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Review

Well-Being and Tourism: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: In recent decades, the concept of well-being has often been the subject of psychological studies. The current study examines how tourism relates to well-being from the perspective of tourists/visitors, through the study of the older and more recent literature. Especially when it comes to the complex and multifaceted issue of well-being, in relation to the also complex and sensitive sectors of tourism, the specificity of this relationship is reflected in the evidence and the growing number of articles published in mainstream and reliable journals. By using the PRISMA framework, this article compares and evaluates published papers on the study of well-being and tourist behavior to guide and direct future research. It has been found that the relationship between well-being and tourism, especially after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, has been significantly strengthened. This study highlights the need to adopt a holistic approach that considers all the connections between well-being and tourism.

Keywords: well-being; tourism; risk perception; pandemic COVID-19

1. Introduction



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Two of the most popular topics to investigate in the international literature are related to well-being and tourism. The literature, in most cases, examines these two concepts separately. Attempts have been made from time to time to clarify tourists' well-being through psychological, social and economic studies, but perhaps, the main point of convergence is the positive impact that philosophy of well-being has in one's daily life. Tourism is related to well-being, as it is a desirable goal of tourists.

This study explores the relationship between well-being and tourism. The systematic review of the literature aims to investigate this two-way relationship between the two variables in relation to the new trends and challenges in the global economic system. As research is ongoing and intensive, the current study contributes to detailing the relationship between well-being and tourism, and also to identifying the future research agenda. This paper underscores tourism's potential to enhance tourists' positive experiences and well-being, yet acknowledges the need for further exploration in this area.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section, previous studies on the subject and their connections with the current study are presented. Section 3 explains the methodology followed in the current study. Section 4 presents the empirical results and Section 5 presents the most significant findings. The final Section 6 proposes some future research directions.

2. Previous Studies on the Subject

Tourism research has increasingly explored the nexus between well-being and tourism, drawing from philosophy and psychology with terms like "quality of life" and "life satisfaction", "happiness", and "well-being". Many authors, such as Dolnicar et al. (2012) and Sirgy (2010), have contributed to a growing body of work that examines how tourism impacts travelers' well-being, despite the field still grappling with defining the exact mechanisms.

Early studies, such as those by [Chen and Petrick \(2013\)](#) and [Pyke et al. \(2016\)](#), underscored the emerging interest in the health and well-being benefits of travel, highlighting the concept's underutilization in tourism research.

The emphasis on well-being within tourism reflects a broader trend toward seeking balance in life, with vacations increasingly seen as a means to achieve relaxation and a balanced lifestyle. [Voigt and Pforr \(2014\)](#) have identified a growing interest in well-being-oriented tourism, driven by shifts in lifestyle preferences and the acknowledgment of tourism's role in promoting overall well-being. Additionally, emotional well-being significantly influences tourists' motivations and choices, with [Wendt et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Dornbach-Bender et al. \(2020\)](#) arguing how positive and negative life events affect tourism consumption. This evolving field suggests that tourism not only offers escape, but also contributes substantially to the well-being of individuals through relaxation, recreation, and emotional rejuvenation.

In their study, [Gilbert and Abdullah \(2004\)](#) underscored the need for deeper investigation into how tourism satisfaction correlates with overall life satisfaction, noting slight improvements in well-being among vacationers. This area of research, further supported by [Gao et al. \(2017\)](#), integrated the concepts of eudaimonic and hedonic well-being into the tourism sector, indicating the role of the industry in promoting these dimensions through its services. Research by [Piuchan and Suntikul \(2016\)](#) and [Chen et al. \(2016\)](#) further explored the relationship between travel and subjective well-being (SWB), suggesting that vacations enhance happiness levels. [Nawijn et al. \(2010\)](#) examined whether a trip enhances happiness. They found that vacationers reported higher pre-trip happiness than non-vacationers. However, the long-term effects of this happiness boost tend to be small and short-lived ([Speth et al. 2024; West et al. 2021](#)). [Mitas et al. \(2016\)](#) and now [Bagheri et al. \(2024\)](#) have addressed the ephemeral nature of the positive emotional effects and well-being associated with vacations. The accumulation of similar studies has not only confirmed the immediate positive effects of tourism on happiness, but has also hinted at its potential for contributing to long-term satisfaction, advocating for a balanced perspective in tourism research that accounts for its complex impact on individuals' well-being.

[Smith and Diekmann \(2017\)](#) asserted that the impact of vacations on subjective well-being is influenced by personal values towards tourism and demographic factors, such as gender and age, with specific studies targeting the well-being of different age groups highlighting this variance. The effect of vacations on happiness, explored by [Nawijn et al. \(2010\)](#), shows a temporary boost in satisfaction pre-trip, yet the long-term uplift in well-being is minimal, indicating the fleeting nature of vacation benefits and pointing to the complexity of well-being as encompassing various aspects of life. This holistic view highlights the link between well-being, quality of life, and broad benefits to physical, mental, and social health. [Diener \(2000\)](#) highlighted happiness as a key component in assessing quality of life, arguing for its importance in global human goals. This broader assessment of happiness extends beyond traditional measures such as wealth to include multidimensional aspects of well-being, which focus on cultural, spiritual, and psychological aspects. This approach marks a shift towards the subjective assessment of well-being, emphasizing psychological rather than material aspects. Studies consistently show that tourists experience increased comfort and happiness while on vacation, suggesting a positive relationship between travel and short-term well-being. However, debate continues about the longevity of this happiness boost.

