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# TOurISM, MedITaTION, SuSTaINaBILITY

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**Abstract:** *The economic value of meditation based services is clearly demonstrated by a growing number of companies using such services. In the USA one quarter of the companies offer in-house meditation training to their employees. On the other hand, the number of those who think that the western consumption paradigm in its present form is unsustainable is also increasing. In addition to its business value, meditation and its most popular western form mindfulness is a practical tool that can catalyze a change in our world view and value system. A basic precondition for learning meditation techniques is to have an open, receptive, feminine attitude. As it is revealed in the present research, tourists poses a significantly elevated level of openness to new experience. This increased openness together with an upward trend for spiritual experiences can create a synergy for certain destinations, accommodation types, tourism locations to expand their service portfolio with meditation based services. While favourable physical and psychological effects of traditional tourism services fade within a few weeks, meditation is a portable tourism product which can be taken home and practiced regularly in a virtually cost-free way. By learning and practicing meditation the extremely poor physical and psychological condition of the Hungarian population could be improved in a preventive and cost-effective way. As the level of mindfulness is positively correlated with sustainable behaviour by offering meditation services tourism might take on a new level of significance in the battle for sustainability.*

**Keywords:** *tourism, meditation, sustainability, openness to experience, trends*

## Introduction

In the 289-page document of National Development 2030 (mirror translation of Nemzeti Fejlesztés 2030) the Hungarian equivalents of the word „sustainable” or its derived forms appear 247 times and in the 81-page document titled Concept of National Tourism Development (mirror translation of Nemzeti Turizmusfejlesztési Konceptió) 2024 37 times. Sustainability has become a commonplace and part of educated rhetoric. Since E.F. Schumacher’s famous book „Small is beautiful” was published in 1973 (Schumacher 1973) alternative economic theories emphasizing the priority of spiritual values over purely economic concerns have been gaining momentum (Kocsis 2011; Prónay, Málóvic 2008; Boudrillard 1998; Randers 2012). In spite of the myriads of scientific publications, action plans, conferences, educational efforts in the last five decades humanity is still headed for worst case climate scenario (RCP8.5) as clearly demonstrated in the Global Carbon Budget 2014 report (Le Quéré et al., 2014). There are other planetary boundaries we have already transgressed (Steffen et al., 2015). There are concerns that the Paris climate conference (COP21) has failed to make a breakthrough in global mitigation as countries can decide how much they want to contribute to mitigation efforts in their INDC (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions). Sustainability is an elusive term and has been defined by many with various factors in mind (Hammond, 1998, Prugh, Constanza & Daly, 2000, Wills-Johnson, 2010). However we want to define it there are basic and at the same time very difficult questions to answer. What do we want to sustain? Why those things? How? For what period? What sacrifices might be necessary for

the stakeholders involved? How best measure it? Answering these questions and basically all others in connection with sustainability supposes personal subjective value judgements and it will also have to involve a paradigm shift in our world view, attitude and behaviour (Capra, 1982, Zsolnai, 2010, Diamond, 2011). *The hard question of sustainability is: How can we make people change their world view, attitude and behaviour?* The aim of the present paper is twofold. On the one hand it attempts to demonstrate that the tourism context is exceptionally suitable for acquiring meditation skills for the first time or even for deepening insight already gained through practice. The other aim is to demonstrate through analysing Google trends data that next to the supply side potentials there is a marked increase in the online interest concerning meditation and mindfulness. It provides a business case for the introduction of more meditation-based services in the tourism industry both globally and in Hungary in particular.

## 1. Background of research

### 1.1 Tourism and wellbeing

A community can function sustainably in the long run only if the physical and psychological health of its members is guaranteed. Physical and psychological health is perhaps the most important aspect when considering quality of life. The Gallup-Heathway Well-Being Index examines and evaluates six areas, three of which describe physical and psychological health. Based on statistical data in OECD’s „Health at a glance” reports it is not an exaggeration to declare that physically and psychologically the Hungarian population is in a strikingly bad

shape. We ranked 2nd for cardiovascular mortality out of the examined 26 countries and in 2011 we still ranked 2nd out of 33 OECD countries. For self-reported health we ranked 23rd and 30th respectively in the same years. As for cancer mortality we retained our 1st place throughout this 10-year period (OECD, 2003, 2013). If we examine the volume of domestic tourism between 1990 and 2011 we can see a 150% increase (Polgár et al, 2006; MTZrt, 2012). Given the average length and frequency of domestic holidays in Hungary the question arises: Do domestic vacations have any long-term effects on the physical and psychological well-being of the population?

The fact that the Concept of National Tourism Development and another strategic government document the Curing Hungary Health Industrial Program (mirror translation of Gyógyító Magyarország Egészségipari Program) sets the improvement of the quality of life of the Hungarian population as a strategic goal for the tourism industry makes this question even more relevant. The former actually lists the improvement of health among the expected results of the program. In his 2007 study Gábor Michalko found that the frequency of holidays and the level of happiness are positively correlated (Michalkó, 2010). However, it is important to point out that it does not necessarily mean a causal relationship. As Nawijn highlights: „it is not established that this correlation is due to an effect of holiday trips on happiness or an effect of happiness on holiday-taking.” (Nawijn, 2012: 37).

