

Tourist re-enchantment: Cultivating planetary wellbeing through more-than-human entanglements in the forest

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1. INTRODUCTION

The current Anthropocene era is characterised by various ‘disenchantments’. They are not only entwined with the capitalist pursuit of progress, power, and dominance, but also associated with ecological imbalances, consequently leading to the ill-being of global ecosystems (Beery *et al.*, 2023; Huijbens & Gren, 2015; Crutzen & Stoermer, 2020). Posthumanist scholars have argued that to ensure a sustainable future, we need to ‘stay with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016) by embracing uncertainties and reconfiguring our relationships with ourselves, each other, and our planet. To this end, Tsing *et al.* (2019) called for adopting a critical and curious approach towards the Anthropocene, while Bennet (2001), in emphasising the agency and vitality of non-human entities, invited us to develop a more vibrant and enchanted understanding of the world. Likewise, tourism researchers have increasingly called for the awakening of consciousness and cultivating mindful, responsible, and ethical behaviour if we are to create a more liveable world (Sheldon, 2020; Jamal & Camargo, 2013). Nadegger (2023a, p.18) posited that we need to develop “new literacies and sensibilities to stay-with and live-with the trouble and cultivate more-than-human futures from and beyond capitalist ruins”. Increased attention has been, therefore, paid to rethinking sustainability and exploring what we can learn from more attentive engagement with a more-than-human world (Nadegger, 2023b; Grimwood & Höckert, 2023; Rantala *et al.*, 2020). Such initiatives do not reject the disenchanted Anthropocene; rather, they open up spaces for thinking of different ways of being and living with(in) it.

This paper joins these discussions by exploring how we can ‘re-enchant the world’ and contribute to planetary wellbeing through recognising and embracing our relationships with non-human entities by making kin with forests. In recent years, the positive impact of ‘reconnecting’ with natural environments has led to a surge in nature-based interventions for health and wellbeing, offering a panacea for global social ills (Doimo, Masiero, & Gatto, 2021; Giannico, 2021; Tiplady & Menter, 2021; Kotera *et al.*, 2020). Some of these programmes tend to revive and commodify ancient Eastern practices as quick-fix solutions for overcoming the vicissitudes of modern life. Among these initiatives, a Japanese concept of forest bathing (*Shinrin Yoku*) emerged as a research-driven framework that advocates for the therapeutic benefits of immersing oneself in the forest atmosphere (Li, 2018). Since its emergence in the early 1980s, forest bathing has evolved from a commercialised tradition to the leading wellness trend. It has spurred the establishment of numerous forest therapy institutes and associations worldwide, gaining recognition in public health programmes and green social prescribing schemes (e.g., Nature Rx, PaRx, or Green Gyms). In the post-pandemic period, it has been paid much greater attention within the context of tourism, for example, as a mindful practice (Farkic *et al.*, 2021) and as a way of rural tourism development (Ohe *et al.*, 2017).

The emergent conversations about humanity’s responsibility for global ecosystems emphasise the necessity for more ‘ecologised’ tourism practices (Matteucci *et al.*, 2022; Dwyer, 2018). Forest bathing thus responds to the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (e.g., 3, 13, and 15) in addressing the issues of human health, whilst also engaging with broader

discourses around forest welfare, deforestation, and unsustainable consumption activities. To this end, it embraces the concept of planetary wellbeing as an inclusive framework that considers the health and wellbeing of the Earth's natural systems across individual, social, and planetary dimensions. Antó *et al.* (2021) suggested that thriving in harmony with both human and non-human entities relies on thoughtful consideration of the political, legal, economic, cultural, and social institutions shaping the Earth's natural systems. However, the contributions of forest bathing to the wellbeing of forests and other non-human entities have been absent from scholarly discussions. Approaching planetary wellbeing from the tourism perspective, we, therefore, support a view that a sustainable future can be achieved by understanding tourism relationally (Font *et al.*, 2023; Pernecky, 2023; Jamal & Camargo, 2013). We follow the post-anthropocentric school of thought in embracing a relational philosophy to explore multiple, dynamic, and entangled relations among humans and non-humans (Rantala *et al.*, 2024; Lindell *et al.*, 2022). Our goal is to go beyond the rationalised, measurement-based understanding of the health benefits associated with forest bathing (Li, 2018). We aim to move beyond human-centrism, arguing that understanding this practice not only as a means to improve human health but also as a sustainable tourism practice might open up multiple possibilities for earthly flourishing and meaningful societal change.

