the word “wellness”. The majority, fourteen out of eighteen (14/18), replied without hesitation that wellness is about overall wellbeing.

Table 6. How do you understand the term “wellness”?

	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10	I11	I12	I13	I14	I15	I16	I17	I18
Comprehensive wellbeing	x	x	x		x	x				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Luxury			x					x										
Spa	x	x	x		x	x	x			x	x					x		
Does not know				x					x									
Wellness is not correct term			x				x											

Fourteen out of eighteen (14/18) of the interviewees had used the term wellness and could describe characteristics of a wellness concept. For their part, service providers were also unanimous on whether the term wellness is correct, but should prefer to use the term wellbeing, even if they use the term and understand the concept of wellness. Some respondents strongly disagreed that the term wellness was the right one for wellbeing/wellness/welfare related tourism. During the interviews many respondents mentioned that the term wellness has changed during last years and it will be changing further. “Natural wellness” or “Holistic wellbeing arising from the nature” (*“luonnosta kumpuavava kokonaisvaltainen hyvinvointi”*) and comprehensive wellbeing with body, mind and soul was the main theme that was repeated during the interviews. A couple of interviewees also mentioned that wellness is now a megatrend but did not open up more about what they meant with it.

The term “wellness” caused a little bit confusion and even when the service providers knew and understood the term, they felt that their services and products are not “pure wellness” services or products. Many respondents mentioned in the beginning of interview that they would like to use the Finnish term “hyvinvointipalvelut” or that they are health/wellbeing service providers. 9/18 associates wellness with a spa. Remarkably only 2/18 connected the wellness concept to luxury. Only one interviewee did not know exactly what the term and concept meant. *“Although the term wellness is not used in my own services, it was not a completely foreign matter. “I have heard the word, but I did not need to know it” I4*

Wellness was understood as a wide concept. *“I have somehow understood that in wellness, well-being is at its core, but that there are also some pampering elements, not necessarily luxury but something special. Wellness is somehow a bit active, although it can only mean spas and lounging by the pool. A part of wellness also consists of awareness and self-choices that I am making the right choices”. -I16*

Another perspective was about diversity, *“Well, of course, the word wellness involves a lot, a lot of everything. I understand the word wellness as holistic well-being that involves both physical and mental well-being. And with all that can be done today, after all, there are methods from earth to heaven, not everyone has to, but to find their own wellness thing what it is for someone then. But for me, it's a really broad concept. ” I2*

Even among the service providers who do not use the term in their own services, awareness of it was very good. *“Wellness is related to health, well-being, welfare, both physical and mental and even social well-being.” -I14*

On the other hand, some interviewees took the term and concept for granted. *“Wellness, hmmm .. For us and the company, it is well-being in the literal sense of the word” -I5*

Some respondents did not think that the term wellness was correct when talking about overall well-being, but felt that the term “wellbeing” would be better and, as mentioned earlier, The National tourism organization Visit Finland's view is that the Finnish wellness-based tourism products are so-called wellbeing products and not wellness products, assuming that the term “wellbeing” was easier to understand in the everyday life. *“Actually, I immediately turn Wellness into wellbeing, I don't use the term wellness at all anymore because I think wellness today is limited to spa or gym, so I think that the term wellbeing is much better much better. “I7*

Some interviewees felt that wellness was associated with some level of luxury. *“So, wellness is kind of that I immediately associate it with some expensive service and products or customer group that*

*expects something like luxury even.” -I3* Seven out of ten thought that spa and spa culture are linked to the term wellness. *“As far as the word wellness comes to mind, this is the kind of spa stuff”-I5*

In general, therefore, the term wellness was understood to mean the holistic well-being of the individual, which can be promoted by e.g. spas with a touch of luxury. Respondents also felt that the term wellness has changed over the years and will change as it is only used more. Some of the interviewees also believed that the more it is used the more it gets wider significance.

### 4.3 Fitness and wellbeing

Additional questions provided deeper and more accurate answers to the main first question.

Table 7. Do you think is it more about fitness or more about wellbeing?

	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10	I11	I12	I13	I14	I15	I16	I17	I18
Wellbeing	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x
Fitness																		
Both												x		x				

When asked whether wellness is more related to fitness or wellbeing, 16/18 respondents connected wellness to wellbeing, *“Yes, it is more wellbeing because fitness is just something physical and gym.” I2*. Only two mentioned that it can be both. *“Our tourist center uses in their marketing slogan “sport and relax” so I think that it can be both. -I14*

Well-being was perceived to include some kind of “soft” exercise and fitness was understood to be more simply a concept like wellness and wellbeing. In this context none of the interviewees combined or connected fitness and intellectual and mental health with each other.

Fitness was strongly related to gym training that takes an individual to extreme limits and that was not seen to be a part of the wellness and wellbeing concept.