In Michalko's survey the contribution of travelling to happiness ranked relatively high, however, when participants were asked how important travelling was in their life, domestic travel was ranked lower than buying new gadgets and foreign travel was less important than buying new clothes. This seeming contradiction can be resolved by assuming that the positive effects of holidays on wellbeing and happiness is observable during the holiday most significantly. This assumption is supported by peer-reviewed literature. The length of the fade-out period of positive vacation effects ranges from a few days (De Bloom et al, 2013), a few weeks (Nawjin et al, 2010), to a month (Kühnel & Sonnentag, 2011). Based on these findings and considering the average length and frequency of holidays taken by Hungarians it is questionable that traditional tourism products can significantly improve health and quality of life.

## 1.2 Tourism, meditation, mindfulness

Meditation based tourism services are special products in the wellness sub segment of tourism. Their uniqueness results from the fact that unlike traditional wellness products such as massage, fitness trainings, bubble bath, saunas etc., meditation is a „portable product” which can be taken home and practiced virtually cost free. Certainly there are other skills that you can learn and take home with you like skiing or handicraft skills acquired during an animation program. However these activities either do not have such manifold and clinically proven physical and psychological benefits as meditation or there are certain obstacles (financial, geographical etc.) to practicing them. Interest in Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) therapies has been growing steadily in recent

years (Csörgő, Bíró, Kopkáné & Müller, 2012). Meditation (mindfulness) is one of many techniques that can be utilized in CAM treatments. The 2014 trend report of SpaFinder describes mindfulness and mindful living as „Über trend” in the wellness market. Forest bathing, top trend in the 2015 SpaFinder report, also uses mindfulness in its relaxation exercises. Keeping up to date regarding changes in consumer preferences and behaviour is the basis of successful operation in a highly saturated and competitive market. As Müller et al. point out in their paper „Trends change fast, but being aware of them is crucial both in the for-profit and non-profit sector as it is a factor of competitiveness.” (Müller et. all 2013:25). By analyzing Google Trends data, the present research provides reinforcement to these findings. Meditation has been part of the service portfolios of spa and wellness establishments around the world. However in Hungary out of the 2312 (KSH, 2015) commercial accommodation service providers fewer than 20 offer some form of meditation. It is less than 1 % of all commercial accommodations. Examples of accommodation service providers offering meditation include Oxigén Hotel\*\*\*\* és Zen Spa, Lifestyle Hotel Mátra\*\*\*\*superior, Barátság Gyógy-és Wellness Szálloda\*\*\*superior and Panoráma Wellness Apartman Hotel\*\*\*\*.

Mindfulness is an umbrella term for certain, mainly Buddhist, meditation techniques such as vipassana, satipa—hāna, and anapanasati. Led by professor of medicine John Kabat-Zinn the first MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) programs were launched at the Stress Reduction Clinic in 1979. Today MBSR programs are coordinated by Massachusetts University Mindfulness Centre.

Its positive physical and psychological effects have been proved by many clinical and non-clinical researches abroad especially in the United States (Miller et al 1995; Kabat-Zinn 2003; Baer 2003; Kristeller 2013). Mindfulness was found beneficial in clinical tests with cardiovascular conditions (Schneider et al, 2012), high blood pressure (Hughes et al, 2013) or with cancer patients (Matchim, 2010). Its positive effects were tested in schools (Weijer-Bergsma et al, 2012) and work places (Reb et al, 2012). From a sustainability perspective one of the most relevant research findings is positive correlation between mindfulness and sustainable behaviour. (Jacob, Jovic, & Brinkerhoff; 2008, Amel, Manning, & Scott, 2009; Rosenberg, 2004; Brown, & Kasser, 2005). Meditation in the western world is becoming popular mainly as „mindfulness”. The increasing popularity and significance of mindfulness programs are demonstrated by the fact that the English parliament created a mindfulness committee in May 2014 with all parties participating to examine how mindfulness could be utilized in health care, education and in the workplace. Prior to this MP had been participating in in-house mindfulness trainings for a year.

## 1.3 Tourism and sustainability

It is not easy to reconcile forecasts for tourism arrivals for the next few decades with the pressing issues of global warming. According to UNEP projections, by 2050 international tourist

arrivals will be around 2.6 billion, which is 30% less than the BAU scenario. Even this “greener scenario” means a 251 % increase in solid waste disposal, a 154 % in energy consumption, 152 % in water consumption and a 131% rise in greenhouse gas emission. At the same time tourism is considered as one of the top ten industries instrumental in contributing to the transition to a greener global economy (UNEP, 2011). Several authors raised concerns about the unsustainability of present day mass tourism, some even advocating degrowth of the industry (Hall, 2009, Hollenhorst, Houge-Mackenzie & Ostergren, 2014). The optimistic scenarios of UNWTO or WTTC are questionable as the main contributor of tourism’s green house gas emission long-haul air travel is and projected to be growing exponentially (Scott, Hall & Gössling, 2012). The GHG emission of tourism estimated to be around 5-8 % (UNWTO-UNEP-WMO, 2008), can reach an astonishing 40 % of all emissions globally according to some researchers (Dubois & Ceron, 2006). Technological innovations aimed at reducing fuel consumption per seat kilometre might result in a 25 % reduction in aviation-related GHG emission, however, even that would be far from satisfactory considering how urgent the climate problem is. There are serious efforts within the industry towards a higher level of sustainability. Corporate tourism giants such as TUI or Thomas Cook have a dedicated section devoted to detailing their sustainability efforts on the front pages of their corporate websites and as there is a growing number of green-minded tourists on the market (Wehrli, Schwarz & Stettler 2011), more and more smaller firms also incorporate sustainability in their policies. Besides the demand side pressure, companies engaging in sustainability measures can save costs and also become more prepared for the probably harder legal environment after COP21 in Paris. However as Saarinen points out, there is still a lot of greenwashing and „... the industry as a whole and its customers need to have firmer guiding regulative frameworks for creating a wider responsibility and a path towards sustainable development.” (Saarinen, 2014:11)