Contrary to the views on the transitory effects of holiday happiness, studies by [Tuo et al. \(2014\)](#) showed that vacations can provide long-term benefits, providing tourists with memorable experiences and an increased sense of well-being and life satisfaction after the trip. Findings suggest that tourism may lead to sustainable improvements in subjective well-being, with vacation activities significantly enhancing tourists' happiness and satisfaction with life, thus supporting the notion of tourism's positive long-term impact on well-being.

Tourism research emphasizes the impact of vacations on various well-being domains, including physical, mental, and social aspects, suggesting vacations significantly enhance tourists' quality of life. [Puczkó and Smith \(2012\)](#) extend the quality-of-life concept to tourism, covering health, work, material well-being, and emotional and spiritual well-being, underscoring tourism's broad contributions, especially in enhancing health, productivity, and relationships. Similarly, life satisfaction, as discussed by [Sirgy \(2012\)](#), encompasses satisfaction across various life domains—family, social life, leisure, health, and travel—highlighting the integral role of tourism in achieving a holistic sense of well-being.

Conversely, [Heathwood \(2014\)](#) introduced a critical viewpoint on tourism and well-being, focusing on the pursuit of idealized desires and the discrepancies between expectations and reality in travel experiences. This narrative suggests that while travel aims to fulfill idealistic yearnings, the actual satisfaction derived may differ due to the idealized images presented in media and personal expectations, underlining the complex interplay between tangible well-being benefits and the intangible pursuit of idealized travel experiences. Desires also change over time, a fact increasingly recognized by tourism scholars who study the preferences of different generations or lifestyles, such as older travelers ([Shaw et al. 2016](#)) or young travelers ([Cavagnaro et al. 2021](#)).

From time to time, tourism researchers have extensively explored risk perceptions in various contexts such as destination selection, accommodation security, and smart hotel selection ([Fan 2020](#)). Their analyses have detected up to seven dimensions of risk, including financial, physical, social, performance, and health risks, alongside overtime risk and opportunity loss. These findings present the complexity of risk assessments that influence tourism decision-making.

The pandemic of COVID-19 has forced the tourism industry to rethink its practices, revealing the need for sustainability and resilience ([Cheung et al. 2021](#)). This is due to changes in traveler preferences combined with overtourism. [Gössling et al. \(2020\)](#) documented the widespread impact of COVID-19. [Sigala \(2020\)](#) reported several behavioral adaptations in tourists' choices as a result of the pandemic. They all agreed on the urgent need for the tourism sector to adopt sustainable and adaptive strategies to ensure long-term sustainability and prosperity.

3. Methodology

This review of the literature mainly aims to identify and analyze academic research articles, focused on the nexus between well-being and the tourism sector. The validity and the identification of current findings and gaps for future research analysis are also basic elements of this analysis. Documenting and categorizing the current literature sources focusing on this topic will provide a better picture of areas where future research should be targeted. This could highlight the individual aspects that need to be considered in investigating the relationship between well-being and tourism. The following methodological approach was supported by a systematic review of both theoretical and empirical articles.

Bibliometric analysis requires researchers to consult multiple bibliographic databases ([Rodríguez-López et al. 2020](#)). Empirical and theoretical articles supporting this analysis were published up to 2023, with recent technological developments and COVID-19 playing an important role in shaping the relationship between well-being and tourism. To improve the quality of the results and conclusions, only peer-reviewed articles were included. The following databases were initially used to search and locate articles: ScienceDirect, Scopus, ProQuest, Google Scholar, Web of Science, and SAGE. Keywords used for the search, either as single words or combined into phrases, were as follows: "well-being and tourism", "tourism and crowding", "subjective and objective well-being and tourism", "hedonic well-being and tourism", "Hedonic well-being and tourism", "Psychology and tourism", "Well-being—Economy—Tourism", and "Well-being—COVID-19 Tourism". The inclusion criteria used were (a) scientific articles published up to 2023; (b) articles written in English; (c) articles with the search terms included in their keywords; (d) scientific research articles with peer review; and (e) articles mainly focused on the search terms. The exclusion criteria

used were (a) articles not written in English; (b) articles that did not include the search terms; (c) articles not peer reviewed; and articles not mainly focused on the search terms. The search was focused on the article's keywords since these represent the core concepts of the articles.

The evaluation and reduction process used is shown in Figure 1. There were multiple processes and phases, including the verification of the credibility of results according to the long-established PRISMA conceptual framework (Xiao and Watson 2019). The first step was "identification", which included all data and databases related to the selected study area. The second step, "screening", limited the number of items after eliminating duplicated data. The third step, "eligibility", included a more detailed discussion of the inclusion and exclusion parameters. The final step, "inclusion in the study", consisted of determining the quantity of items in the sample and performing a quantitative or qualitative analysis. The use of the PRISMA framework ensured the transparency of the selection and analysis of the data included and the scientific merit of a reported systematic review or meta-analysis (Booth et al. 2020). Moreover, some intermediate steps were added to confirm the credibility of the results (Xiao and Watson 2019) and their relevance to the review of the literature. After the process was completed, the final number of articles included in the review and analysis reached 183.

