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Well-Being in Tourism – a Conceptual Framework

Well-being w turystyce – ramy pojęciowe

Abstract: The aim of the article is to develop a conceptual framework for the relationship between well-being and tourism. The article is based on desk research of the academic literature of various disciplines (their original perspectives and main research topics, with particular emphasis on the relationship between well-being and tourism) and the policies documents published by leading supranational organizations. The article ends with a proposal of a scheme of relations between tourism and various concepts of well-being.

Keywords: well-being; tourism; welfare; subjective well-being; ecosystems; wellness

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest opracowanie ram koncepcyjnych relacji pomiędzy well-being a turystyką. Artykuł opiera się na literaturze akademickiej różnych dyscyplin (ich pierwotnych perspektyw i głównych tematów badawczych, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem związku między well-being a turystyką) oraz dokumentach programowych publikowanych przez wiodące organizacje międzynarodowe. Opracowanie zawiera w części końcowej propozycję schematu powiązań turystyki z różnymi koncepcjami well-being.

Słowa kluczowe: well-being; turystyka; zamożność; subiektywny well-being; ekosystemy; wellness

INTRODUCTION

It will not be an exaggeration to say that the term “well-being” is currently experiencing its momentum. It is commonly used in the mass media, administrative documents, national development strategies and much more. It can be said that well-being has become “fashionable and up-to-date”, just like the terms “ecological” or “sustainable” used to be and arguably still are. Well-being is also gaining more and more interest in scientific articles. It is enough to mention that the search engine on various platforms indicated from 500,000 to 600,000 articles with well-being in the title or as keywords published until 2016 (after Dłużewska 2016). In 2023, Google Scholar shoved over 2,450,000 of them (www2).

Still, as with “ecological” and “sustainable”, there is a lot of “terminology confusion” about what well-being really means. Moreover, well-being is understood differently in different scientific disciplines that deal with it. It is seen as a clean environment in which we live, prosperity, health, happiness, freedom of choice and action, and much more.

There is also an obvious question whether well-being is an objective, measurable state (which can be defined by certain “specific” measures), or is it an individual feeling more closely related to happiness? In both cases, the question is what factors influence well-being? Good health? Money? Individual predispositions to be happy, manifested by the fact that the glass is half full, not half empty? Good relationships with other people? What is happening to us or what can we give to others? The only common denominator is the agreement that well-being is something worth striving for, something that every individual desires, so it has only a positive connotation (Tuula, Tuuli 2015).

Well-being is also mentioned in relation to tourism. Examples are the strategic documents of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) on sustainable development in tourism or the (tourism) development strategies developed by various national tourism authorities around the world, e.g. Global Code of Ethic in Tourism (www3), UNWTO, Visit Finland (2014) and much more.

This article is an attempt to develop a conceptual framework for the relationship between well-being and tourism, in particular the impact of tourism on well-being of tourists and the inhabitants of tourist destinations. The article is based on academic publications on well-being and selected strategic documents, especially those of an international nature. We first present the conceptual background of well-being characteristics of various academic disciplines, including their original perspectives and main research topics, with particular emphasis on the relationship between well-being and tourism. Secondly, we turn to the perspective of supranational organizations and well-being administration and

policy. The article ends with a proposal of a scheme of relations between tourism and various concepts of well-being. The article is conceptual.

WELL-BEING IN SELECTED SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINES

Economy – well-being as welfare

Economic science was the first to start talking about well-being. This term was introduced with the concept of gross national product (GNP) developed by Simon Kuznets as early as 1934. Later, GNP evolved into gross domestic product (GDP), still understood as welfare and intended to measure countries' economies (Shea 1976).

The science of economics was seen “as nearest the core of any problem concerning the quality of life because the quality of life of any individual or community can in a direct and simple way be related to income” (Wilson 1972, p. 131). In principle, it was agreed that the more money is earned and spend in the country, the higher the well-being of its citizens will be.