#### 1.4 Meditation and sustainability

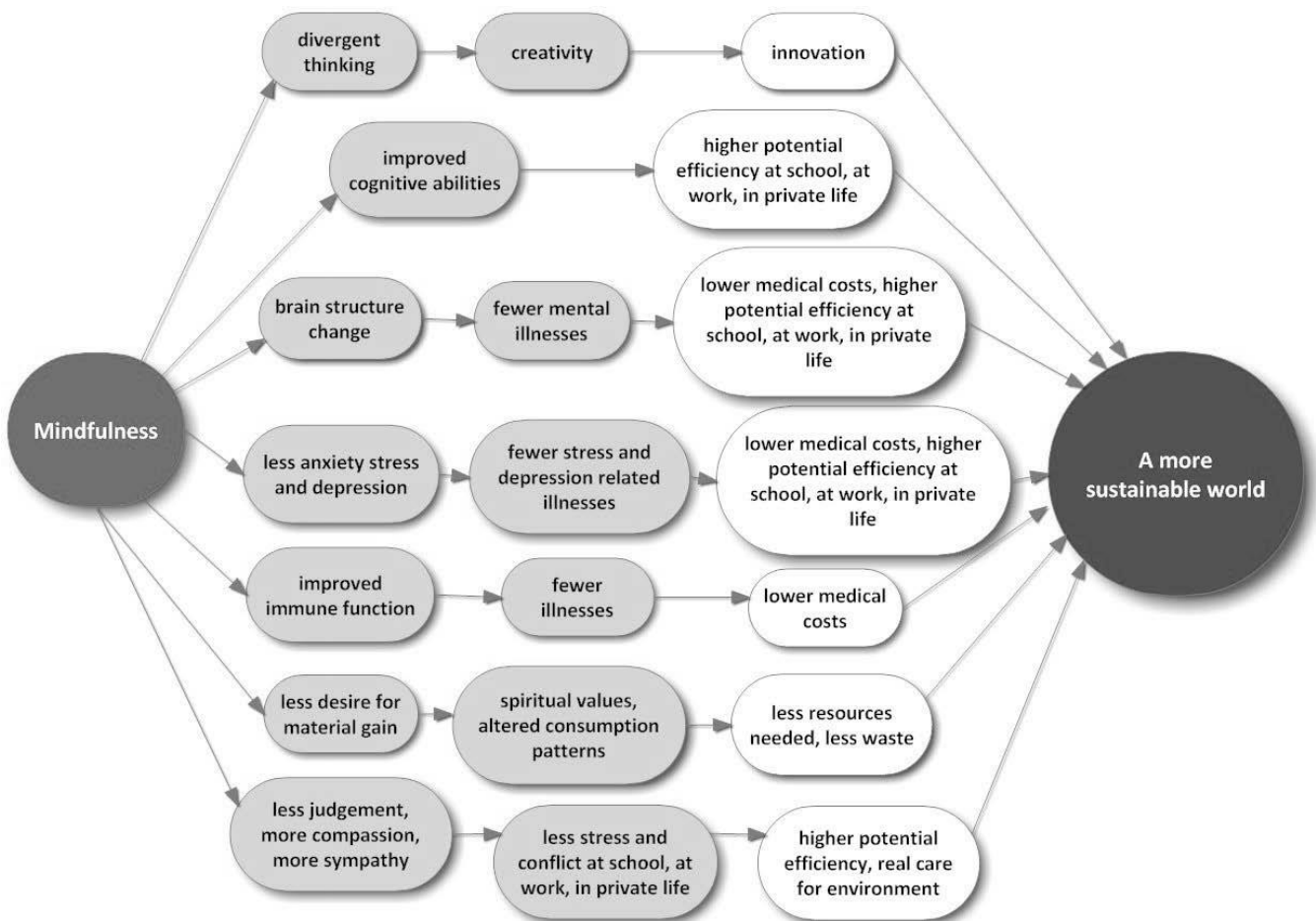
Long term sustainability is not just about technological fixes. Our world view, value system, way of thinking is really what is unsustainable. As it was pointed out in the introductory section, the hard question of sustainability in the long run is how an inner transformation concerning our world view, value system and way of thinking is possible. Such transformation on the individual level can be brought about by a systematic, regular and voluntary inner exploration and growth. Figure 1. demonstrates proven benefits of mindfulness meditation and how these benefits can be the basis of a more sustainable world. Numerous studies explored how mindfulness and sustainable attitude and behaviour are related. Mindfulness can positively influence consumerism and materialism in general. As Rosenberg points out “Mindfulness may enhance one’s awareness of potentially accessible cognitive-behavioural processes underlying consumption that have become relatively automatic. It can make consumption more a matter of choice

than of impulse clouded by the illusion of choice.” (Rosenberg, 2004:107). This positive association has been confirmed empirically by other authors as well (Brown & Ryan, 2004, Brown & Kasser, 2008. Jacob, Jovic, & Brinkerhoff, 2009, Amel, Manning, & Scott, 2009, Ericson, Kjønstad & Barstad, 2014). Out of the numerous psychological and physical benefits of mindfulness its stress and anxiety reducing potential seems to be one of the most important. The Hungarian population has been in an extremely poor state of health for decades. “In 2000 out of 26 OECD countries Hungary ranked 2. for cardiovascular mortality and 23. for self-reported health status. In 2011 it was still ranked 2. for cardiovascular mortality and 30. for self-reported health status out of 33 countries. For cancer mortality it had retained its 1. place during the 10 year period.” (Lengyel, 2015). “Apparent links between psychological stress and cancer could arise in several ways. For example, people under stress may develop certain behaviors, such as smoking, overeating, or drinking alcohol, which increase a person’s risk for cancer.” (NCI, 2016). While the same indirect mechanism is also true for stress and heart disease, the strong link between them is a scientific fact (Ghiadoni et al., 2000, Gu, Tang & yung, 2012). *All in all, mindfulness seems to be able to contribute largely to becoming more sustainable mentally, psychologically, physically and economically as well.*

