

Practical ways to include spiritual values in management planning of protected areas in Finland

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METSÄHALLITUS

More than 90 per cent of the visitors to Finnish national parks choose their destination in order to experience peace and silence and to enjoy the beautiful scenery.



Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park

Mental and physical experiences are also important; silence, absence of rush and natural beauty bring peace, release stress and make the mind receptive for deep thoughts



Close relationship with nature has been typical of Nordic people; many national parks and other protected areas have been established in lovely, archaic sacred places which also have beautiful and valued landscapes



Recognizing the immaterial values improves the appreciation and quality of a protected area. These are taken into account in the management of the areas, and their significance is now being tapped in the communication and marketing of national parks.



Metsähallitus has adopted promoting health benefits as one of the thematic programmes under the motto "Healthy parks – healthy people". The main principle is that public health improves as people get out into nature, enjoy positive and genuine experiences, and improve their physical and mental health.

- Health issues including spiritual viewpoints are emphasized and are included in park profiles.



Nature promotes health and wellbeing

There is research evidence that contact with nature:

- prevents diseases
- helps to recover from stress and diseases
- promotes positive attitudes towards life
- increases productivity
 - > Strong emotional and spiritual experiences are most effective

→ A therapy based on nature can cure patients even when other cures are not effective

→ Parks and other natural environments are essential in the prevention of diseases

For most of people health is the single most important issue in their lives

The Finnish Forest Research Institute and the U of Tampere has devised a specific research route featuring various types of natural sites where experiences of nature is intensified by various exercises.

”The Mental Power Forest”



VOIMAMETSÄ



The health benefits of using protected areas are monitored and measured with visitor surveys and special studies, and used to enhance services



Several national parks offer paths that take visitors to most beautiful and appreciated natural sites and landscapes, improving their accessibility



Increasing pressures of tourism and the visitors' advanced knowledge of the environment create new challenges for protecting and managing national parks.

Steady erosion of the soils and deterioration of vegetation also disturb visitors and their peace of mind.



Principles of Sustainable Tourism in Finland's National Parks

1. Nature values are preserved and the tourism activities promote nature protection
2. Minimum loading of the environment is assured
3. Local culture and heritage are respected
4. Customers' appreciation and knowledge of nature and culture are promoted
5. Customers' opportunities to find recreation in nature are enhanced
6. Customers' mental and physical wellbeing are reinforced
7. Positive impacts are made on local economy and employment
8. Communication and marketing are of high standard and carried out with a sense of responsibility
9. Activities are planned and implemented in co-operation