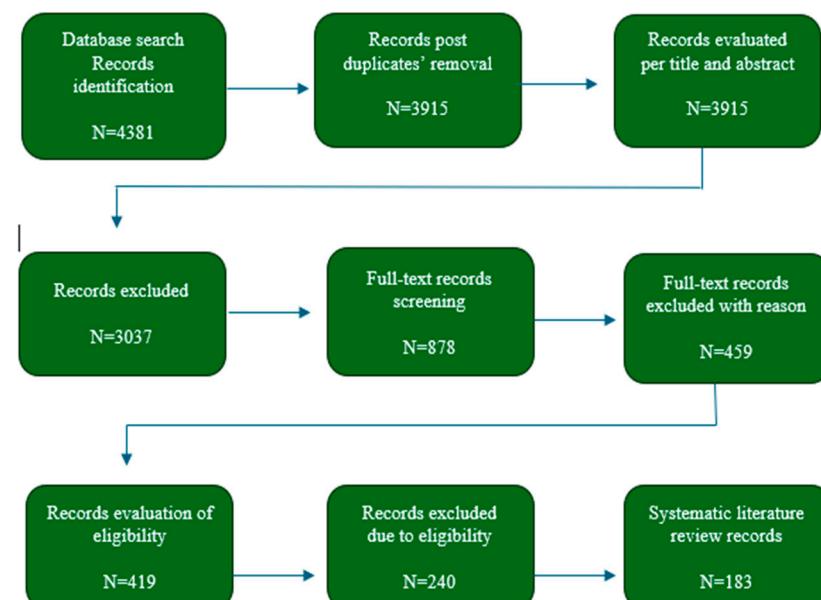


Figure 1. Overview of the bibliography regarding the relationship between well-being and tourism.

After their selection, the studies were subjected to a content analysis to explore them in depth (Weber 1990) as well as to support thematic analysis based on the resulting data. The articles under analysis showed a wide range of investigated topics due to the complex nature of the relationship between tourism and well-being. However, the thematic analysis highlighted six research areas as follows:

- WELL-TOUR 1: articles focusing on the relationship between tourism and well-being through subjective or objective characteristics, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, and psychology.
- WELL-TOUR 2: articles focusing on the relationship between tourism and well-being through the perceived image.
- WELL-TOUR 3: articles focusing on the relationship between tourism and well-being through risk perception.
- WELL-TOUR 4: articles focusing on the relationship between tourism and well-being through crowding.

- WELL-TOUR 5: articles focusing on the relationship between tourism and well-being through the effects of COVID-19.
- WELL-TOUR 6: articles focusing on the relationship between tourism and well-being through income.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of the selected studies based on the year of publication and the six categories, while Table 1 presents the main thematic categories, as well as the main characteristics of the relationship between well-being and tourism.

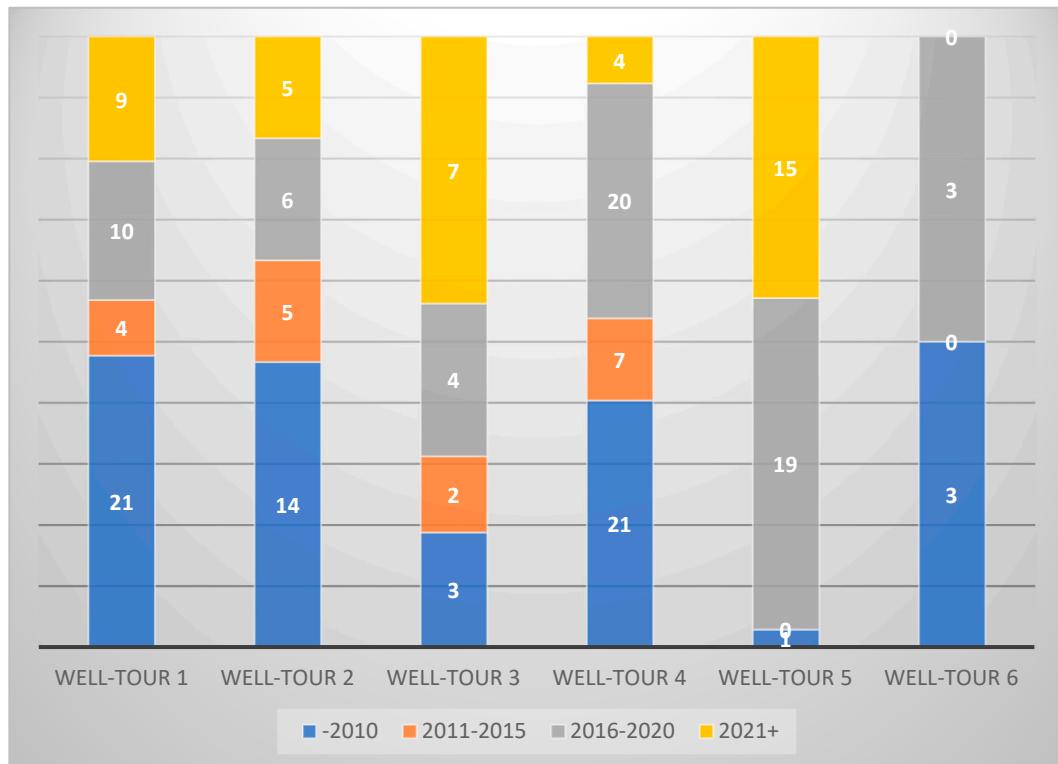


Figure 2. Distribution of the selected studies based on the year of publication (-2010, 2011–2015, 2016–2020, 2021+) and the six categories (Well-Tour 1, Well-Tour 2, Well-Tour 3, Well-Tour 4, Well-Tour 5, Well-Tour 6). Source: author's calculations.

Based on Figure 2, we observe the following:

WELL-TOUR 1 (tourism and well-being through subjective–objective characteristics, hedonic/happiness, and psychological): This category had significant research interest before 2010, but this has gradually decreased over the years. This suggests that early research was keen to explore the fundamental relationship between tourism and well-being, especially through psychological and well-being dimensions. The recent resurgence of research after 2021 suggests a renewed interest, which may be due to the changing perceptions of well-being in the post-pandemic era.