#### 1.5 Meditation and economic rationality

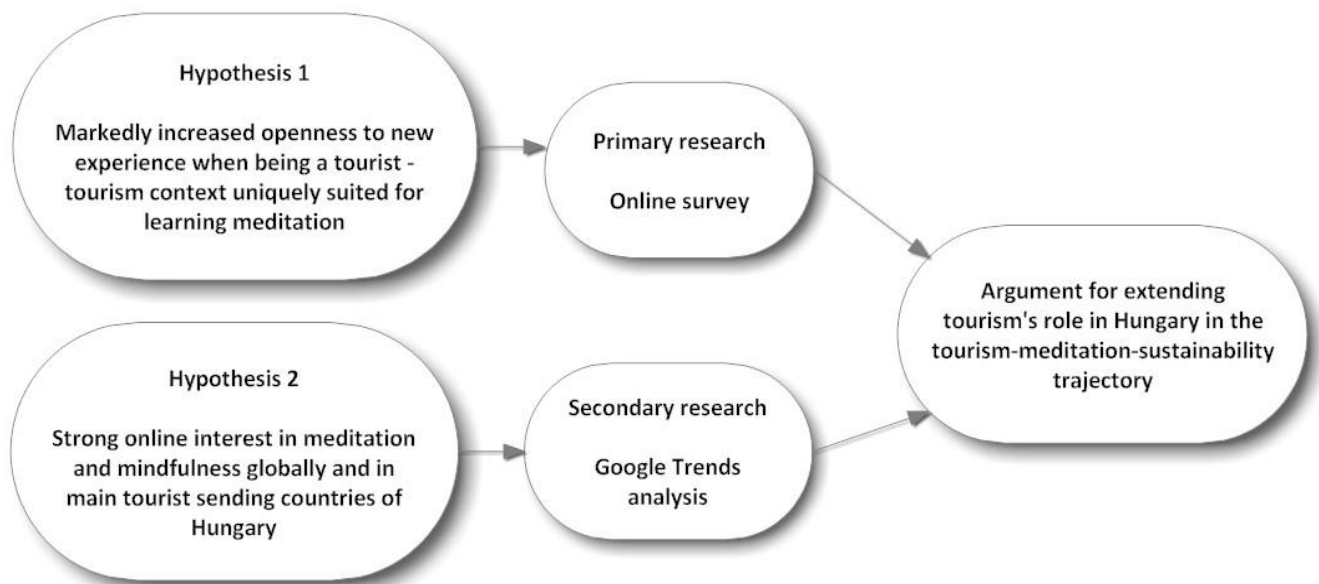
The market case for meditation based services is apparent when looking at the corporate world, especially companies in the USA. „Search inside yourself” was launched in 2007 at Google offering free 30-minute guided meditation sessions during working hours to the employees. Other corporate giants such as Intel, Monsanto, Procter & Gamble, Apple, Goldman Sachs Group, Unilever or Deutsche Bank also provide in-house meditation services. The corporate interest in meditation is probably best explained by the facts that meditation’s beneficial effects on executive control (Teper & Inzlicht, 2012), creativity (Ren et al., 2011), physical and psychological health are measurable cost savers and profit boosters. According to Matrix a study financed by the European Union Health Program in the EU 27 countries a yearly 620 billion Euros are spent on treating work-related depression problems. It is 10 times bigger than the yearly GDP of Hungary and does not include cost of psychological and psychosomatic problems outside the workplace. As meditation tested in clinical research was found to be effective in relieving or curing stress-related problems it has huge cost saving potential in the long run. Figure 1. gives a summary of the positive effects of meditation. Effects in the light blue boxes are documented in peer-reviewed literature while the last elements of these effect chains show probable positive, financially measurable and pro-sustainable outcomes.

Figure 1: Benefits of meditation and their potential effect on sustainability



Source: Own editing

Figure 2. Methodological construct of the research



Source: Own editing

## 2. Material and method

### 2.1 Methodological construct of the research

The research methodology had a primary and a secondary component. Based on these the hypotheses and the objectives of the present research are outlined in Figure 2.

Examining openness to new experience changes while being a tourist and online trend for meditation and mindfulness together is supported by at least two arguments. In order for tourism to have a much bigger role in familiarising people with meditation and mindfulness than it has now, it must really significantly raise people's openness to new experience as it is the most important condition to be able to have an insight into what meditation or mindfulness really is. However, even if being a tourist does result in a significantly heightened level of openness to new experience, without a rising interest in meditation and mindfulness it remains a pure scientific discovery without any practical economic consequences.