Self-care				x							x	x							x	
Daily/routines that lead to well-being											x				x					x
More down to earth than wellness		x	x		x										x			x		

Wellbeing was mostly related to individual well-being and healthy lifestyle; it was seen as multi-dimensional like wellness. In addition, wellbeing was seen as a part of daily routines that belong to the same scheme of things as wellness because some researcher has argued that wellness is way of life, not just simply an action. (Grénman & Räikkönen , 2015) Internationally terms wellness and wellbeing overlap with each other and they are often used as synonyms. Interviewees connect different things to wellbeing from the general state of being to more precise elements such as that wellbeing is healthy person to that wellbeing is part of the daily routines, which has down to earth characteristics and nature aspects.

Fitness was perceived as physical performance while wellbeing was considered to be self-care with relaxation and nature. The wellbeing term was also combined with exercise and various activities that do not put the customer or individual to extreme limits at any stage.

All interviewees summarize that physical exercise is part of wellness, but competitive sports are not. Interviewees used Finnish terms that are related to wellness: *“Kuntoilu, liikunta, luonnossa liikkuminen, fyysinen rasitus, vaellus”* (Fitness, exercise, motion in nature, physical exertion, hiking) Competitive sport includes Finnish terms: *“Itsensä ääri rajoille vienti, kilpaurheilu, veren maku suussa, ammattaurheilu”* (Putting yourself to extreme limit, competitive sports, bloodthirsty, professional sports)

Almost all interviewees mentioned that soft/easy exercise, training, and hiking in nature surroundings is important in the wellness concept.

#### 4.4 Role of Nutrition

When asked the question *“what is the role of nutrition and nutrition services”*, nutrition, local food and health cuisine played a major role in the wellness tourism for all interviewees. Some of the interviewees had built the whole wellness concept around food, and originally the enthusiasm for the

whole wellness tourism had started precisely from healthy food, around which a larger service concept was developed.

Table 10. What is the role of nutrition and nutrition services?

	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10	I11	I12	I13	I14	I15	I16	I17	I18
Very important, one of the biggest	X	X		X						X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Part of the wellness concept, not biggest					X	X		X	X						X	X		
Local, healthy food		X				X	X	X		X	X	X		X		X	X	X
Most important			X				X											

Every respondent thought that food has significant role in wellness. *“The food experience allows people to experience and see different flavors and colors. Food makes you feel good and so that you’ll get some kind of connection to food and food experience.”* - I3

Ten out of eighteen (10/18) interviewees thought that the role of nutrition is very important and one of the biggest in the wellness concept. Two out of eighteen (2/18) mentioned that food and nutrition is the most important thing in the wellness concept. Six out of eighteen (6/18) interviewees’ perception was that food is a part of wellness services and product, but not the most important thing in the wellness concept.

Most respondents also mentioned that especially local food is important and their menus and services are based on a local food experience. Local food also meant self-produced in this context. There were also a couple of service providers whose whole wellness concept is made around the food and started from the food experience. *“Well, I just defined that even eating alone is well-being so every guest who come in through the door have access to well-being”* -I7 Some interviewees were so passionate

about food and the food experience that they thought that even simply enjoying food and using restaurant services is part of the wellness concept without any other actions or products.

In addition, those service providers who also offer rehabilitation services, conference facilities and occupational services mentioned that food and nutrition are part of the package and it can be also associated to educational purposes, meaning e.g. nutrition lectures are part of the program.

Occupational, in Finnish “*Tyhy/Tyky*” services are an event organized by many employers in Finland about once a year and the purpose of those is to maintain and promote the health and well-being of their employees. (TYKY-päivät , 2020)

*”It really matters how that person eats, what she/he eats during the day and during the consumption of the service.” -I10* Because wellness is a comprehensive concept, the service providers also thought that the complete service package should be consistent.

This research interview did not focus on weight loss or e.g. detox programs which in literature are related to the wellness concept. Weight-loss diets and programs are usually part of the fitness activities or special treatments in resorts. (Smith & Puczkó, 2009, s. 59) The results of this research show that local entrepreneurs in Eastern Finland focus more on food experience and healthy cuisine. None of the interviewees mentioned having weight loss or detox programs.

#### **4.5 Karelian wellness product**

The second research question was what would be idea and content of Karelian wellness product?

Idea refer to service concept and content of Karelian wellness product refer to service process and to service system in context of tourism product and the customer-oriented tourism product and service model which was presented earlier. Although interviewees work with different concepts related to wellness tourism, the answers to the interview questions were quite similar. In its entirety interviewees’ answers were linked to peace and nature. As summarized below, the idea or service concept of Karelian wellness product is about sensing nature in peace, relaxation, and customer feeling welcome. *Content* of the Karelian wellness product consist of two different parts, service modules and service scape. The service modules are nature-based activities, local food, spa, sauna, pampering and treatments. The service scape includes the Koli National park, nature and lakes, sparsely populated area and culture.

*Idea*

Peace
Sensing the nature
Feel authentic
Relaxation
Feel welcome

*Content*

<i>Service modules</i>	Nature-based activities
	Local food
	Spa
	Pampering and treatments
	Sauna
<i>Service scope</i>	
	Koli National park
	Nature and lakes
	Sparsely populated area

The table 10. below shows the common factors that were repeated among interviewees when asking *What do you think Karelian Wellness looks like? What Karelian Wellness could be? What characteristics could be associated with it?* The factors are divided into service modules and service system.