Visitor survey

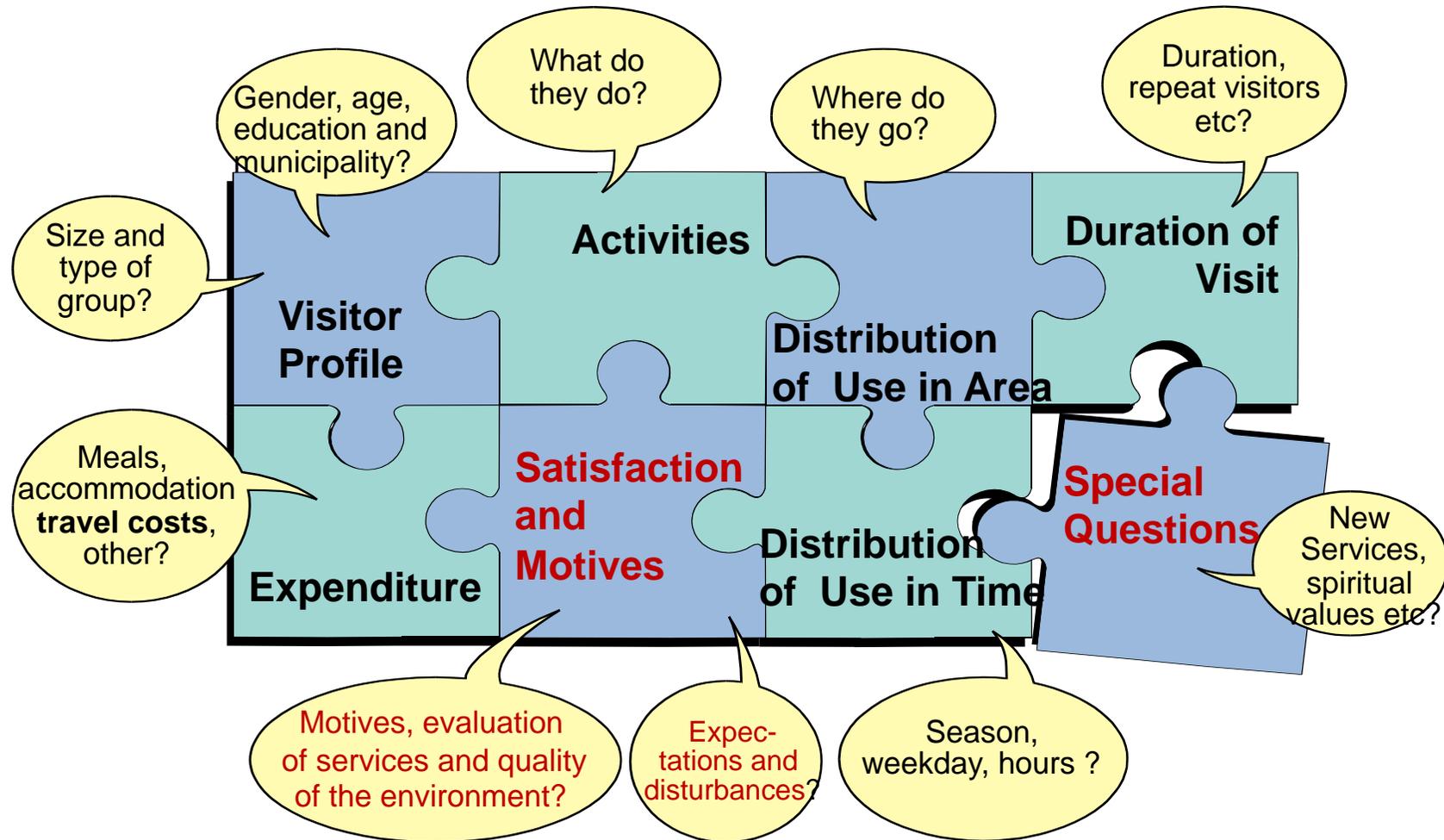
A study by means of which researchers or managers obtain up-to-date information about an area's visitors and their opinions, expectations, and behaviour.

The survey is performed on an area's visitors, using questionnaire or interview methods.