Later (even only in the field of economic sciences) it was noticed that the formula greater GDP = greater prosperity is not so obvious. Thus, also passing through Seers' work, attention was paid to the distribution of income among citizens (social inequalities), the purchasing power of money, and even the structure of spending (e.g. the question of whether the purchase of cigarettes definitely affects higher well-being?). The answer to these doubts was the concept of the genuine progress indicator (GPI), which distinguishes negative from positive expenditure (Halstead 1998; Hamilton 1998).

At a later stage, economic science extended the concept of well-being to the achievements of other disciplines. An example is the human development index (HDI) (Lai 2000), which extends traditional economic indicators to include GDP, literacy and life expectancy (UNDP 2003). The concept of capability introduced by the economist, Sen (1985) went even further, developing a platform combining economic, political and social analysis.

There are also numerous studies in the field of economics that challenge the certainty that more money = more well-being, both for individuals and societies (Gardner, Oswald 2007, p. 3). For example, in the case of Western countries, it has been noted that although GDP has increased in recent years, there has been no increase in indicators of subjective well-being (Eckersley 2000; Cummins et al. 2003).

With regard to tourism, the economic concept of well-being is widely used in studies of the sector's profitability on a global and regional scale (who uses

tourism and how much) or in studies of demand in source markets (tourism expenditure). An example is the studies of the most important organizations responsible for the development of tourism in the world, such as the UNTWO or WTTC. It is no exaggeration to say that the economic perspective still dominates politics, perhaps giving some space to the environmental science (Janicki, Dłużewska 2022). It is also very important to distinguish whether we are talking about the well-being of societies or individuals (McGregor, Pouw 2017). Particularly in the case of tourism, the differences in relation to collective (country) well-being and individuals are in many cases very large (Pratt et al. 2016). It should also be emphasized that economics is a “living science”, and therefore also in relation to well-being, the economic perspective is definitely richer and more complex than that originally associated with wealth (Chatterjee et al. 2020).

Environmental science – well-being as the good state of ecosystems

Environmental sciences became active in the field of well-being research with the emergence of the concept of sustainable development through the so-called Statement of the Brundtland Commission (WCED 1987). Well-being here is closely related to the state of ecosystems. From an environmental science perspective, the better the condition of ecosystems, the better the well-being of humanity (Hall et al. 2013). Ecosystems are considered a prerequisite for human existence. It was also emphasized that the relationship between ecosystems and human well-being is mutual. Well-being relies on ecosystems, but at the same time the pursuit of well-being affects ecosystems (Naess 1995; Giddings et al. 2002; Haila 2009; Tuula, Tuuli 2015). As stated by Tuula and Tuuli (2015), “the way in which (human) needs are met has inevitable social and ecological consequences” (p. 170). In tourism, with inadequate (unsustainable) activities, the ecological consequences can be enormous. Pollution of sea waters, occupation of wild areas for tourist infrastructure (extirpation of species), erosion and many others.

However, it should be emphasized that the Brundtland Commission Statement (1987) does not mention tourism and therefore does not provide practical guidance on sustainable activities in this sector. As a consequence, the literature on sustainable tourism, especially in the 1990s, was “swarming” with loose interpretations. Mass tourism was considered “bad” by definition and perceived as the greatest enemy of ecosystems, while ecotourism was supposed to be at the opposite pole (good). Currently, we know that the division into mass tourism and ecotourism is not correct – in one case we are talking about the scale, in the other – about the purpose of the trip (Stronza et al. 2019; Taczanowska et al. 2019). More importantly, it is recognized that ecotourism can do much more

damage than mass tourism, for the simple reason that it takes place at the heart of ecosystems (see Duffy 2013 for examples). In general, the prevailing opinion in environmental science was that tourism was something bad, harmful to the environment. Out of concern for the good of the planet/humanity, tourism should therefore be limited. Currently, environmental sciences devote much space to the effects of tourism on a global scale. An example can be numerous publications calling for the reduction of air travel due to excessive gas emissions as they have a negative impact on the well-being of the world's inhabitants on a global scale (Peeters et al. 2009; de Bruijn et al. 2010; Dwyer et al. 2010; Pearch-Nielsen et al. 2010; Scott et al. 2008, 2010).