Table 11. Characteristics which were expressed among the interviewees.

	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10	I11	I12	I13	I14	I15	I16	I17	I18
<b>Service process</b> (Service modules)																		
Local food		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X		X		X	X
Sauna		X	X	X		X	X			X	X							X
Relaxation services	X	X			X	X									X			X
Nature-bases activities		X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X				X			
Day spa											X				X			
<b>Service system</b> (physical experience elements and human interaction elements)																		
Lakes		X	X			X	X	X	X	X			X				X	
Forrest		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Silence	X	X	X	X	X	X			X			X						
Koli National park										X	X							
Cottage											X							

Nature													X			X		X	X
Price level into account												X				X	X		
Mystique, tension							X											X	X
Culture	X		X			X	X			X	X	X					X		X
People/hospitality	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X				X			X	

Several answers were related to the nature and sauna. *“So Karelian wellness is about nature and forest. Birch tree and conifer forest. Then it local food and sauna” I2*

Some interviewees gave a very precise definition for the possible Karelian wellness product. *“Naturally related to this, nature is a key element i.e. water, tar, resin, forest. These scents come to mind. Frost, freshness, frost. But then it inevitably also has a cultural dimension, i.e. tradition, food, clothing, architecture, taste and the arts. Art and culture more broadly. After all, there are also elements that bring well-being from this as well. Karelianism and the region have been an inspiration and still radiate to Finnish culture, so it should certainly be part of the built-in and easily distinguishing factor.” -I16*

Culture and hospitality were one subject in the research answers *“Karelian wellness is the well-being realized by certain types of people. Karelian culture and hospitality play a big role in the whole package.” -I10* The local hospitality culture was highlighted by many interviewees. *“Karelian hospitality”, which comes straight from the people who live here. “And we have these personality differences in service providers as well. Although it is a bit cliché that we Karelians are just happy and talkative, but it is often true. Somehow that too could be reflected in the product, that is, just that person” I8* Several respondents also emphasized that the people and local culture would make the Karelian Wellness product worthy of its name. *“Karelian culture has always somehow brought either people or doing form or marketing through its Karelian into that well-being product. I can imagine that certain type of people only can produce this kind of Karelian wellness product. “ I10*

Most of the answers emphasized natural resources and culture. A couple of interviewees thought that the price level should be considered. *“There could be cheaper wellness products and then definitely some luxury. I assume that wellness can be very differently priced.” -I15*

In the interview, the health effects were mostly related to herbs obtained from nature and how they can be used both externally and internally. *“I use a lot herbs and give tips what you can do with it” I7* All the interviewees were enthusiastic about the Karelian Wellness product and it did not appear to any of the participants that the product or development in question was useless, nor did they have anything negative to say about it. Almost all respondents underlined the fact that Eastern Finland has

unique landscapes with tree covered hills, magnificent lakes and a completely different nature than other parts of Finland. *“It should have elements of that nature. From the nature those trees and water and local and clean food. And then that sauna. So Karelian wellness is nature and forest, in a way birch and softwood. Then it's local food and a sauna.” I2*

The interviewees' answers were mainly connected to local resources of nature and silence. Also the transformational effects of wellness tourism came up *“It is precisely the holistic well-being of that person. Giving a chance to find someone to lock themselves in and wake up. Provides an opportunity to learn something new” I7*

Although nature, and in particular pure nature, came up on several occasions, only one of the interviewees spoke clearly about how to preserve and protect the local nature and environment. *“Of course, if we kept nature as real nature and did not destroy this nature at this terribly accelerating pace” I4*

Compared to regional research that has been done before, the question about the Karelian Wellness product raised several same characteristics e.g. nature, silence, landscapes, and lakes. However, the understanding, and the image of wellness products and services has changed during the last 15 years. The Finnish tourism board (2005) defined that a wellness product should be “well planned, segmented, marketed and implemented entity, which also include a touch of luxury.” (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010) This thesis research results show that the wellness product can also be about daily factors, or arise from small pieces, and for some the wellness product and experience can simply be about modest accommodation, a lake shore and silence. The content of Karelian wellness product can be reflected to Müller and Lanz Kaufmann's (2001) wellness model which was introduced in the figure 2, page x.

Healthy cuisine: Local, fresh food, self-produced

Spirit, mind and self-development: Meditation, relaxation programs

Inner and external beauty: Sauna, facial treatments, herb baths

Health: Herbs, sauna, clean air, walking in nature

Relaxation and comfort: Silence

Tailor-made, movement: Movement in nature, food, and herb courses

#### 4.6 Regional strengths and weakness

To get a deeper understand and information about the strengths and weakness of the Eastern Finland region as a wellness tourism destination interviewees were asked: *Do you see any regional differences in wellness concepts between areas?*

Table 12. Regional differences in wellness concept between areas

	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10	I11	I12	I13	I14	I15	I16	I17	I18
Lakes		x	x										x	x	x			
Nature			x	x	x	x		x					x		x		x	
Relationship with nature		x					x											
Kinship							x										x	
Authenticity and earthiness	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x						x	x	
Silence and peace						x									x			
Food culture							x	x					x				x	
Koli national park	x	x			x				x	x				x				
History																	x	
Culture																	x	
I have no opinion/I don't know												x						x
Lot of spas in Eastern Finland															x			