In aiming to explore how relationality and embodiment in the arboreal atmospheres can contribute to our more ethical, reciprocal, and sustainable being in the world, we take the readers to Serbian forests. We engage with urban dwellers who temporarily embrace forest bathing as an antidote to their fast-paced everydayness, while attentively listening to and learning from their experiences. In further aiming to deepen our understanding of the emergent relationships between humans and forest, our exploration goes beyond the healing benefits that people 'extract' from the forest; it extends to our curiosity about multiple ways in which forests might affect tourists, how they might rekindle a sense of enchantment in our existence and develop an appreciation for and healthy relations with other earthly beings (Salmela & Valtonen, 2019). To frame our study, we knit together the Weberian theory of *disenchantment of the world* with feminist new materialist ideas to illuminate how changing perspectives on the world around us intersect with the agency of non-human agents and how humans might re-evaluate our relationship with the world and our place within it.

2. (Dis)enchantment of the world and entanglements that matter

In tourism literature, theories of alienation and estrangement, rooted in Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx, are often employed as theoretical frameworks to scrutinise existential concerns resulting from capitalist industrialisation, accelerated lifestyles, and a growing disconnection from nature (Vidon, 2019; Vidon & Rickly, 2018; Xue *et al.*, 2014). Max Weber, in his 1917 lecture *Science as a Vocation*, expanded on Marx's ideas, introducing the concept of the *disenchantment of the world* and the decline of magic to elucidate the adverse effects of progress under capitalism, leading to societal and environmental alienation. To describe the alienating character of modern society, he borrowed the term *disenchantment of the world* (*Entzauberung der Welt*) from Friedrich Schiller, who, through his poetry, sought to re-spiritualise the world. Weber's conceptualisation of disenchantment challenges the prevalence of rationality, radical secularisation and instrumental thinking, which he claimed leads to alienation and a loss of meaning, and, consequently, to collective illbeing. To him, the modern condition and race for dominance and wealth were the main causes of the detachment from nature, spiritual decay and loss of identity, leading to the "unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual" (p. 60).

Weber (1905/2001) observed alienation embodied in what he called the eclipse of a moral universe. He proposed the concept of the 'iron cage' to caution that modern life leads to mechanised petrification and threatens to render human life meaningless and senselessness. Rationalisation and bureaucratisation have imposed strict behavioural patterns on people's lives, limiting their freedom, imagination, and creative potential by promoting the necessity for measurements, standardisation, routines, or repetition in all spheres of life. He explained rationalisation as a force that marginalises interpretivist freedom, which characterised the pre-modern worldview, as it "banishes superstition, myth, and magic, and replaces them with a realistic approach to the world" (Greisman, 1976, p. 496). Under such circumstances, processes are oriented toward rational goals, as opposed to primitive societies, in which reality was understood through tacit knowledge, intuition, mystery, or magic. Consequently, nature has been approached from an anthropocentric standpoint: as a commodity that is a tameable, predictable, and exploitable resource, and largely aimed for people's consumption.

Weber, however, did not envision a dichotomy between rationality and irrational thinking, nor did he assert a process of re-enchantment would reverse or compensate for disenchantment. Although he saw disenchantment as the fate of the world, it has served to open up new avenues for thinking about how to live a meaningful life in accord with nature. Similarly, Gibson (2009, p. 11) posited that we should make kinship with nature, as it can offer us what we need but cannot find elsewhere in the consumerist world: authenticity, transcendence, a sense of mystery and meaning, even glimpses of a numinous world beyond our own. Despite rationalisation and the attempt to control nature, humans need to allow for reciprocity in the encounter, as the interplay between humans and nature can contribute to the wellbeing of all living beings (Jenkins, 2000, p. 29). Re-enchantment then is rooted in a worldview that recognises more to existence than the purely material, the visible, or explainable, while evoking a sense of the world where the philosophies and principles of reason or rationality cannot fully comprehend the agency of more-than-human relationships in world-making.

