

WELLNESS IN EVERYTHING

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Many recent hospitality publications written since the 2016 Eurochrie conference in Budapest have been dedicated to wellness, but the main talk seems to always be technology. This should not surprise anyone, as technology is the main driver of accelerating economic and psychosocial change. Technology, owing to its controversial nature, is creating both a dire need and necessary conditions for wellness in every human activity.

While technology is certainly helping people in many ways, it is also making them overly dependent, even addicted. People have a hard time withstanding its pace: they feel stressed, nervous and fatigued. It is not surprising then that two biggest markets in the developed world nowadays are technology and escapes from technology.

Paradoxically, the only way we can hope to prevent the negative effects of technology is with the use of more technology. We can agree that to escape technology even in the simplest way, such as to spend time in nature, we need technological help. We need a motor vehicle to take us to the woods; we need hiking shoes, warm clothes, waterproof tents and more technological products.

The pace of changes driven by technological progress is only bound to accelerate. As we see the world around us surmounted by hyper-connectivity, internet of things, smart technologies and artificial intelligence, the catchphrase of the day is technology in everything. However, considering the pressure humans are already exposed to, this is not such great news for those already worn out by technology. According to Jeremy McCarthy, director of wellness and spa division of Mandarin Oriental, technology in everything can only be balanced by wellness in everything.

We indeed need healing and mindfulness more than ever. The new creative class who thrives in the brave new high-tech world, spends more time and resources on organic foods, exercise, learning and self-actualization than any other social stratum in the history of human kind. These high-earning individuals are also high-learning and highly evolved in the spiritual and cultural sense: they benchmark themselves against the abstract ideals of beauty, wellbeing, consciousness and culture instead of material possessions. They also like to co-create and share more than compete and accumulate. In other words, they pursue experiences and self-transformation rather than consumerism and spiritual stagnation. Consequently, precisely because of these individuals, the concept of luxury is being redefined. It seems that the new creative class is not exposing its status in terms of showing off their wealth by buying luxury cars, jewelry, expensive watches, going to traditional fine dining restaurants and traveling to

posh places. The new affluents are perfectly willing to stay in regular hotels, fly coach, use Uber and Airbnb, eat street food and buy an Apple Watch instead of a Rolex. However, they like to define their status by asserting control of their time, body and mind. Things such as travel to off the beaten path places, personal trainers, yoga, cooking classes, life coaching, authentic foods and drinks, learning, health services and cultural experiences become the yardsticks of their success.

This shift from materialism to more spiritual pursuits is paradoxically powered by technology which is, again paradoxically, also leaving a negative toll on the high achievers. In just one example, their social life is suffering as they often live alone. A cure for loneliness, a very widespread modern disease, may be a new trend of wellness hostels, such as the Wellness Hostel 4000 in Switzerland, which features a tapas bar, hot tubs, hydro massage, Finnish sauna, ping pong and pool table instead of shared TVs and poorly stocked bars. Originally envisaged for young budget travelers, it saw a mix of youth, ski teams and affluent older customers looking for a fun, healthy and safe place to meet people. In their book, this is real luxury.

The future is bound to bring more surprises of this kind. Convergences and fusions of social groups and styles will continue to happen as technology brings greater connectivity of everything. As every traditional business model is being challenged, hospitality services must become very flexible and extremely high touch, while all at the same very high tech. Casual, smart, cooperative, healthy cultural experiences leaned against the backdrop of sophisticated technological networks is the new luxury. This is a real opportunity and a serious threat: those who do not embrace the new business philosophy are at risk to be disrupted..