WELL-TOUR 2 (tourism and well-being through perceived image): This category has been more evenly distributed over the years, with a significant decline in the 2016–2020 period followed by an increase from 2021. This may mean that the exploration of perceived image, while previously more mature, has seen a renewed focus in recent years, which may be related to the rise of digital tourism, social media and changes in traveler expectations after the pandemic.

Table 1. Classification and characteristics of the relationship between well-being and tourism.

Categories	Characteristics	References
Well-Tour 1 Subjective–Objective Well-being and Psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjective well-being • Objective well-being • Hedonic well-being • Eudaimonic well-being 	<p>(Campbell 1976) (Tien et al. 2021) (Diener 1984)</p> <p>(Alizadeh and Filep 2023) (Hao and Xiao 2021)</p> <p>(Smith 2023) (Disabato et al. 2016) (Smith and Diekmann 2017)</p> <p>(Ryff et al. 2021) (Waterman et al. 2008)</p>
Well-Tour 2 Perceived Destination Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjective opinion • Infrastructure, cleanliness, etc. 	<p>(Sahbaz and Yuksel 2015) (Li et al. 2017) (Arnegger and Herz 2016)</p> <p>(Alcañiz et al. 2009) (Watkins et al. 2006)</p>
Well-Tour 3 Tourist Risk Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjective risks (e.g., special characteristics of tourist destinations) • Violence • Climate risk • Risk of terrorist acts • Risk of disease (e.g., COVID-19, Lyme disease) 	<p>(Alcañiz et al. 2009) (Cater 2006)</p> <p>(Santana-Gallego and Fourie 2022)</p> <p>(Steiger et al. 2022) (Asgary and Ozdemir 2020)</p> <p>(Han et al. 2020)</p> <p>(Zheng et al. 2021) (Elizabeth et al. 2021) (Donohoe et al. 2015)</p>
Well-Tour 4 Crowding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived crowding • Motivation and perceived crowding • Nationality, motivation, and perceived crowding 	<p>(Papadopoulou et al. 2023) (Zhang and Chung 2015)</p> <p>(Kim and Prideaux 2005) (Kozak 2002)</p> <p>(Kozak 2002) (Lee 2000)</p>
Well-Tour 5 Impact of COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological effect • Resilience transformation 	<p>(Gössling et al. 2020) (Sigala 2020)</p> <p>(Ioannides and Gyimóthy 2020) (Zheng et al. 2021) (Han et al. 2022)</p>
Well-Tour 6 Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low correlation between well-being and personal income 	<p>(Sen 1993) (Van Zanden et al. 2014)</p>

WELL-TOUR 3 (tourism and well-being through risk perception): The sharp increase in research in this category after 2021 suggests that risk perception, likely impacted by the global health crisis (COVID-19), has become a major focus of research into well-being and tourism. The earlier decline (2011–2020) may reflect the lower priority given to risk-related factors in tourism research prior to the pandemic.

WELL-TOUR 4 (tourism and well-being through overcrowding): This category showed a clear concentration of research between 2016 and 2020, which may be related to growing concerns about overtourism and its impact on traveler well-being. The limited research prior to 2010 and in recent years reflects how this issue was a major concern prior to the pandemic but may have been less of a priority after 2020 as traveler numbers declined.

WELL-TOUR 5 (tourism and well-being through COVID-19 effects): This category, as anticipated, demonstrated a notable increase in research following 2021, with limited studies available from prior periods. The recent surge in research is directly linked to the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as tourism focused on well-being is progressively recognized as a means for recovery and managing the global health crisis.

WELL-TOUR 5 (tourism and well-being through the effects of COVID-19): This category demonstrated a notable increase in research activity following 2021, with limited studies available from prior periods. The recent surge in interest is directly linked to the persistent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as tourism focused on well-being is increasingly recognized as a means for recovery and a strategy for managing the global health crisis.

Content analysis was applied to the selected articles of the six categories. The thematic analysis was supported by the already performed content analysis, where each category included several subcategories based on the analysis of the case studies. Table 1 presents the main subcategories as well as indicative articles that touched on the described topic.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Well-Tour 1: Subjective–Objective and Hedonic–Eudaimonic Well-Being

Forty-four (44) studies focus on the relationship between tourism and well-being through subjective or objective characteristics and hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.

4.1.1. The Subjective Dimension of Well-Being

Campbell's (1976) seminal work introduced the concept of subjective well-being (SWB), further developed by Kammann (1983), who identified key factors, such as health and wealth, as integral to personal well-being. This foundation was expanded through theories like desire theory, hedonism, and authentic happiness, leading to Diener's (1984) widely recognized definition and model of SWB in tourism studies. Diener's model, (Figure 3) acknowledging the contributions of positive and negative emotions as well as life satisfaction to SWB, has become a cornerstone in understanding well-being within the tourism sector.

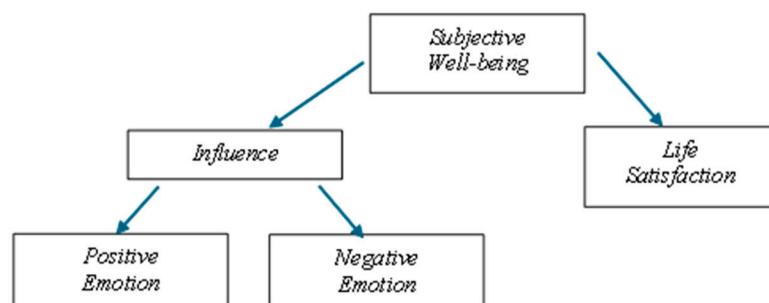


Figure 3. The concept of life satisfaction in subjective well-being. Source: (Diener 1984).