Tourism scholars have built on Weber's ideas of rationalisation to discuss tourism activities in natural environments (Varley, 2013). While ensuring adequate management of outdoor activities, service providers also seek ways to 'wow' consumers, offering "increasingly magical, fantastic, and enchanted settings in which to consume" (Ritzer, 1999, p. 8). This has resulted in the emergence of a tourism market where commodified excitement and enchantment are integral to the tourism product. Yet, Weber's concept of disenchantment has received limited attention in tourism literature. For example, Lovell and Griffin (2022) used it as a lens to explore the co-production of enchantment at light festivals. The authors posit that to deliberately enchant tourists, affective openings necessitate destabilisation and unexpected elements, facilitating unsettling dissonance, uncanniness, and sublimity. While enchanting experiences are usually facilitated in commodified tourism spaces that Ritzer (1996) termed 'cathedrals of consumption', predicting affective outcomes can be challenging. Lovell and Griffin's (2022) study has shown that even in commodified settings, the production of enchantment might illuminate its unknown, mystical aspects, "taking visitors to imaginative thresholds to the supersensible" (p.15). Similarly, Wei *et al.* (2021), although not explicitly building on Weber's work, approached disenchantment from an indigenous perspective, examining urban alienation, inauthenticity, and disenchantment through interactions of Mosuo people with urban tourists. While urban tourists perceive the break from disenchantment and alienation as temporary and superficial, Mosuo people hint at more open-ended scenarios, where aspirations for modernity and belonging to indigeneity coexist and feed into each other. These studies show that enchantment and disenchantment are not polar

opposites but rather co-evolve, coexist, and support each other in productive and meaningful ways.

We, therefore, found Weber's concept of disenchantment as a useful starting point for our exploration of forest bathing that, despite being scientifically rationalised, has the potential to re-enchant alienated humans through offering possibilities for re-establishing broken ties with the natural world. While green spaces have gained widespread recognition in human wellbeing discourses more broadly (Giannico *et al.*, 2021), scholars have emphasised the benefits of engaging with nature, claiming that interactions with natural environments can evoke restorative, even transformative experiences, particularly for disenchanted urbanites who seek solace and respite from the demands and disillusionment associated with accelerated urban life (Williams & Harvey, 2001).

While human-centric approaches to wellbeing still hold sway in tourism literature, they are gradually being supplanted by the emergent post-anthropocentric perspectives, often represented in nature and, more specifically, in forest-based tourism research. By way of example, researchers have theorised the benefits of forests while highlighting the interconnectedness and entanglements between humans and forest affordances (Rantala & Puhakka, 2020; Hjalager & Flagestad, 2012; Komppula, Konu & Vikman, 2017; Komppula & Konu, 2017; Konu, 2015; Konu & Laukkanen, 2010; Rantala 2010). What unites them is the exploration of how the forest affordances, such as trees, soil, fungi, natural elements, scents, or sounds, have the agency to affect people's moods and feelings, thus playing an active role in co-constructing the experience *together with* the forest. As a result, alternative frameworks have started to be employed to gain a deeper understanding of how these emergent interactions among humans, non-human entities, and the natural environment might contribute not only to human wellbeing but also to the wellbeing of the planet.

More recently, forest bathing has positioned itself as a tourism practice that can prompt human reconnection with the natural world (Farkic *et al.*, 2021; Ohe *et al.*, 2017). Originally developed in response to urbanisation and health crises in Japan, forest bathing was proposed as a complementary healthcare practice. It took the form of short trips to the forests surrounding urban agglomerations to address issues such as long working hours, anxiety, exhaustion, and burnout (Li, 2018). While bathing in the forest can be done independently, people often appreciate 'expert' guidance through the experience. The guides' role is crucial, however, as they mediate the encounter between the people and the forest, facilitating introspection, emotions, or developing social bonds (Kim & Shin, 2021). Through structured activities, which Clifford (2018) termed invitations, forest guides facilitate the immersion in the forest atmosphere while allowing the "attention to be shifted from learning about what something in the forest *is* to how something in the forest makes one *feel*" (original emphasis, Farkic *et al.*, 2021, p. 2). Attentiveness and noticing, for example, the textures, colours, and sounds of the forest, might foster a sense of awe and appreciation for the beauty and complexity of the ecosystem of which humans are part.