A key piece of evidence from environmental science is that our lives and health depend on the health of ecosystems (Rodrigues, Kastenholz 2010; Pretty et al. 2011; Völker, Kistemann 2011). No wonder that numerous studies are being carried out to determine which ecosystems are most beneficial for us. It is also recognized that some ecosystems have a greater positive impact on human well-being than others (Velarde et al. 2007). Much attention is paid to landscape studies, especially in relation to the so-called blue spaces (e.g. Völker, Kistemann 2011) and green spaces (e.g. Maas et al. 2006; Pretty et al. 2007; Barbosa et al. 2007). Although the problem of the relationship between ecosystems and well-being is mainly studied in various environmental disciplines (Pretty et al. 2007), it is gaining increasing interest in sociology, recreation research and medical sciences (Yang et al. 2013).

Medical science – well-being as health

Well-being research is devoted to medical science in the field of disease treatment, rehabilitation and prevention. In most cases, this is hermetic medical literature on selective diseases. The medical concept of well-being also refers to the achievements of many disciplines that contribute to physical health to some extent – dietetics, psychology or sports science.

However, there are quite a few references to tourism here. Starting from studies on medical, SPA or sanatorium tourism, to discussions on the impact of tourism and leisure on health, to simply taking a break from work and staying in a specific environment – by the sea, in forest areas, etc. (Alipour et al. 2020; McCabe et al. 2010; Morgan et al. 2015). No wonder that we will find here numerous references to the concept of ecosystems – the beneficial effect of selected ecosystems on the treatment of selected diseases, prevention of lifestyle diseases, stress reduction and more (Pessot et al. 2021; Zhang et al. 2021). It should also be emphasized that the topic of health tourism is often discussed in the area of non-medical disciplines (e.g. Azara et al. 2018; Pesonen, Tuohino 2016).

The term “well-being tourism” is primarily associated with tourism that promotes personal health. This type of tourism is frequently known as wellness tourism (familiar in Scandinavia and the UK) and medical tourism (in Baltic States, Bulgaria or Poland) or health tourism (Lubowiecki-Vikuk 2018; Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al. 2021). However, as noted by Konu et al. (2011), medical tourism and well-being tourism are two completely different products. While medical tourism focuses on the treatment and prevention of specific diseases, well-being tourism is intended to maintain a state of holistic well-being of the body, the mind and the soul (Łęcka 2003). Here, well-being can be rather understood as a state of balance (Dodge et al. 2012). Lindell et al. (2019, p. 11) suggest the following definition for well-being tourism to be applied:

“a specific type of tourism intended to promote and maintain a positive state of health of the body, mind and soul, and that is composed of products and services drawn upon a sustainable and harmonious interaction with the surrounding environment and community”. Thus, [...] well-being tourism, it is a comprehensive concept that implies sustainability. It comprises tourism services and products that bring well-being to the visitor as well as to the host destination (community and nature). (p. 11)

Well-being tourism is now functioning as a legitimate, very popular tourist product (see *www2* for the example). It is basically agreed that the main content of well-being tourism are high-quality wellness services and products (such as, e.g. beauty treatments, dedicated physical exercise, baths, saunas, places for relaxation). However, as Lindell et al. (2019) noted, well-being tourism, as “a much wider concept and also importantly include natural areas such as the coastline and forest, infrastructure to enable access and activity in the nature such as paths for biking and trekking and beaches, as well as healthy nutritious food products” (p. 11).

Sports science – well-being as health through physical activity

On the basis of sports science and medical science, a very popular concept of *wellness* was born, combining well-being with physical activity (Ardell 1985). Wellness is built by two concepts: well-being and fitness. The term was first used in 1959 by Dunn in an article titled “High-Level Wellness for Man and Society” (based on his better known 1961 book *High-Level Wellness*). Dunn’s main argument was that health is much more than the absence of disease. This statement remains the basis of the concept of well-being today. Dunn (1961) defined wellness as “an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable” (pp. 4–5). Ardell

(1982) views wellness more individually and defines it as “self-responsibility, nutritional awareness, physical fitness, stress management, and environmental sensitivity” (p. 17).