The importance of asking this question to the interviewees was discussed in this thesis, but the question raised issues that deviate from the direct question of what a Karelian wellness product would be and what it would contain. When comparing Eastern Finland, Western Finland, Southern Finland and Lapland regionally, the biggest difference from other regions was authenticity and earthiness. In some way, the local service providers saw that the products and services in Eastern Finland are more authentic and down to earth compared to the products and services in Lapland or Southern Finland for example. *“There in Lapland, there is more some kind of magical and mystical stuff and they have*

*there a lot different products which are related to magic. They have their mass tourism but not unique things.” I10*

Interviewees assume that the Eastern Finland surroundings are different because of the lakes and that it was definitely considered a strength.” *Here in the Lakeland area, we have a resource that is not available in all of Finland. and then again, we don't get the northern lights or fells that are in Lapland. That is, without a doubt, the things where we are located contribute to its formation.” -I14*

The interviews revealed that geographical location matters ” *I connect the north somehow to this kind of wilderness and the well-being that comes from there, while Western Finland comes to mind maritime.” -I15* and as in this quotation the same aspects were repeated ”*To the north, I somehow connect this kind of wilderness trek to wilderness and the well-being that comes from there. Western Finland comes to mind in maritime affairs. Southern Finland comes to mind for such international, rapid and shorter well-being and condensed services.” -I17*

Five (5/18) of the interviewees also thought that people who live in Eastern Finland generally have a different relationship with nature and have not become estranged from it, on the contrary the local service providers want to include and improve nature in wellness products. A third of the interviewees also pointed out one destination, Koli National Park, which was directly perceived as one of the wellness products and destinations that is part of the Eastern Finland wellness. *“I think that the nature is different here and for example in Koli Area” I3*

Wellness is also strongly related to many different activities and services but still interviewees thought that intangible things are most important. *“I would say that there are more wellness things and services in many destinations than we have here, but we have this nature, silence and peace. I think that we can produce good for people with good heart.” I6*

This question reinforced the view of local strengths but did not highlight regional differences enough. Several service providers mentioned that they do not know the services or products from other parts of Finland.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Main Findings and implications

#### *Definition of wellness*

According to this thesis' research results, perception about wellness was almost unanimous, and same with the research literature. However, interviewees were not sure if the term wellness is correct when it comes to their own products. As mentioned earlier service providers were more familiar with the Finnish term "*hyvinvointi*" (*wellbeing, welfare, wellness, health*) and did not mention what would be the international term for their services and products. Even if the companies do not use the term 'wellness' in their marketing material, websites and social media channels use terms such as 'relax', 'peace', 'silence' and 'pampering' which are related to the wellness concept. Nonetheless, only one interviewee argues that when the Finnish wellness is in question, the correct term is *wellbeing*, not *wellness*. The opinion of the researcher of this study is that unawareness was one of the reasons why service providers prefer to use the Finnish term and not the international one. An interesting point of view was that service providers defined the term in line with the research literature but were apprehensive about using it.

However, some of the interviewees pointed out that service providers do not make promises of well-being and becoming a "better me" but provide resources and a framework for it. This supports the wellness mindset of an individual personally being responsible for their own well-being and external factors enabling well-being and a better self to progress. (Grénman, 2019)

Those wellness resorts that have more than a couple of percent international customers, used the term "wellness" about their health-related services and products. However, the knowledge about the wellness concept vary between service providers. Some service providers were unsure if spa services are part of the wellness concept and other interviewees expressed deep knowledge about the definition of the wellness concept. Those service providers who were more aware of the multidimensional wellness were offering services which are related to spiritual and emotional dimensions. These interviewees' services and products were more tailor-made and individualized compared to the spa and wellness resorts. It can state that the interviewees knew what wellness is, but they didn't know what it contains.

The general impression based on the research results was that activities and gentle sports are part of the wellness concept, but fitness was not part of wellness. In the research literature fitness can be part of the everyday life and in Western countries wellness resorts often offer fitness and sport programs for their customers. (Smith & Puczkó, 2009, p. 77)

The importance of food experience and nutrition was surprising compared to the research literature where nutrition and food do not get as much attention as they did in the research interviews. Of course, food is part of the wellness concept and there are many topics related to nutrition and healthy eating in the media. Globally, retreats and holistic centers offer nutrition-based services and wellness resorts have started to focus on serving healthier food for their customers. (Smith & Puczkó, 2009, p. 66) The general perception from this research is that local and healthy food is important.