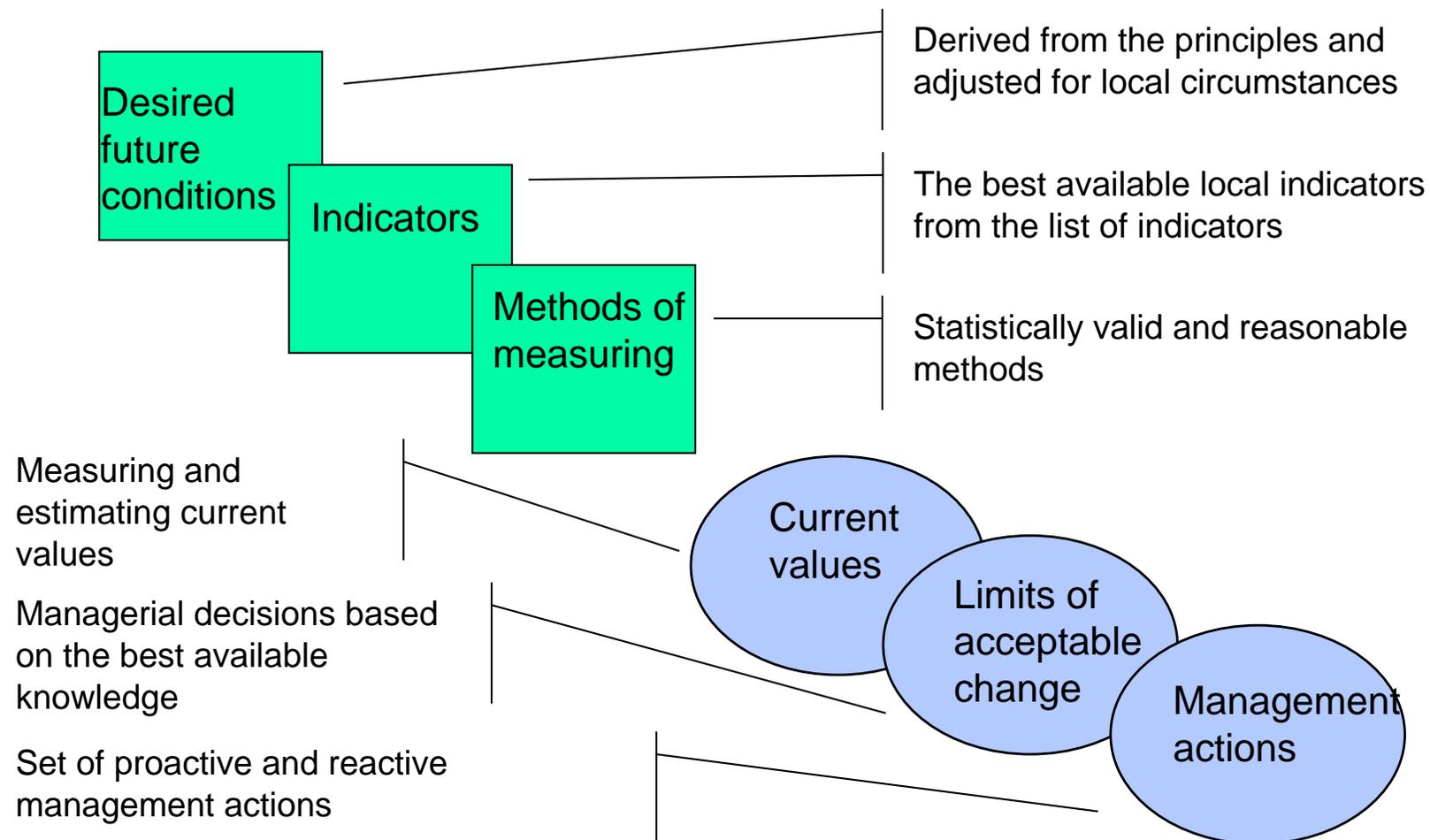


Urho Kekkonen NP

Information Collected by Visitor Surveys



Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) as Applied in Finland



An example of Principle 6. Customers' mental and physical wellbeing strengthen: visitors feel relaxing and refreshing in nature, getting nature experiences and inspirations

Desired condition	Indicator	Method of measuring the indicator	Current value 2007	Limits of acceptable change	Management actions
Importance of wellbeing	Customer survey, question 8/4	Customer survey 2012	Mental wellbeing either very or rather important for 94%	Either very or rather important for over 90%	1. Marketing and communication 2. Co-operation with entrepreneurs
Importance of relaxing	Customer survey, question 8/6	Customer survey 2012	Relaxing either very or rather important for 96%	Either very or rather important for over 90%	1. Marketing and communication 2. Co-operation with entrepreneurs