### 2.2 Primary research

The primary research was carried out to establish a supply side argument for expanding tourism's role in promoting and offering meditation based services. As it was pointed out in section 1.2, meditation including its mindfulness type version has been part of the service portfolio of spa and wellness service providers. However, it has not yet been explored what makes the tourism context unique for imparting meditation knowledge and skills to people. Meditation requires a largely receptive, feminine attitude (Osho 1975, 1979). *Openness to new experience is the most important prerequisite of learning meditation.* On the other hand openness to new experience is also relevant because, in spite of cultural globalization, meditation is still viewed by many as something culturally alien. *The questions of openness to new experience changes when being a tourist has not been the subject of tourism research in Hungary before.* Empirical research in connection with openness to experience in a tourism context is sporadic in the literature (Schneider & Vogt, 2012, Jani, 2014). The research carried out by Schneider and Vogt was aimed at exploring how hard and soft adventure tourists evaluated their openness to experience in their daily lives. From Jani's research it is not clear whether tourists were asked about their openness while being tourists or when in everyday circumstances. With these in view it has to be emphasized that *the survey for the present study attempted to find out whether being a tourist results in a higher level of openness to new experience as opposed to general openness in everyday circumstances, and if yes to what extent.* An online survey using the Online Research Platform of Szent István University was created and sent to 75 people with certain known demographic characteristics (mostly women, middle aged, educated, higher than average income). These first participant were instructed to forward the link to the survey to people that they believed to possess similar demographic characteristics to theirs. The final sample contained 478 respondents and as it was a snowball type sampling procedure

general conclusions are limited. This methodology was used to obtain a sample whose main demographic characteristics show strong similarity to that of the typical wellness tourist. Examining the changes in the openness to new experience in potential wellness tourists in particular is warranted by the fact that it is this segment which buys meditation based tourism services in Hungary at the moment.

### 2.3 Secondary research

Google Trends data was analysed to find with two objectives in mind. On the one hand it was hoped to provide further evidence to support SpaFinder's findings regarding trends for mindfulness. On the other, it aimed to explore popularity trends for meditation and mindfulness in the biggest tourist sending countries for the base search terms "meditation" and "mindfulness". The words "meditation" and its related terms as well as "mindfulness" and its typical search compounds were investigated. Search terms were chosen based on three different methods. The Google Adwords Keywords tool was used to find popular search expressions in connection with the two base terms. Google Trends also provides some popular search terms for the base words. Lastly, some of the expressions were taken from own search experience. Several peer-reviewed articles have proved how valuable Google Trends data can be in forecasting and statistical analysis. It has been successfully used as a robust epidemic surveillance tool (Carneiro & Milonakis, 2009), for the quantification of trading behaviour in financial markets (Preis, Moat & Stanley, 2013) or for forecasting private consumption (Torsten & Vosen, 2009). Utilization of Google Trends in tourism research has so far been insignificant (Song et al., 2011, Athanasopoulos et al., 2011). Choi and Varian give a thorough overview of Google Trends literature, advantages and limitations and explain the essence of its statistical methodology as follows "The query index is based on query share : the total query volume for the search term in question within a particular geographic region divided by the total number of queries in that region during the time period being examined. The maximum query share in the time period specified is normalized to be 100 and the query share at the initial date being examined is normalized to be zero." (Choi & Varian, 2012:4). Times series data in a weekly breakdown for each search term was downloaded in cvs format from the Explore section of Google Trends. Single word terms as well as multi-word search expressions were examined between 2004 and 2015. I examined the changes in search popularity between 2004 and 2015 and especially for the years 2014-2015 in the case of 68 search terms related to the word "meditation" and 61 search items containing the words "mindful" or "mindfulness".

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1 Online survey

As it had been expected from the sampling method used, the sample (n=478) was found to be overrepresented in terms

of certain demographic characteristics (Table 1.). If we compare the demographic profile of the typical wellness tourist described in the literature (Lehto et al. 2006, Smith & Puczko 2009, Voigt, 2010) with the demographic characteristics of the sample a strong similarity is observable. This similarity is significant because in Hungary today the most likely consumer of meditation based services on the tourism market is the wellness tourist.

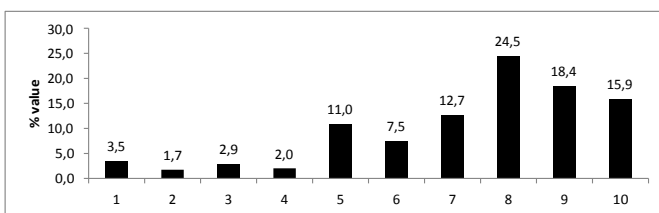
*Table 1: Demographic profile of the typical wellness tourist in literature and the sample.*

Demographic variables	Gender	Age	Education	Income level
Literature	mostly female	over 30	mostly college or university degree	above average
Sample	female = 74%	> 30 years = 76%	≥ college or university degree = 72%	> average = 80%

Source: Own editing based on Smith & Puczko, Voigt & Lehto and own research data

The survey contained the following question about openness to new experience: „When you travel for pleasure, do you become more open to new experience than you are in your everyday life? The description of the two end values of the 10-point rating scale were: 1=Not at all, 10= yes, very much. Figure 3. shows openness to new experience change in the sample. By visual analysis it is fairly obvious that the majority of respondents rated this change above 5 on the scale. The rating scale data was recoded into a new category variable which categorized the data according to how significant the change in openness to new experience was yielding the following two categories: 1=significant change – data with scale values between 6 and 10, 2=not really significant – data with scale values between 1-5. The first category accounts for 79 % of the sample, M=8. Therefore it can be stated that in the present sample, which bears the main demographic characteristics of the typical wellness tourist, the tourist state results in a significantly raised level of openness to new experience as compared to openness to new experience in everyday circumstances.