Interviewees revealed that the concept of wellness has changed and will get wider over time because the demand for diverse wellness service products is growing. Smith and Puczkó (2009) mentioned almost ten years ago that wellness is a globally growing trend (Smith & Puczkó, 2009) and GWI (2018) state that wellness continues to grow. (Global Wellness institute, 2018) The awareness of fitness, lifestyle, sports, QoL gets wider. People are seeking ways to slow down, find meaning in life (Smith & Puczkó, 2009), and use orthodox medicines and desire to live healthier lives. (Voigt, Brown & Howat, 2011)

This research did not point out all aspects of wellness even though wellness concept is a multidimensional phenomenon and that the definition of wellness has been changing during the last decades. The research results did not reveal that wellness would also be a way of life that guides everyday consumption habits. (Müller & Lanz Kaufmann, 2001) In general, in Europe, ideology of wellness tourism has clearly been developed because earlier, in tourism research, wellness tourism was equated to pampering, luxury and pleasure. (Grénman, Rääkkönen & Wilska, 2014) Beauty care is strongly related to wellness concept in research literature (Sheldon & Bushell, 2009) but in this research beauty care and external body care didn't get much attention. This thesis research results show that a minority perceived that wellness is something luxurious and the majority saw it more simply as experiences in nature surroundings. According to Komppula & Konu (2012) nowadays the wellness concept has become more down to earth especially among those wellness concepts that are related to specific regions. (Komppula & Konu, 2012)

In general wellness is active process towards to healthy and fulfilling life. Purpose is to develop itself and make choices that affect to comprehensive wellbeing together with mind, body, and soul. (Smith

& Puczkó, 2009) According to this thesis research wellness matters because everything we do and how we feel are related to our well-being. Whereas our well-being influence on our actions and emotions. Even theories and definitions about wellness varies which optimal wellness includes, key message is the same, optimal well-being. Like one interviewee said, *"Because I think it's exactly the same, whether it's yoga or botox, if it benefits and make feel happy and brings joy to life then it's perfectly fine."* II

### *Karelian wellness tourism product*

The possible Karelian wellness product followed very much Visit Finland's definition of the Finnish wellbeing product. The most important elements were nature, more specifically forest, lakes, and silence that the Finnish nature surroundings often offer. *"The traditions of Finnish lifestyle go back hundreds of years. In the rush and crush of modern life, the rarities are what we value most, such as space, quiet and time. The space to breathe, a time to dream, hiking in summer, cross-country skiing in winter, or simply a gentle walk in the woods. One could even say that Finnish people knew mindfulness and slow travel before they became global megatrends. Finns often flock to their countryside cottages, whether it be summer or winter, and the simple step of heating the sauna is the beginning of a perfect (digital) detox."* direct quote from Visit Finland (2020) website, which describes Finnish wellbeing. (Visit Finland, 2020) The idea and content of Karelia Wellness product do not differ from the Finnish tourism broad's perception a lot, as the main elements and factors are the same. Still local service providers mentioned that there is something unique about the tree covered hills *"vaaramaisemat"* and the local hospitality, *"Karelian hospitality"*, that comes directly from the people who live in Eastern Finland.

Nature and its surroundings were one of the main elements in interviews but also in the literature review and in other research findings that have been published about health-related tourism in Finland. The wellness concept is context bound. Like Alpine wellness (Fischer & Pechlaner, 2015) and Lake wellness (Konu, Tuohino, & Komppula, 2010), Karelian wellness could utilize local resources, nature, and culture in new service and product development. Nature and its surroundings provide facilities for physical actives but nature also offers different experiences trough senses. Colors, sounds and scents ensure that the more diverse the nature experience is, the better it contributes to well-being.

Based on these research results, a possible Karelia Wellness product can be outlined according to the prerequisites of the customer-oriented tourism product and service model figure 8. (Komppula, Konu & Tuohino, 2010; Komppula & Boxberg 2002) With the research results of this thesis, it is not possible to start developing a completely new service, but the interviews provide a good basis for certain things and support earlier studies e.g. developing the Lake Wellness product.