Physical activity is seen as an essential element of physical and mental health (Penedo, Dahn 2005). The question is, what kind of activity should it be (e.g. jogging, yoga, Pilates, TBC)? And at what intensity? With what frequency? It is obvious that what is beneficial for some people may end up in injury or permanent damage to others. The literature on the wellness trend is full of publications on fitness recommendations for individual age groups, practical training tips, or specific benefits of selected forms of fitness (Gamby et al. 2021). A certain answer is provided in Poland by the policy of developing physical activity of citizens, visible in numerous open-air gyms financed throughout the country, and co-financing of shared bike stations (Łęcka, de Kuyper 2023). The concept of wellness was quickly absorbed by the tourism industry, which is reflected in the creation of the Spa & Wellness hotel concept combining passive body care with the offer of physical activity. Both seen as a way to ensure guests' well-being.

Psychology and social sciences – well-being as happiness

Due to the high level of convergence in the understanding of what well-being is, the section on social and psychological sciences was treated together. Proportionally, we therefore devote slightly more attention than to other disciplines. To put simply, well-being here is almost synonymous with happiness. The real question is what makes us happy? In psychology, but also in the social sciences, three main approaches can be distinguished (Brock 1993; Diener, Suh 1996). The first relates well-being to specific cultures and religions. In different cultural contexts, different things make us happy. Moreover, a high level of well-being can be achieved even by sacrificing one's own well-being for the benefit of other people (Diener, Suh 1996, p. 189). The second approach relates to the personal preferences of individuals. It emphasizes the diversity of individual feelings – what makes someone happy does not necessarily make another person happy, even in the same cultural, religious and economic context (e.g. pregnancy). The third approach focuses solely on subjective evaluation. From this perspective, if someone felt happy, it should be assumed to be true, regardless of the objective circumstances (Land 1996).

The original area of research on the relationship between well-being and tourism in the field of psychological sciences concerned the positive impact of tourism activity on the well-being of tourists – by changing the environment, experiencing an adventure, taking a break from work, making friends, etc. (e.g. Etzion 2019). Research asks the question, do holidays really affect

well-being? What will this holiday be like? How long does the positive effect last?, etc. (e.g. De Bloom et al. 2009, 2010; Kühnel, Sonnentag 2011). As in the case of other disciplines, in the literature on the subject one can find examples of the dysfunctional impact of tourism, e.g. alcohol abuse, loss of brakes, etc. (e.g. Uriely et al. 2011).

The achievements of psychological science are also widely used in research on the impact of tourism on the well-being of hosts – societies living in areas where tourism takes place. For example, the Theory of Subjective Homeostasis of Well-being (Cummins 1998; Cummins, Nistico 2002), the Ability to Aspire (Appadurai 2004), and the Belt of Well-Being (Janicki, Dłużewska 2022) are equally applicable to studies of well-being of both groups.

The theory of subjective well-being Homeostasis has been used to explain the positive ranges of human well-being values (Cummins 1998; Cummins, Nistico 2002). The homeostasis system is always deeply personalized. This can be illustrated by the standard question: “How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?”. The response reflects the perceived state of happiness and well-being of the evaluator, which is precisely the stage where the homeostatic system is operating. The homeostatic system builds the “meaning of life”. Still, people making individual assessments compare themselves with others. As a result, they may believe they are better or worse (Dodge, Kahn 1931; Andrews, Withey 1976; Headey, Wearing 1988, 1989; Diener et al. 1999; Cummins et al. 2003). One indicator of measurement is the (imaginary) self-distance to the social/global level in which we participate.

Tourism can improve the self-esteem and prestige of tourists. For local communities, this can have the opposite effect, as it radically changes the reference point (for the richer guests). Local communities can feel much worse, even if their objective standard of living increases. In many tourist destinations, where the hosts are relatively poorer than the guests, the comparison would increase the negative attitude towards the feelings of the hosts when they compare their situation with the tourists (see, e.g. Peake 1989; Tosun 2001a, 2001b; Middleton 2004; Dłużewska 2018).