*Figure 3: Percentage distribution of openness to new experience change in sample*



Source: Own editing

Openness to experience has been found to be positively correlated with the level of mindfulness (Giluk, 2009, van den Hurk et al., 2011) and sustainable behaviour (Markowitz,

Goldberg, Ashton, & Lee, 2012). Although positive correlation does not necessarily signal a causal relationship, the increased level of openness can facilitate a deeper insight into meditation practices and can also help to change the individual’s consumption oriented value system to a more sustainable paradigm. Although the generalisability of results is limited by the sampling process, these results suggest that potential wellness tourists undergo a significant change in terms of openness to new experience. The markedly raised levels of openness to new experience seem to support Hypothesis 1, namely that certain tourism contexts (e.g. wellness locations) are uniquely suited for learning meditation skills.

### 3.2 Google Trends analysis

Trend lines were fitted to the Google Trends time series data of the search expressions. As the main aim of the analysis was to establish whether the search expressions have had rising, falling or stagnating popularity only linear, quadratic and exponential regression models were used. Bellow is the list of the examined 68 search expressions for the base term “meditation” and 61 search terms for the base terms “mindful” and “mindfulness”. If popularity was falling or stagnating in at least the last two years it is marked as F or S in brackets after the expression. Expressions without F or S have had a rising search popularity globally at least in the last two years.

Search terms related to “meditation”:

*benefits of mantra, benefits of meditation, benefits of yoga, best mantra, best meditation(s), best yoga, breathing meditation, chakra meditation, deep meditation, depression meditation, do mantra, free meditation, free yoga, guided meditation, healing meditation, health meditation, how meditate, how to do yoga, how to meditate, how to relax, kundalini meditation, learn meditation(S), learn yoga(S), love meditation, mantra meditation, mantra(s), meditate, meditation and anxiety, meditation and health, meditation audio, meditation benefits, meditation book(s), meditation classe(s) (S), meditation experience, meditation for you, meditation help, meditation master(s)(S), meditation music, meditation practice, meditation retreat(s), meditation teacher(S), meditation technique(s), meditation tips, meditation video(s), meditation youtube, meditation, money meditation, my meditation, online meditation, online yoga, osho meditation, power of meditation, practice yoga, sex meditation, spiritual meditation, tantra meditation(S), tantra(F), what is meditation, what is yoga, what meditation, why meditate, yoga for you, yoga master, yoga masters(S), yoga meditation(stag), yoga teacher(s), yoga, your meditation*

Search terms related to “mindful” and “mindfulness”:

*benefits mindfulness, do mindfulness, guided mindfulness meditation, how mindfulness, meditation mindfulness, mindful life, mindful living, mindful therapy, mindful way, mindful work, mindfulness, mindfulness and anxiety, mindfulness and depression, mindfulness and meditation, mindfulness and stress, mindfulness anxiety, mindfulness based cognitive therapy, mindfulness based stress reduction, mindfulness based therapy, mindfulness benefits, mindfulness book, mindfulness*

books, mindfulness business, mindfulness center, mindfulness children, mindfulness cognitive therapy, mindfulness course, mindfulness depression, mindfulness exercise, mindfulness for anxiety, mindfulness for depression, mindfulness group, mindfulness groups, mindfulness guide, mindfulness guided, mindfulness health, mindfulness help, mindfulness how to, mindfulness jon kabat zinn, mindfulness kabat, mindfulness kabat zinn, mindfulness meditation, mindfulness music, mindfulness online, mindfulness practice, mindfulness school, mindfulness stress, mindfulness stress reduction, mindfulness teacher, mindfulness techniques, mindfulness therapy, mindfulness training, mindfulness video, mindfulness work, mindfulness yoga, mindfulness you, online mindfulness, practice mindfulness, what is mindfulness, what mindfulness, why mindfulness

Percentage distribution of rising, stagnating and falling trends is shown in tables 3. And 4.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of trends for “meditation” for 2014-2015

Trends based on regression	Frequency in sample	% in sample
Rising	60	88,2%
Stagnating	7	10,3%
Falling	1	1,5%

Source: Own editing based on www.google.com/trends data

Table 4: Percentage distribution of trends for “mindful” and “mindfulness” for 2014-2015

Trends based on regression	Frequency in sample	% in sample
Rising	61	100 %
Stagnating	0	0 %
Falling	0	0 %

Source: Own editing based on www.google.com/trends data

As it is shown in tables 3. and 4. the vast majority of “meditation” and “mindful”/“mindfulness” related search expressions have had a rising popularity at least in the last two years. For “meditation” related search expressions it is nearly 90 % of the examined 68 terms while for “mindful”/“mindfulness” related terms it is 100 %. The reasons for the bigger relative popularity of mindfulness was examined theoretically by Lengyel earlier (Lengyel, 2015) and now new empirical evidence is provided to support the theoretical suggestions. In addition to finding out about global trends in the popularity of these search expressions it is also important to explore how their popularity has been changing in the major tourist sending countries of Hungary specifically. Table 5. and 6. summarises results. I must be noted that in the case of “meditation” countries were examined using the actual language counterparts of “meditation”. For “mindful” and “mindfulness” it was not viable as “mindfulness” referring to certain types of meditation is rarely translated in the different languages.