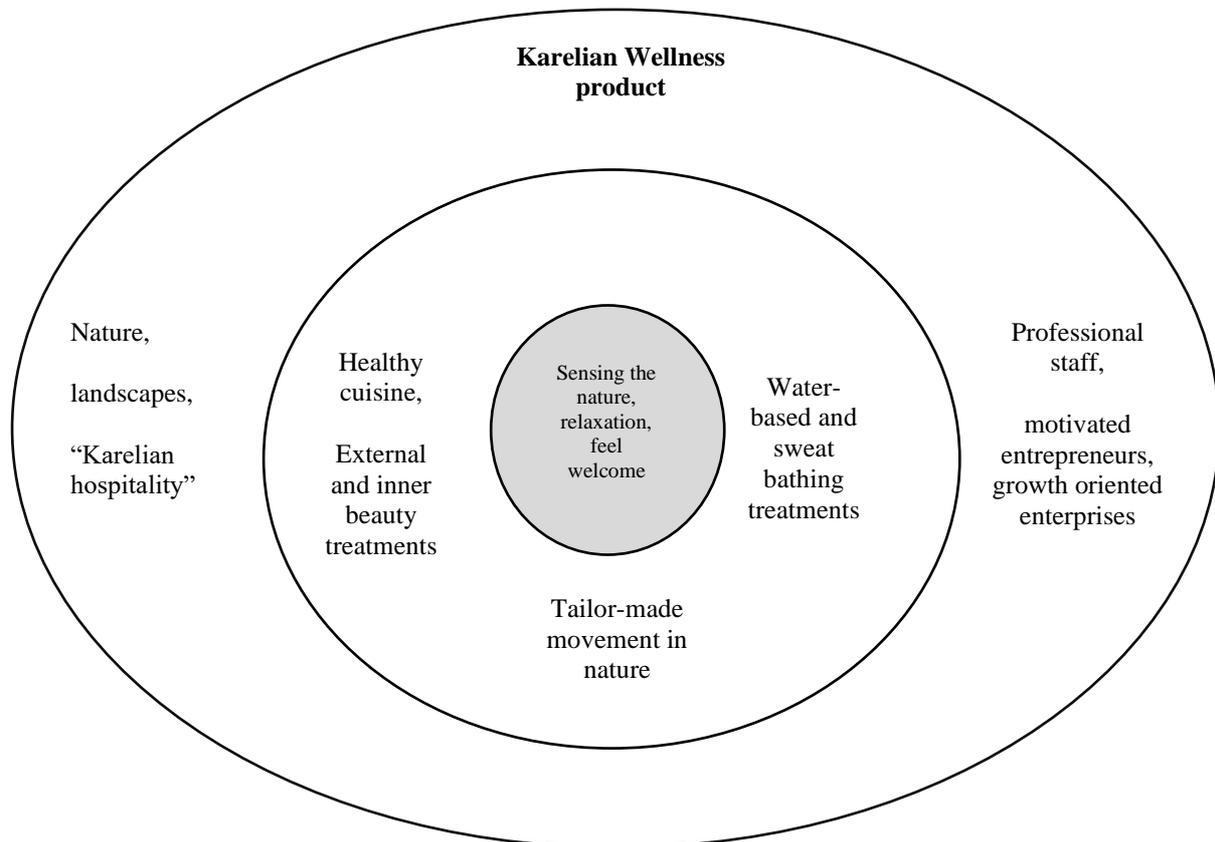


Figure 11. Karelian Wellness experience product

The service concept of the Karelian wellness product is the idea of the customer value and based on customer needs which were sensing the nature and relaxation. The service process keeps within visible service modules such as healthy cuisine, external and inner beauty treatments, mind and self-development activities, nature-based activities, water-based treatments and sweat bathing treatments and also tailor-made movement in nature. Karelian wellness product does not have luxury elements and it was seen more as a down to earth-wellness product.

The service system is based on motivated growth orientation. Several interviewees expose that entrepreneurs want to educate themselves and increase their own professional skills through various types of education. The service concept also includes sparsely populated areas, hospitality and lakes and nature. Service concept also includes sparsely populated are, hospitality and lakes and nature.

Eastern Finland is mostly sparsely populated which is very important when local service providers would like to focus on products where silence and peaceful is one part of the completeness.

In the wellness tourism context and in this thesis, silence refers only to the sound of nature which does not include any industrial noise, transport, construction or industrially produced noise. According to Komppula et al. (2017) the sound of nature's silence arises when the wind blows and the leaves of the trees sway or when waves hit the shore. (Komppula, Konu & Vikman, 2017) Research results did not reveal in detail what the interviewees meant when they spoke about silence.

Many interviewees also mentioned that Karelian wellness is something normal and daily for Finns. The service providers also mentioned that people who live in Eastern Finland may have different kind of connection with the pure nature compared to e.g. people who live in Southern or Western parts of Finland. The surprising result of this research was that although more than half of the interviewees mentioned that the possible Karelian wellness product has to include sauna experience, it was not emphasized much and there was no talk about the Finnish sauna culture or the health effects of the sauna. The assumption is that service providers did not highlight the sauna culture because it can be regarded as obvious.

Furthermore, when Karelian wellness product is described with prerequisites of customer-oriented tourism product and service model, it is required to clarify through which assumed expectations are met.

Figure 12. below describe how the goal and the idea set at the core of Karelian Wellness product are achieved with service modules, human interaction elements and physical environment which were introduce earlier to be part of the service process and service system.