The impact of comparing oneself with other people on subjective well-being has also been highlighted in Appadurai’s Capacity to Aspire theory, and more recently in the Well-being Belt concept (Janicki, Dłużewska 2022). Research by Janicki and Dłużewska (2022) confirmed that a comparative scale is an important factor determining subjective well-being. “Therefore, in many societies, there is a growing awareness of the gap between one’s own quality of life and that of others”. Moreover,

there is a strong link between HDI and SRLS (self-reported life satisfaction) on a global scale, as well as in the subgroups of high and medium developed countries; this link is missing in poorly developed countries. The disconnection between objective and subjectively perceived change in the situation – i.e. the improvement in living standards does not translate into increased life satisfaction. (Janicki, Dłużewska 2022, p. 1)

Research by Pratt et al. (2016) on gross happiness in Fiji confirms this regularity. The results of the research indicate that the inhabitants of tourist villages were much less happy than non-tourist villages, despite the greater poverty of the latter.

In addition, the work of the University of Bath research group on well-being in developing countries points to different patterns of how well-being functions in different cultural contexts, such as:

– *doing well* (objective measures) → *feeling good* (subjective measures) for western societies where good material status is often understood as a key determinant of well-being, and

– *doing good* → *feeling well* (subjective measures) for most of developing countries, where “living the good life” means having social respect, good relations with other people, believing in God and so on (White 2009, p. 4).

In the context of tourism, this perspective is important in research on the social effects of tourism in developing countries, especially the so-called culture shock.

Well-being in selected transnational policies

Well-being has received much attention since the publication of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA 2003, 2005). Millennium documents have become the basis for the development of many strategies at the international level, including in relation to tourism. An example is the Global Code of Ethics in Tourism prepared by the UNWTO and the United Nations. Strategies at the supranational level were followed by national strategies developed by selected ministries, e.g. in European Union countries. According to the MEA, the well-being of the individual is built up by five elements, they are:

- financial resources sufficient for a decent life,
- health,
- good social relations,
- security,
- freedom of choice and action.

Although the environment is not included among the five listed elements, its key role in shaping well-being is further emphasized in the documents (MEA

2003, 2005). The MEA documents also include the term “ecosystem services”, developed at the intersection of economic and environmental sciences. From the perspective of a millennium, human well-being is closely related to the state of ecosystems. Proper ecosystem services are essential for the sustainable development of our planet – the well-being of its inhabitants. As already mentioned, the Millennium perspective has been an important impetus to address the topic of well-being through environmental science.

In turn, the latest Sustainable Development Goals Agenda published by the UNDP (2017) sees well-being in a slightly different way. The whole concept combines a wide range of economic, environmental and political characteristics, divided into the following 17 goals:

- *SDG 1 – No poverty* (economics)
- *SDG 2 – Zero hunger* (economics)
- *SDG 3 – Good health and well-being – Ensure healthy life and promote well-being for all ages* (medicine & psychology)
- *SDG 4 – Quality education* (politics)
- *SDG 5 – Gender equality* (politics)
- *SDG 6 – Clean water and sanitation* (environment)
- *SDG 7 – Affordable and clean energy* (economics & environment)
- *SDG 8 – Decent work and economic growth* (economics & psychology)
- *SDG 9 – Industry innovations and infrastructure* (economics)
- *SDG 10 – Reduced inequalities* (politics)
- *SDG 11 – Sustainable cities and economies* (economics & environment)
- *SDG 12 – Responsible consumption and production* (economics & environment)
- *SDG 13 – Climate action* (environment)
- *SDG 14 – Life below water* (environment)
- *SDG 15 – Life on land* (environment)
- *SDG 16 – Peace, justice and strong institutions* (politics)
- *SDG 17 – Partnership for the goals* (economics)