Table 5. Search popularity trends for „meditation” in major tourist sending countries of Hungary

Country/guest night %	Germ. 17%	Aust. 7%	UK 6%	Russ. 6%	Ita. 5%	USA 4%
Google	↑since 2010	↑ since 2012	↑ since 2010	↑ since 2012	↑ since 2013	↑ since 2011
youTube	↑since 2008	↑ since 2012	↑ since 2008	↑ since 2011	↑ since 2009	↑ since 2008

Source: Own editing based on www.google.com/trends data

Table 6. Search popularity trends for „mindful”/“mindfulness” in major tourist sending countries of Hungary

Country/guest night %	Germ. 17%	Aust. 7%	UK 6%	Russ. 6%	Ita. 5%	USA 4%
Google	↑since 2011	not enough data	↑ since 2008	not enough data	↑ since 2011	↑ since 2006
youTube	not enough data	not enough data	↑ since 2012	not enough data	not enough data	↑ since 2011

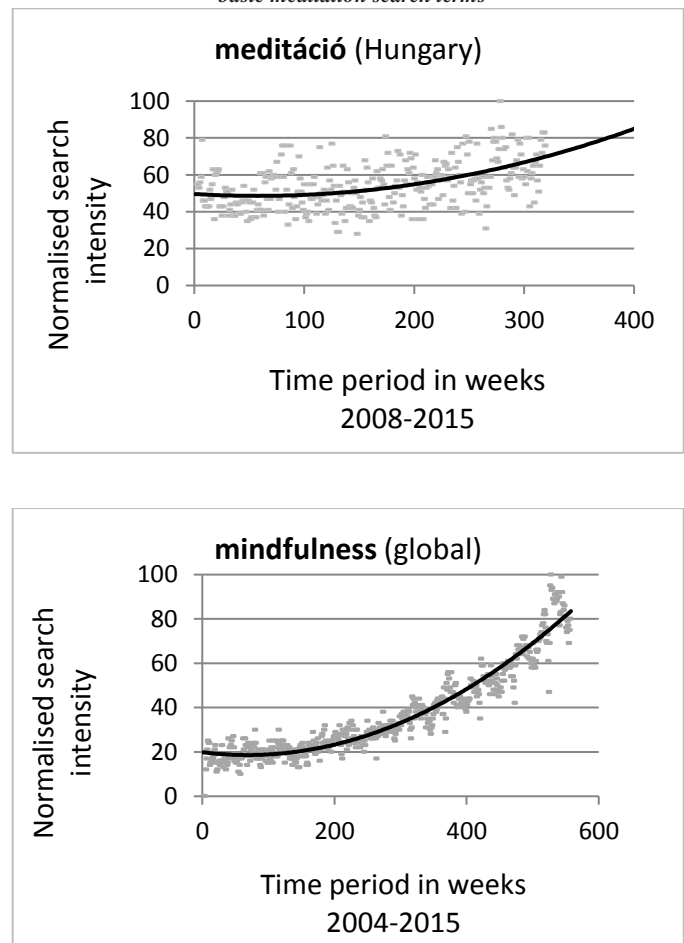
Source: Own editing based on www.google.com/trends data

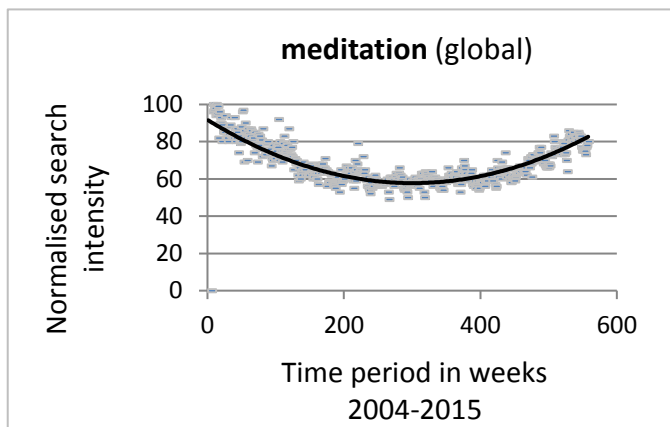
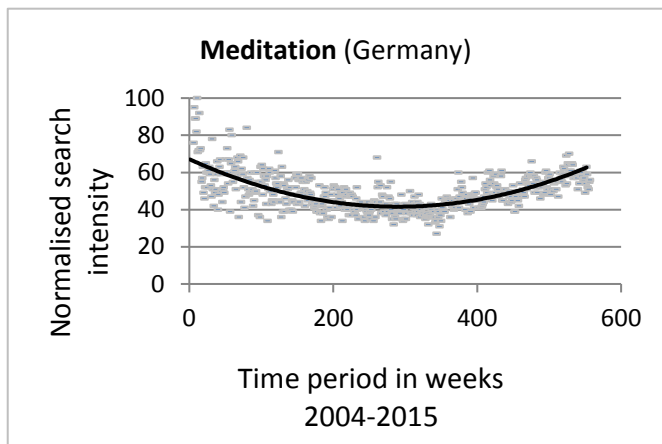