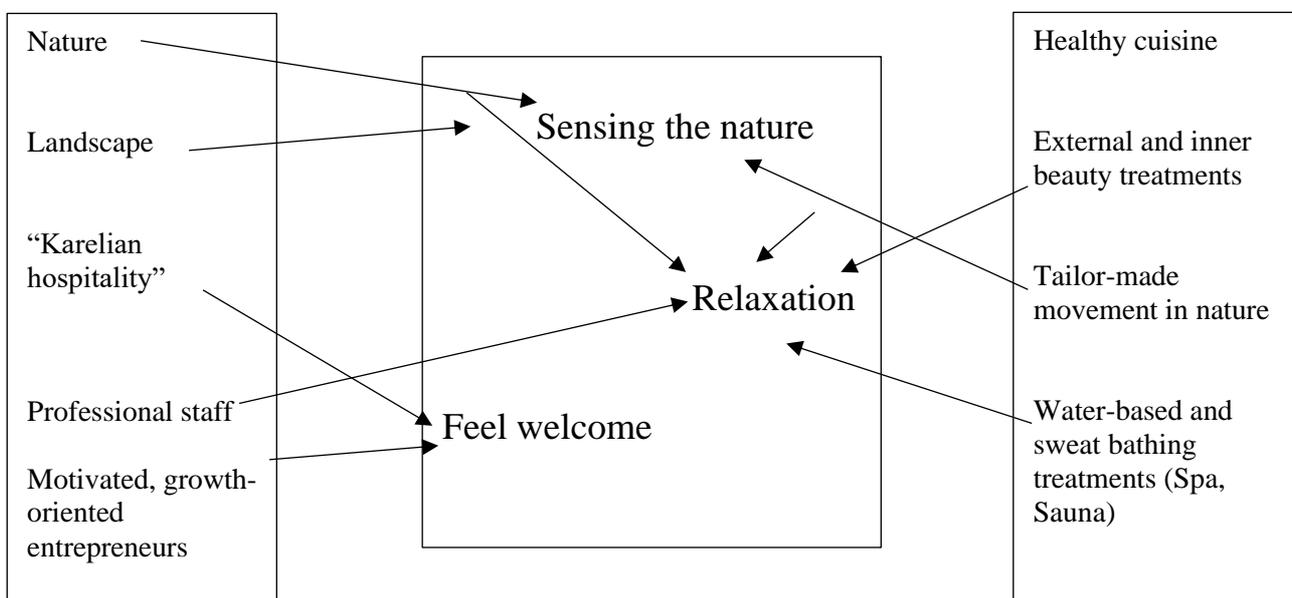


Figure 12. How achieve the goal (needs and expectations) through service modules and service system in Karelian Wellness product. Own illustration.

Customer has certain expected value from the product which in this case refer to needs and goals. In the case of Karelian wellness product presumption is that costumer goal is to promote holistic well-being in nature surroundings and relaxation. Desired consequences during the service process and desired attribute performances affect to perceived value and through it to experienced value (Komppula, 2005).

Like all tourism products, possible Karelian wellness product is layered and includes several different modules. Before product can produce any value or experience to customer, every single item and step should plan and organized from that step when customer start to plan vacation and to buy wellness tourism product. Because assumption is that in Karelian wellness product customer goal is to sense the nature and feel relax. This goal can be achieved with service modules and service scape.

In addition, it is remarkable what is the environment and what kind of person produce these services, through the customer experience is created. In the end customer define is the expectations fulfilled and needs satisfied.

Nature and landscape intrinsically offer environment to sense nature. Karelian hospitality which is part of the local culture ensure that the customer feels welcome. As shown in the figure almost every elements influence on relaxation. According to this study's research results and literature review most important motive and goal in wellness tourism is relaxation (Voigt, et. al., 2011; Chen et. al.,2008; Konu & Laukkanen, 2010) Professional staff ensure that customer feels welcome and professional staff produce spa and beauty services. Service modules such as spa, sauna and external and inner beauty treatments purpose is that customer feels relax during and after action. Tailor-made movement in nature influence to both, nature experience and to relaxation.

#### *Strengths and weaknesses in providing the Karelian wellness tourism offering*

Answer to third research question about strengths and weaknesses is quite simply to sort out because the research results were almost consistent with each other. Unique nature surrounding with berries, herbs, forest, lakes, and silence offers good facilities and environment to provide services. Service providers are motivated and growth oriented. According to research results weaknesses are in productization, marketing and in service design.

## 5.2 Discussion

Research results appear that service providers in Eastern Finland understand the wellness tourism importance in growing marketing and mentioned that they need to “wake up” and start to utilize all resources that they have. All interviewees were enthusiastic about Karelian Wellness product development in practice and acceptance where surprisingly positive. Like Konu et. al. (2010) ten years ago reveals that wellness tourism in Eastern Finland is a bit unprofiled, (Konu, Tuohino & Komppula, 2010) it is still in 2020 century. However most local service providers do not have specific term if they start to market their products to the international markets because research reveal that interviewees like to use Finnish term “*hyvinvointi*”, not wellness or wellbeing product or services.

According to earlier studies in Finland and especially in Eastern Finland, service providers should promote their wellness tourism products with researched information. Because local service providers are conscious about natural local resources and believe in what they are doing yet the message to the consumer is not clear if there is more supply than demand. According to Finnish experts and studies, nature, and the environmental characteristics offer solutions for the development of health-related services and thereby provide a good starting point for competitive business. The intangible value of nature cannot be valued, but together with services and technology, it can be combined into a complete service package. (Konttinen, Särkkä & Sjöstedt, 2013) According to this thesis research results local service providers’ perception is that the nature is unique in Eastern Finland compared to other parts of Finland, but it has not been utilized and productized in the best possible way. In general, Finland has succeeded in utilizing its nature through the wood industry but the business that provides intangible value has not been utilizing it to its full potential and resources. (Konttinen, Särkkä & Sjöstedt, 2013) The traveler appreciates simple things along the way such as sensing nature and hearing silence. (Komppula, Konu & Vikman, 2017) During research interviews local entrepreneurs told about tourists who are coming to experience silence. For that reason, the forest, lakes and silence were the biggest pull factors in Eastern Finland and proves that there is demand for service productization and service design in the region.