Formally, the term “well-being” is used here only once, in support of the description of health, in goal no. 3 – *good health and well-being*, although well-being, its defining characteristics, can be found in almost all of the guidelines presented in the document (Łęcka, de Kuyper 2023). The Sustainable Development Goals and Guidelines developed by the United Nations have been adopted by numerous supranational organizations, including the United World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). With regard to SDG3, the UNWTO proposes that: “Tax income generated from tourism can be reinvested in health care and services, improving maternal health, reduce child mortality and preventing diseases. Visitors

fees collected in protected areas can as well contribute to health services”. And suggest “Health prevention programs; Fight against sex tourism, health and disasters awareness and donations; Customer security and health – prevention and facilities” (UNWTO & UNDP 2017).

“LOST IN TRANSLATION” – WELL-BEING IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

Despite the widespread agreement of many countries on the need for actions in the field of well-being at the level of central administration, there are significant differences in the understanding/translation of the concept of well-being (Dłużewska et al. 2020; Smith 2015; Smith, Diekmann 2017).

For example, in the Anglo-Saxon context, well-being is most often understood as a complex of physical, psychological, monetary and environmental factors. Responsibility for the implementation of the policy rests with the Department of Health and Social Care, Department for the Economy, Department for Environment & Food and Rural Affairs and other administrative bodies. Despite this, the term well-being is often used interchangeably with the term wellness (Dłużewska et al. 2020). The result is a kind of “abuse” in the use of the term wellness, in relation to products that have nothing to do with physical activity (fitness). The term “wellness” is even used to describe monastic meditation festivals as a type of spiritual wellness (see Voigt, Pforr 2013 for examples).

In Finland, as in other Nordic countries, well-being is mainly related to ecosystems. In addition to the Ministry of the Environment, well-being is monitored by many bodies, including, what is worth emphasizing, the Finnish Tourism Organization. Linking well-being to ecosystem services is also strong in tourism promotion campaigns. Clean ecosystems are the basis of many tourist products, e.g. forests and lakes for SPA & wellness. Still, a SPA & wellness holiday can literally just be a lake house. Clean water, fresh air, forest (without any pampering body treatments) – that is what was called for the first time in the promotional campaign of Finland. Later, the product was simply called Finn relax (Björk et al. 2011; Tuohino et al. 2014). In Bulgaria, well-being has been translated as welfare, policy implementation activities are the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Economy and Industry (working papers www.tobewell.com). In Hungary and Poland, well-being was first understood as the absence of disease. In both countries, implementation policy activities have been delegated to the Ministries of Health (Dłużewska et al. 2020; Smith, Puczkó 2014).

In most European countries, the term “wellness” is much more recognizable than well-being. In addition, wellness has taken on a kind of independent life,

mainly related to spas, luxury hotels and beauty treatments (Sánchez et al. 2022). An example is the literature in Polish, where the vast majority of articles containing the term well-being in the title or keywords are automatically associated with SPA & wellness (Dłużewska 2016; Lubowiecki-Vikuk 2018; Lubowiecki-Vikuk, Dryglas 2019). Still, thanks to international projects on well-being tourism, carried out in Poland, the awareness of the tourism industry and tourists has changed and wellness is confused with well-being less and less frequently.

WELL-BEING CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK – CONCLUSIONS

The literature on well-being, although richer year by year, remains quite chaotic as the subject matter is very diverse. In the case of tourism, as Dłużewska (2018) stated,

analyzing relations between well-being and tourism is much more complex than studying dependencies between well-being and sustainable development perceived holistically. This can be seen as a result of tourism functioning in adjunction to other sectors of economy, in relation to national policies, in a bond with the environment, and so forth. This, in turn, makes it extremely difficult to correlate the tourism sector with specific indices of human well-being. (p. 1)

The most important relations between tourism and well-being are presented in Fig. 1. The figure is developed on the basis of the literature and policies documents cited in the paper.