Results depicted in tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 seem to support Hypothesis 2. It must be emphasized that online popularity of these terms does not have a direct link with potential online tourists. Not all those online users who positively influenced Google Trends data on the rising popularity of the examined search terms are necessarily potential tourists at the same time. There is no available scientifically validated data on what percentage of online users globally and in the examined tourist sending countries are actual or potential tourists, or more specifically wellness tourists. Nor can one find data on what percentage of online users interested in meditation and mindfulness are potential tourists. In all the examined countries and globally too, however, tourism is on the rise and its preparatory phases are increasingly managed online. Wellness tourism has also been enjoying an upward trend both globally and in the examined countries. Thus it might not be a far-fetched inference to suppose that a very high percentage of online users contributing to the above data are potential tourists. The reason why more data is accessible for the term “meditation” can probably be explained by two things. Firstly, “meditation” was translated to the examined countries’ own language. Expressions in own language usually result in more search data. Secondly, meditation as a notion has been around in western countries since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while “mindfulness” started to gain popularity in the 1980s in the United States first. As for the years when these expressions started to see a steadily rising popularity in Google and YouTube there are interesting differences to be observed. In the case of “meditation”, with the exception of Austria, for all other countries rising popularity started earlier on YouTube. For “mindfulness” it is the other way around for the UK and the US, the only two countries with analysable data in both Google and YouTube. It might have to do with the fact that while meditation as broad and sometimes confusing term was probably more easily popularised in a motion picture. Mindfulness on the other hand had enjoyed a much clearer status right from its debut in the 80s. The very first articles about mindfulness were accounts of clinical tests. It immediately gave it a stronger validity for the public. Also the special health programs like MBSR or MBCT based on mindfulness had a focused and clear message. Certainly these assumptions can be justified by scientific enquiry elsewhere. Also due to space constraints the search popularity change of only some of the basic search expressions are summarized in Figure 4. The regression lines show that in the last few years the popularity of these search terms has been growing steadily. The four expressions are “meditáció” (Hungarian for “meditation”), “Meditation” (German for meditation), “mindfulness” and “meditation”. Google Trends does not yield analysable data for “mindfulness” when filtering for Hungary, and in the case of Germany it is a similar exponential trend line as for the global popularity change for “mindfulness”, only starting later, in 2011. If we look at the four regression lines in Figure 4. there seems to be a connection between the 2007-2008 global financial crisis and the interest in meditation. With all four expressions search popularity started to rise around or after the crisis. It coincides with opinions cited

earlier regarding the need for a paradigm change in our world view and value system. Considering the rising popularity of the vast majority of search terms examined we can assert that both globally and regionally people are turning towards spiritual techniques such as meditation. Rising popularity of meditation and mindfulness also coincides with trends regarding institutionalised religions as it is apparent from censuses and other large sample survey data. Based on the 1949 census data members of the three largest historical churches (Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical) accounted for 97,6 % of the total population. This figure dropped to 73,1 % in the 2001 census and fell to 52,8 % in the latest 2011 census. According to Gallup’s survey in Germany and Austria, which are the two biggest tourist sending countries of Hungary, religiosity has decreased by 9% and 10% respectively since 2005. Parallel with these trends the number of those who consider themselves spiritual but not religious (SBNR) has risen markedly. The Eurobarometer 2010 survey found that 49% of the population of the EU 28 countries do not believe in a personal God but 26 % believes in some spiritual force (European Commission, 2010). These trends are relevant because the rising non-religious but spiritually interested segment might be a potential target audience for meditation based tourism services.

Figure 4: Trend lines showing change in search popularity of four basic meditation search terms





Source: Own editing based on [www.google.com/trends](http://www.google.com/trends) data

#### 4. Conclusions

From the empirical research it became evident that the state of being a tourist results in a significantly raised level of openness to new experience. As learning and practicing meditation requires great openness and a receptive attitude the tourism context, especially certain accommodation or destination types can be ideal for an introduction to various meditation techniques or during a longer holiday even for acquiring a deeper insight through practice. Meditation based services are tourism products that can be taken home and practiced without any costs or special efforts. If practiced regularly the ambitious goal of the Curing Hungary Health Industrial Program (Original government program titled: Gyógyító Magyarország Egészségipari Program) to improve the tragically bad physical and psychological condition of the Hungarian population through tourism might be realised. It was pointed out from literature that this goal is not realistic with only traditional tourism products as their positive effects fade out very quickly. On the individual level meditation can also catalyse the change in value system from the present, consumption oriented and increasingly unsustainable way of life to one that is based on spiritual rather than economic growth. On the corporate level meditation can contribute to sustainability by enhancing creativity and effectiveness. The results of Google Trends data analysis of meditation related

search expressions reinforce SpaFinder trend reports labelling mindfulness (meditation) as the most important trend on the wellness market. These favourable demand side trends, the government's plan to turn Hungary into the main country destination for health tourism in Europe, the pressing challenges of global, regional and local sustainability, meditation's varied benefits and the tourism context's unique suitability for learning meditation constitute a constellation that might be highly synergetic. Taking encouragement from the British example, the Hungarian government should seriously consider meditation's potentials in various areas. Also, government support in the form of tax benefits or direct subsidies should be available for those tourism service providers who offer meditation based services as part of their service portfolio. As in 2012 almost half of all guest nights were realised in wellness establishments and at present only a few offer meditation based services, there is plenty of space for expansion.

#### 5. Limitations and further research

As the snowball method was used as sampling procedure yielding a sample of convenience the generalisability of results is limited. However, in terms of certain demographic characteristics the sample proved very similar to the demographic profile of the typical wellness tourist, hence even if in a limited way it was possible to take some general conclusions. As the openness to new experience in tourists has not been researched before in Hungary it might be useful to further examine this area on samples that give ground to a much greater level of generalisation. Further research in connection with openness to new experience might focus on different tourist types and demographic segments. Although the research on Google Trends allows for greater generalisation regarding market trends, the sample of examined expressions can be expanded and examined in relation to trends for search expressions of other related fields using complex statistical analysis methods.

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