Adapting Müller and Lanz Kaufmann’s (2001) wellness model it is obvious that wellness is an active process and mostly consists of different experiences which are intangible and personal. This improves the theory that the tourism product is an emotional experience where the emotional experience is always subjective. The presumption is that it cannot be produced, yet it may provide prerequisites for

services. (Komppula, 2005) To be precise, service provider provides facilities for e.g. food experience or silent experience, but the customer is after all the one who experiences it and decides whether her/his expectations were fulfilled.

### **5.3 Theoretical conclusion**

This thesis offers a confirmation for that wellness concept is multidimensional and means different things in different countries and context (Konu, Tuohino & Björk, 2011; Smith & Puczkó, 2009) and more detailed information from the regional level about the wellness tourism impressions and comprehension. The study did not reveal any results which divert from earlier studies about wellness tourism in Finland, only confirmed that wellness tourism is slightly unprofiled in Eastern Finland (Konu & Tuohino, 2008). In the wellness theory the lacking terms were bringing inconvenience and difficulties (Smith & Puczkó, 2009, p. 6), which were also recognized in this study. The uncertain use and purpose of the terms can cause problems for all, especially for service providers and customers.

Like other studies reveal wellness tourist one of the main motives is relaxation (Voigt et. al., 2011; Konu & Laukkanen, 2010) this study's results confirmed that service providers in Eastern Finland believe that the value and motive is based on relaxation.

### **5.4 Managerial contributions**

Health-related tourism is growing faster than any tourism sector (Global Wellness institute, 2018), and therefore studies which relate to a growing business field are valuable. According to this thesis' research interviews, the service development in the area is needed and the local service providers are willing to grow in the wellness tourism sector. The idea and content of Karelian Wellness product confirmed earlier regional studies and research results about local resources and strengths having to be utilized in new service development and service design. From the researcher's perspective it has been revealed in many studies that wellness is contextual and changes according to time, culture and place. It would be necessary to focus more on regional strengths and how different countries can promote own natural resources in context of wellness tourism. The result of the study should be exploited in practice. However, most important is to combine supply and demand in right markets.

## 5.5 Evaluation of the study and future research suggestions

### Evaluation of the study

This study follows the guidelines which are given to studies like master thesis and qualitative research. In qualitative study trustworthiness consists of dependability, transferability, credibility, and conformability aspects. Researcher of this thesis shows dependability to the reader when the study process is systematic, traceable and sensibly documented. In order of transferability reader can find connection between earlier studies and findings. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) To fulfill credibility the researcher of this thesis has gathered enough knowledge and understood the research topic and has gathered enough information to substantiate the allegations. Conformability is achieved if the researcher is able to combine observations and interpretations with the research data. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016) In this master thesis interpretations were linked to data with quotations. Theory and research results are supposed to interact with each other and in additional several different figures and tables were presented to make it easier for the reader to interpret the research results.

This thesis research interviews were conducted during local pandemic Covid-19 in spring 2020 which caused problems in data collection. The global lockdown situation and the restrictions on travelling affected the tourism industry strongly. The size of data was sufficient for a qualitative study, but the quality and content of the interviews would have been more rewarding in a different situation. Many interviews were cancelled because the local service providers did not see what the effort of this thesis could bring to them in this kind of situation. Interviewees openly talked about their bad situation, cancelled reservations, financial worries and mentioned that answering to research questions was not their first priority. However, after attending the research interviews, the service providers were positive and interested in developing the possible Karelian Wellness product.

### For the future research

Konu & Laukkanen (2009) mentioned that there are very little existing research data about pull factors in wellness in general level. (Konu & Laukkanen, 2009) During the research, author of this thesis made same observation. In addition, it would be interesting to find out, is the term *wellbeing* or *wellness* the “right” term in the Finnish wellness tourism marketing in the future, because the wellness concept is nowadays wider. A research, which consider more regional strengths, would give more

important data, and after that there is a possibility to create a strong brand like Alpine Wellness in Finland. What should Finnish wellness products contain, what is the idea and content of wellness products covering the whole country, if they were presented in the same model as the Karelian wellness product.

Finland has several different concepts like Finrelax and Sauna from Finland, which are related to the Finnish Wellness tourism products. However, there is no clear brand or product that can be marketed in international markets, so product and service development would be necessary. And before introducing products, there should be a lot of research data to support the development of services.

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## APPENDIX 1

**1. Understanding and awareness**

- How you and your company understand the term wellness? Have you ever heard the word?
  
- Additional questions: Do you think is it more about fitness or more about wellbeing? How do you understand the term fitness? How do you understand term wellbeing? What is the role of nutrition and nutrition services? What is the role of sport services? What is role of spa?

**2. Current state of business and existing services**

- Do you offer wellness services or products?
- What kind of services do you offer?

**3. The future prospects of the company and wellness services**

- What do you think Karelian Wellness looks like?
- What Karelian Wellness could be?
- What characteristics could be associated with it?
  
- How do you see the development of wellness tourism? (Finland and International)
- Do you see any regional difference in wellness concept between areas?