In 1984, Diener asserted that subjective well-being is a balance of positive experiences, negative reactions, and an overall assessment of life satisfaction. A further explanation is that happiness involves more than the presence of positive emotions or the absence of negative ones.

According to Emmons and Diener (1985), SWB is clarified through three main components: positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction. Positive affectivity indicates the extent of happiness and joy experienced by a person, while life satisfaction implies a comprehensive assessment of the individual's quality of life against personal reference points. Even though individual temperament and personality significantly influence SWB, Diener (2000) emphasized the role of cultural and social factors in shaping one's well-being, proposing a multifaceted approach to understanding happiness that integrates personal, cultural, and social dimensions. Additionally, the interaction between subjective well-being,

spirituality, and religion has been detected, indicating an extensive variety of factors that contribute to personal well-being.

The principal value of well-being surpasses personal satisfaction to include various aspects of life, with research showing that people with higher positive affect enjoy enhanced social relationships, healthier behaviors, and greater overall health, among other benefits. [Adler and Seligman \(2016\)](#) further suggested that people with higher levels of satisfaction exhibit stronger immune responses and lower cardiovascular mortality, but mainly enjoy higher quality sleep and better self-regulation, contributing positively to society and economy.

Happiness and satisfaction during leisure activities are considered basic components of well-being in tourism studies, emphasizing the distinction between overall life evaluation and “well-being”. Subjective well-being, especially in tourism, explores how leisure pursuits contribute to greater life satisfaction, with the Life Satisfaction Scale (LSS) by [Diener et al. \(1985\)](#) widely used to measure this aspect. Findings from researchers [McCabe and Johnson \(2013\)](#) confirmed that vacations significantly boost tourists’ subjective well-being. Earlier, [Keyes \(2002\)](#) had identified mental health as crucial to social well-being, arguing that the happiness and health of individuals play a pivotal role in societal progress, thereby linking personal leisure experiences with broader well-being and societal benefits.

Objective vs. Subjective Well-Being

Since the 1950s, researchers have recognized that measuring well-being requires more than assessing material wealth, such as income, advocating for a broader understanding that includes personal satisfaction and social values not captured by economic metrics ([Hanlon et al. 2013](#)). This led to distinguishing between objective well-being, focused on material conditions, and subjective well-being, centered on an individual’s assessment of their positive and negative emotions and overall life satisfaction ([Deci and Ryan 2008](#)). This conceptualization of subjective well-being echoes Aristotle’s ancient idea of “eudaimonia” ([Hao and Xiao 2021](#)) or the pursuit of a fulfilling life, emphasizing the intrinsic value of happiness and personal contentment ([Alizadeh and Filep 2023](#)).

Objective list theory holds that there are a variety of objectively valuable aspects that contribute to an individual’s well-being ([Anand et al. 2005](#)). It commonly includes specific essential “things”, such as health, employment, and education, besides happiness, loving relationships, achievement, esthetic appreciation, creativity, knowledge, and more. Researchers proposed a globally accepted pattern for well-being beyond personal preferences. This theory considers that certain conditions generally contribute to quality of life, regardless of one’s perceptions or emotional state. Therefore, what is objective must also be neutral and universal. The main idea behind an objective list is that one item on the list will make anyone’s life better, regardless of one’s preferences.

More recently, a study by [Margolis et al. \(2021\)](#) further argued that, while personal experiences and preferences play a key role in hedonic and desire satisfaction theories of well-being, the objective list theory uniquely incorporates the natural environment as a fundamental factor of overall well-being.

Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being

From a philosophical point of view, happiness consists mainly of hedonic and eudaimonic elements. This distinction explores happiness through experiential activities and motivations that “hide” behind human behavior ([Smith 2023](#)). Previously, [Smith and Diekmann \(2017\)](#) had already examined the way these well-being dimensions were developed in tourism. They claim that hedonism focuses on the pursuit of pleasure and the absence of distress, and eudaimonia extends beyond mere pleasure to achieve self-fulfillment and a meaningful life. Accordingly, [Hao and Xiao \(2021\)](#) claimed that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being consists of two different pathways to achieving well-being, with hedonic well-being linked to life moments and eudaimonic well-being tied to a sense of meaning in life.

Other researchers state that “eudaimonia” includes all human virtues and a personal goal of self-improvement (Disabato et al. 2016; Waterman et al. 2008). On the other hand, the tourism sector offers experiences that cover both aspects of well-being, contributing to long-term satisfaction and health benefits for both tourists and residents. McCabe and Johnson (2013) and Hartwell et al. (2018) referred to the positive and sustainable effects of tourism, in terms of mental and physical health. They also highlighted the importance of the tourism industry in improving the quality of life through offers that focus on well-being.

In the context of tourism research, the model of eudaimonic well-being by Ryff and Singer (2006) and Ryff et al. (2021) provides a complete framework for comprehending well-being, from a positive psychological point of view. This framework encompasses six core pillars and allows us to apply well-being in tourism research, from an established model of positive psychology (Figure 4):

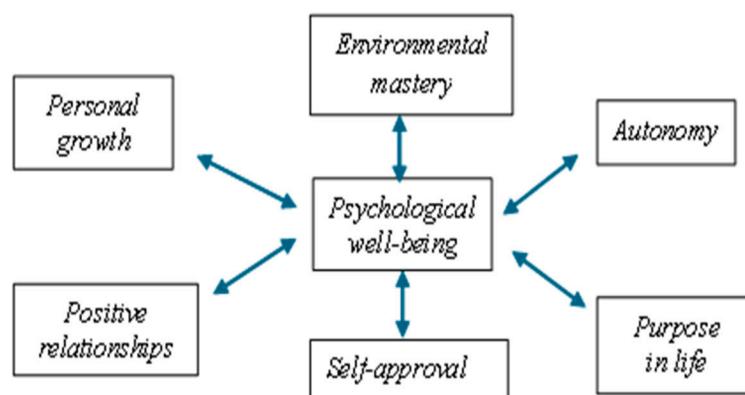


Figure 4. The 6 factors of psychological well-being. Source: (Ryff and Singer 2006; Ryff et al. 2021).