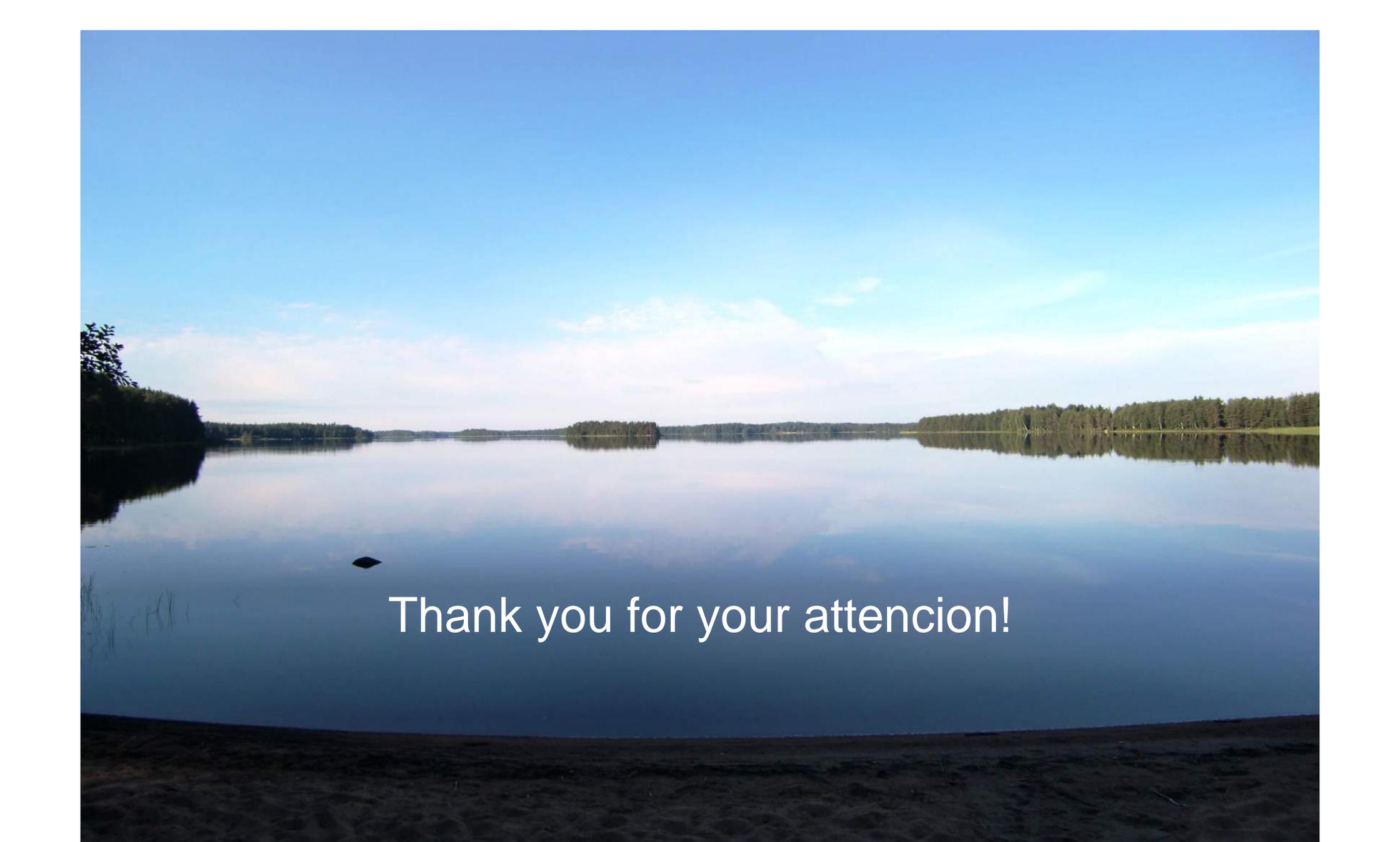
The following set of selected indicators involve in immaterial and spiritual characteristics:

- Visitor satisfaction index
- Importance of nature experiences as a motive
- Importance of mental wellbeing as a motive
- Importance of relaxation as a motive
- Quality of recreation environment
- Quality of visitor management
- Disturbances due to overcrowding
- Trail erosion or littering
- Fulfillment of expectations on nature
- Services and opportunities for activities



My favorite places are located in a wilderness where it is pure silence and peace. Sitting at a campfire in a forest close to a small lake or stream I can deepen my own thoughts and feel spiritual enchantment.





Thank you for your attention!