First of all, attention should be paid to separate/different interpretations of well-being in individual scientific disciplines, such as economics, environmental studies, medicine, sport and psychology/social sciences, which was briefly mentioned in this article. Well-being policies, such as MEA or SDG, were created in a separate “stream”. Importantly, although all SDGs refer to the definition of well-being in various scientific disciplines, this concept is used only once in SDG 3. This had a major impact on different definitions of well-being in different countries. Well-being tourism, although it was influenced to some extent by current (well-being) policies, developed in a completely separate trend. Although the current interpretation of well-being tourism is much closer to a holistic approach than it was in the first period, the elaboration of common definition (for both academic disciplines and policies) is still a significant challenge. A consistent/unambiguous definition of well-being together with an adjusted institutional organization (delegation of well-being policies at national and international levels) will certainly contribute to well-being & tourism research, policies and practices.

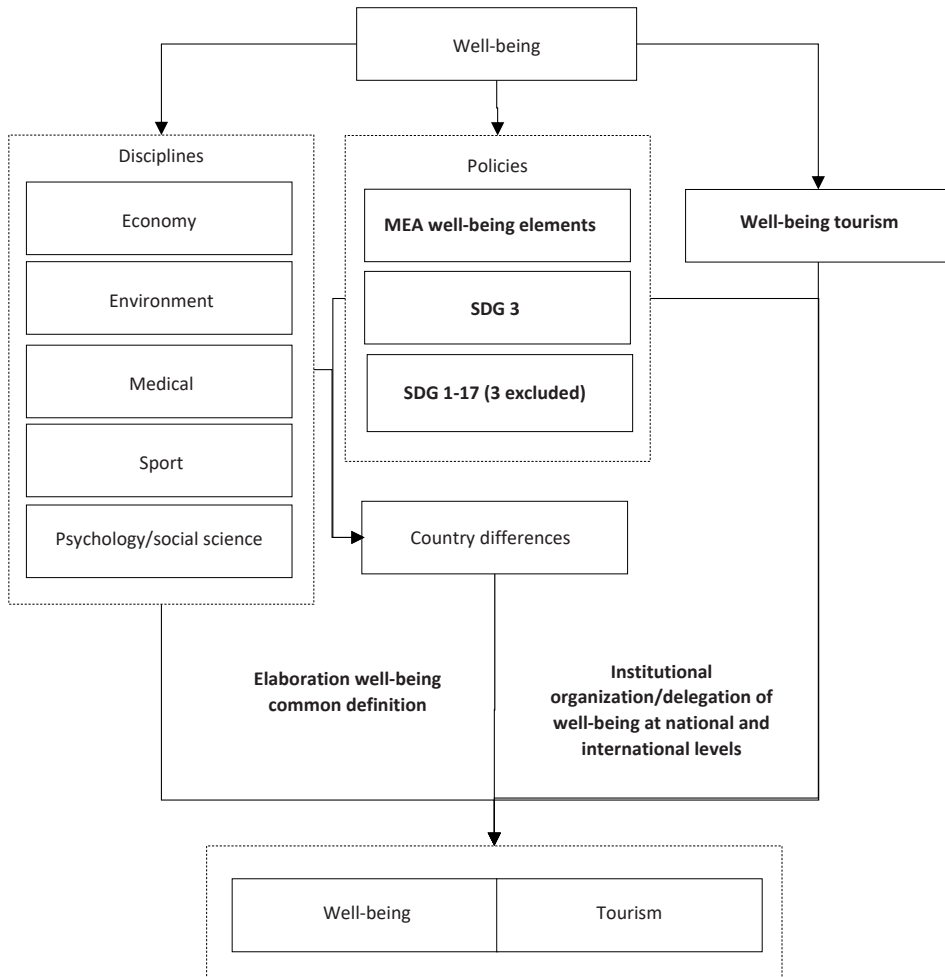


Fig. 1. The most important relations between tourism and well-being
Source: Author's own study.

Talking about the limitations, it must be remembered that some of the issues raised as part of well-being definitely do not relate to tourism (e.g. individual predispositions to be happy). Also, most of presented analysis of well-being in relation to (sustainable) tourism, from the very beginning, can only be superficial and must concentrate solely on key elements.

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