(a) Self-approval, highlighting personal fulfillment and identity; (b) positive relationships, emphasizing social connectedness and emotional bonds; (c) autonomy, focusing on the authenticity of the self; (d) environmental mastery, indicating control over one's surroundings; (e) purpose in life, delving into life's meaning and goals; and (f) personal growth, covering aspects like knowledge acquisition and self-actualization.

4.2. Well-Tour 2: Perceived Destination Image

Thirty (30) studies have examined the relationship between well-being and tourism and highlighted the key role of perceived destination image, described by Kotler and Keller (2006) and expanded to include multifaceted influences from advertising to personal experiences (Avraham 2004).

Image-related research aims to alter perceptions of reality, with images serving as “almost” visual representations that blend actuality and perception, whether through photography, literature, or music (Li et al. 2017, 2023). These perceptions are influenced by individual and external inputs shaping tourists' perceptions of the destination, therefore merging objective attributes with subjective experiences. As a result, the construction of destination image plays a crucial role in travel decisions, where variances between actual and expected experiences may have an impact on satisfaction levels (Watkins et al. 2006). Eventually, perceived destination image often holds more sway in tourist satisfaction than a destination's tangible reality (Alcañiz et al. 2009). It focuses on the significance of managing and aligning destination images with visitor expectations.

According to several researchers, the image of a tourist destination encompasses slogans, visuals, and narratives (Sahbaz and Yuksel 2015). These aspects influence, in a decisive way, tourist attraction and expenditure by forming lasting impressions (Arnegger and Herz 2016). This subjective image can shape tourists' expectations and perceptions and affect their experience and satisfaction. Gallarza et al. (2002) focused on the comparative

nature of destination mutual evaluation and the need for strategic image management to enhance tourist experience and economic outcomes.

The importance of introducing destinations with images that align with how tourists wish to remember them was emphasized by [Kim \(2018\)](#). He also underscored the role of these images in differentiating destinations and influencing tourists' decision-making. Furthermore, [Dahiya and Batra \(2016\)](#) highlighted that, given the abstract and similar nature of tourism products, competition among destinations hinges on image. Therefore, the strategic goal is to counteract any potential negative perceptions or bolster an existing positive image to attract tourists effectively.

Research has shown that environmental quality emerges as a significant cognitive component of a destination's image in tourism research ([Beerli and Martín 2004](#)). Some surveys focus on aspects such as cleanliness, safety, pollution, and local infrastructure and link these to the overall attractiveness of the destination. More specifically, various terms such as "cleanliness and hygiene" ([Alcañiz et al. 2009](#)) and "environmental safety" reflect attributes valued by tourists and suggest that neglect in these areas affects tourists' image of destinations.

The impact of environmental degradation on a destination's image is of increasing concern to tourists, particularly the impact on the health of tourists and residents. A study by [Becken et al. \(2017\)](#), focused on air pollution in China, showed that environmental issues, such as air quality and hygiene, deter tourists due to perceived health risks. [Mihalić \(2000\)](#) previously stated that perceptions of environmental quality can significantly influence travel decisions, especially when pollution poses a threat to health.

4.3. Well-Tour 3: Risk Perception of Tourists

Sixteen (16) studies examined the relationship between well-being and tourism, focusing on how tourists' risk perceptions influence their travel behavior. Risk perceptions are key factors in tourists' decision-making, with factors such as political instability, violence ([Santana-Gallego and Fourie 2022](#)), health risks, climate risks ([Asgary and Ozdemir 2020](#); [Steiger et al. 2022](#)), and terrorism affecting their attitudes toward travel ([Han et al. 2020](#)). Forecast models indicate that tourist numbers will fall significantly by up to 76%, with a recovery period of 6 to 12 months, highlighting the profound impact of the crisis on the tourism industry ([Fotiadis et al. 2021](#)). One of the important impacts of COVID-19 on tourist behavior is the increase in risk perceptions ([Zheng et al. 2021](#)). Despite mitigation measures, concerns remain and highlight the need for the tourism industry to adapt to changing travel demands and increased sensitivity to health risks.

The epidemic has significantly increased tourists' risk perceptions, affected their preferences for safer domestic travel, or greatly affected their international travel decisions ([Elizabeth et al. 2021](#)). Various risks have been identified, including health, political, and environmental threats, with health risks being particularly prominent as tourism activities increasingly involve potential disease exposure ([Cater 2006](#)). Rising concerns among tourists about contracting diseases, coupled with increased international travel and awareness of destination-specific risks, have significantly dampened travel demand ([Donohoe et al. 2015](#)) and made risk management an important factor when choosing a travel destination.

4.4. Well-Tour 4: Crowding

Fifty-two (52) studies explored the connection between tourism and crowding. [Stokols \(1972\)](#) conceptualized crowding as a psychological reaction to the competition for limited space, laying a foundational understanding of overcrowding as more than physical density, but a subjective experience influenced by individual space needs. This notion was earlier touched upon by [Wagar \(1964\)](#) within the context of wilderness recreation, who explored how visitor density could detract from the enjoyment of and desire for solitude in outdoor settings. [Schmidt and Keating \(1979\)](#) further elaborated on crowding within their social intervention theory, positing that crowding occurs when environmental density

hampers an individual's ability to navigate their surroundings. [Shelby and Heberlein \(1986\)](#) introduced "perceived crowding" in an effort to mark the subjective nature of crowding experiences. Later, this concept was expanded by researchers to include social density and subjective perceptions in leisure settings ([Papadopoulou et al. 2023](#)). Perceived crowding is influenced by both personal factors (e.g., age, education, attitudes, motivations, etc.), and environmental factors (e.g., the behaviors of others, the physical setting of a location, etc.).

Researchers also reported that factors affecting tourist crowding include economic issues ([Yin et al. 2020](#)), such as daily tourism costs. However, most studies point out the impact of crowding on tourism and satisfaction ([Liu and Ma 2019; Kılıçarslan and Caber 2018](#)). Other potential side effects of crowding and overpopulation include environmental degradation, water pollution, and the destruction of services ([Rathnayake 2015](#)).

[Zhang and Chung, 2015](#) proposed that social carrying capacity refers to the maximum number of tourists that a region can accommodate without affecting the tourist experience or damaging the environment. They also noted the role of psychological factors in influencing these results.

Earlier research by [Heberlein and Vaske \(1977\)](#) challenged the adequacy of visitor satisfaction as a sole measure for sustainability, highlighting that beyond a certain threshold of visitor numbers, the quality of the visitor experience could deteriorate without a direct correlation with satisfaction metrics. This has led to suggestions that crowding models or alternative evaluative factors should be employed to assess social viability, with [Vaske and Donnelly \(2002\)](#) advocating for perceived crowding as a valuable indicator by comparing experienced impacts with acceptable norms to gauge crowding perceptions.

In tourism studies, motivation has become a key topic to understand tourists' psychology ([Poria et al. 2017](#)). Social intervention theory suggests that crowding occurs when density interferes with visitor activities. Tourists often travel to destinations urged by different motivations, such as enjoying solitude and wanting to relieve stress, and perceived crowding occurs when their motivations are disrupted by crowding.

Expectancy theory suggests that tourists' satisfaction with crowding hinges on their pre-trip expectations; if actual encounters with others exceed these expectations, perceived crowding increases, negatively impacting the experience ([Vaske and Donnelly 2002](#)). Conversely, if encounters are as expected or fewer, crowding perceptions remain low. Activities sought by tourists also influence their crowding tolerance; those aiming for social interactions at events like festivals may welcome crowding, aligning with their socialization goals ([Wickham and Kerstetter 2000](#)). Normative theory further explores how personal norms and motivations modulate crowding perceptions, establishing a nuanced view of how individuals assess their crowded environments ([Shelby et al. 1996](#)).

The importance of understanding cultural and national identities in shaping tourists' behaviors and perceptions, particularly in relation to crowding, has been discussed in various cross-cultural tourism studies. Cultural values, beliefs, and motivations ([Jin et al. 2016; Kim and Prideaux 2005; Kim and Lee 2020](#)) significantly influence the travel preferences and behaviors of travelers with different cultural backgrounds ([Lee and Lee 2009](#)). Research has proven that tourists' nationality and cultural orientation are factors that influence their travel motivation, with significant differences between different cultural groups. For example, [Lee \(2000\)](#) identified six travel motives for American, European, Japanese, and Korean tourists, ranging from cultural exploration to novelty seeking. Also, [Kozak \(2002\)](#) identified differences between the motivations of Anglo-American, Japanese, British, and German tourists. Furthermore, [Kim and Prideaux \(2005\)](#) presented the different motivations of tourists from Australia, the United States, Hong Kong, Japan, and mainland China and focused on the role of cultural differences in shaping travel preferences.

4.5. Well-Tour 5: Effect of COVID-19

Thirty-five (35) studies explored the connection between tourism and well-being and referred to the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic has significantly influenced research within the tourism sector, focusing on topics such as health and mental well-being,

risk perception, crisis management, post-disaster behaviors, and recovery strategies. Its impact on emotional well-being, inducing anxiety and depression, has been a key area of investigation, focusing on the decline in daily emotional well-being and its effect on mental health and tourism demand. Researchers argued that COVID-19 can permanently alter travel perceptions and motivations and suggested a shift towards well-being tourism with increased travel risk prevention measures (Zheng et al. 2021).

Studying tourism behavior and motivations for consuming well-being tourism necessitates addressing tourists' daily emotional well-being, since behavioral patterns are frequently linked to it. This underscores the importance of considering one's daily emotions when analyzing tourism trends and consumer motivations (Io 2023). The pandemic should be used as an opportunity to understand how tourists manage behavioral and psychological needs related to tourism consumption in response to the unprecedented threat of the global crisis COVID-19. Furthermore, people tend to travel less internationally and prefer domestic destinations for their upcoming travel plans. In addition, some tourists select small groups over large ones, to decrease health risk (Maulana et al. 2022). Ioannides and Gyimóthy (2020) claim that the pandemic is an opportunity to change unsustainable tourism and rebuild the tourism industry. Studies consider the COVID-19 crisis as a specific context in which they study changes in travel behavior and contribute to knowledge by applying existing theories to empirical studies (Del Chiappa et al. 2021). In the end, the COVID-19 pandemic offers a solid structure for exploring how hedonic tourism motivations interact with daily emotional well-being.

The crucial role of tourists' emotional state in shaping tourism trends and consumption is highlighted in the research area on the interaction between tourist behavior, motivations, and daily emotional well-being. The pandemic has been a defining opportunity to analyze tourism consumption behaviors in response to threats caused by the crisis, with a marked preference for domestic travel and smaller group experiences (Gössling et al. 2020) to minimize health risks. This period offered a unique context to examine how hedonic motivations for tourism are affected by changes in emotional well-being and sustainability following COVID-19.

4.6. Well-Tour 7: Income

Six studies (6) examined the relationship between tourism and well-being through the effects of income. Most quantitative studies of well-being are based on indicators such as wages, education, personal security, life expectancy, political institutions, environmental quality, income inequality, gender inequality, and economic growth (Van Zanden et al. 2014). However, in the past this approach has been criticized by researchers, such as Sen (1993), who recommended more emphasis on human values when assessing well-being. Van Zanden et al. (2014) concluded that people are more interested in desirable social than economic outcomes. This view differs from the one that related welfare to wealth and recognizes that people see life as a combination of different things much more meaningful to them.

5. Conclusions

Most studies, regardless of the scientific field, conclude that well-being is often associated with tourism in terms of relaxation, leisure, and vacation. Holidays can add to and increase happiness and satisfaction in tourists' lives and are also a beneficial activity for their minds and well-being. They are related to their free time and so-called leisure life and can therefore directly affect their subjective well-being. Well-being is also known by other terms, such as quality of life, subjective well-being, and eudaimonic well-being. Particularly in the tourism sector, which includes products and services, tourists can experience eudaimonic or hedonic well-being. Travel motivations can be positively or negatively affected by various daily events or global situations, as was the case with COVID-19. The pandemic has fundamentally altered travel dynamics and reshaped tourists' preferences in selecting destinations. In particular, the current systematic literature review contributes

to the understanding of the relationship between well-being and tourism based on the following findings:

1. A review of subjective well-being (SWB) in tourism has drawn attention to how positive experiences and life satisfaction, as a whole, contribute significantly to happiness during leisure activities, beyond the traditional focus on material wealth. From the research of [Diener \(1984\)](#), who set the stage, to the most recent ones (e.g., [Liang et al. 2021](#); [Tien et al. 2021](#)), advancing a new model of tourism, based on enhancing SWB through enriching experiences, is necessary. These findings dispute the contractual relationship between happiness and material welfare and reveal a more complex and deeper relationship between travel experiences and well-being that includes emotional, cognitive, and social aspects. Furthermore, the previous research of [Sen \(1993\)](#) supported this overall perspective and highlighted the low correlation between personal income and happiness, emphasizing the importance of human values and social outcomes in assessing well-being.
2. Perceived destination image and environmental quality play an important role in tourists' well-being and satisfaction. In particular, the subjective perception formed by a tourist, both through individual experiences and the advertising promotion of a destination, deeply affects the formation of their expectations and experiences. Furthermore, the importance of environmental sustainability and accessibility underlines the necessity of adopting inclusive tourism practices to improve overall well-being. Tourism stakeholders should adopt strategies for managing the image of tourist destinations and promoting sustainable and accessible tourism, with the aim of ensuring positive tourist experiences and achieving well-being.
3. Recent studies have identified the critical role of tourists' risk perception, particularly intensified with COVID-19, and its influence on travel behaviors and the choice of tourist destinations. Factors such as health risk, political instability, and environmental threats influence and largely shape tourists' attitudes towards travel, with the pandemic increasing their preference for theoretically 'safer-domestic' travel options compared to international ones. The tourism industry will have to adapt to the changing demands and high sensitivities to health risks. The implementation of effective risk management strategies and flexible adaptation to new data are necessary conditions for tourists' well-being and rapid tourism recovery in similar crises.
4. Overcrowding was found to have a negative impact on visitor experience and the local environment, posing challenges to sustainable tourism management. Furthermore, motivation plays a key role in shaping tourists' perceptions of crowding, with expectations and desired activities influencing their levels of tolerance. Cross-cultural studies have revealed how race and nationality influence travel motivations and perceptions of crowding, emphasizing the importance of cultural parameters in tourism management.
5. Strategic planning and management practices in the tourism industry are necessary to balance visitor satisfaction, local well-being, and environmental sustainability in the face of diverse perceptions among populations.
6. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed the relationship between tourism and well-being, highlighting the importance of health and emotional states in influencing tourist behavior and preferences. Research during the pandemic has focused on the psychological impact of crisis situations, suggesting that travel motivations may permanently shift toward feel-good travel and a greater emphasis on health safety. The pandemic has also highlighted the need for sustainable development in tourism, supporting more environmentally conscious practices, and reassessing tourist attitudes towards resilience and adaptability.

6. Future Directions

Overall, our study highlights the need to adopt a holistic approach that considers all the connections between well-being and tourism. By doing this, our study fills a gap in the

current literature on well-being and tourism. However, the current research is not without limitations. The research and publications selected were required to meet all pre-defined eligibility conditions as part of the review process. This resulted in a limited selection of articles, including articles with multiple references. Therefore, less widely recognized articles were excluded. Future studies should address this limitation, offering additional insights into the well-being and tourism link.

Future studies could explore additional areas that could further enrich our understanding of the link between well-being and tourism. Specifically, more research is needed to investigate the impact of external factors such as violence, terrorism, and climate change on the value of wellness tourism to potential customers. These factors could either be negative (lower interest in travel, including to wellness destinations/activities) or positive (demand for personalized, restorative travel experiences).

Finally, this study primarily focuses on qualitative themes and lacks quantitative analysis or insights into the magnitude of tourism's impact on well-being. Future quantitative studies could provide a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between tourism and well-being.

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