Clifford and Page (2019) further explained that forest bathing, in its own way, responds to broader environmental issues, such as loss of biodiversity, climate change, or deforestation. For example, apart from guiding the immersion into the forest atmosphere, guides enact environmental stewardship by encouraging people to take certain measures to protect nature, such as planting trees, collecting litter, or clearing weeds. These small acts, the authors propose, might further deepen the connection with nature and the sentience of the world. For its long-term objectives, which go beyond the health benefits for humans, forest bathing can be, therefore, considered a sustainable practice as it aims to contribute to the wellbeing of all living beings (Myers, 2017; ANFT, 2023). This practice among the activities that celebrate planetary wellbeing by facilitating eco-conscious, rather than ego-conscious behaviour

through offering opportunities for embodied and entangled co-existence *with* and *for* the planet Earth.

In exploring how these entanglements between forest and humans unfold, we follow Rantala *et al.*'s (2020) suggestion that we need to adopt more ecologically attentive ways of knowing, doing and theorising tourism, and attend to the act of 'noticing'; a crucial priority in discovering the more-than-human world and our relationships with it. Höckert, Rantala, and Jóhannesson (2022), while experimenting with sensitive communication with non-human entities, highlighted that the diversity and differences among species should be accounted for in tourist experience research. Similarly, Huijbens (2023) invited us to challenge current consumption practices by creating new 'thick and rich stories', storied around earthly attachments. Following these propositions, we approach the arboreal environment as a tourism space where re-enchantment might unfold through entangled multispecies relations. In our explorations, we take an open-ended, situated and interpretivist approach, while going beyond human exceptionalism to explore alternative ways of re-enchanting the world through making kinship with nature (Gibson, 2009).

3. Methodological approach

Broadly, this study is concerned with how forest bathing affects tourists and how they make sense of the forest experience in relation to others (human or non-human, material or immaterial entities). Feminist poststructuralist approaches, as evident in the influential works of Braidotti (2011), Barad (2007), or Bennett (2010), have proven valuable in challenging conventional and binary understanding of the world. These approaches shift our attention toward more affective, material, vibrant, and embodied ways of knowing, effectively erasing the rigid distinctions between the social, technological, and natural realms (Cozza & Gherardi, 2023). We recognise the value of such approaches in our attempt to understand how the forest bathing experience comes about. More specifically, our methodology is informed by feminist new materialism, which does not prioritise the human individuals and their idiosyncrasies, the society and its structures or the agency of the more-than-human world. Rather, it attends to the emergent relations among humans and non-humans as constituting one another through what Barad (2007) terms intra-action. Such an approach is particularly useful in reconfiguring our knowledge of the world through creating more space for entanglements, fluxes and becomings, whilst keeping an open heart and mind to "curious, caring, and sensitive attitudes", that produce and reproduce the sociomaterial world (Höckert *et al.*, 2022, p.189).

In tourism research, feminist new materialism has been increasingly used as a lens through which to think about (de)colonialisation, sustainability and tourism (Grimwood & Höckert, 2023; Hurst & Grimwood, 2023; Rantala *et al.*, 2020). It also invites new stories in, and of, the Anthropocene, storied together with non-humans. These works are particularly useful in rethinking our understanding of the world and how such knowledge can contribute to acting upon achieving planetary wellbeing through more ethical and political actions and recognising the other by expanding the circles of care (Grimwood & Höckert, 2023). In examining how tourists affect and are affected by the arboreal environment, the knowing is therefore premised on monist philosophy, which opens up new possibilities for deconstructing forest bathing as an event unfolding within a specific moment in time.

The Serbian forest bathing approach stays close to new materialist ideas by enabling multispecies entanglements through mediated experience, emphasising the agency and vitality of both humans and non-humans. The emergence of 'forest hammams' in Serbia, as proposed by the Medical Spa Association of Serbia (MSPAAS, 2020), reflects a conceptual

shift in the Balkan spa industry. This concept, operationalised by Forest Therapy South Eastern Europe (FTSEE) since 2019, draws parallels between the bright Balkan forests and traditional Turkish baths, where sunlight penetrates openings in the treetops similar to ‘elephant eyes’ in hammam roofs, illuminating the central space or *hararet*. Moreover, FTSEE (2023) integrates elements from Finnish, American, and Japanese approaches, adopting transnational perspectives that intersect in the Serbian concept of forest bathing. Significant attention is paid to the guides, who, through their discreet narratives, aim to connect tourists with local ecosystems, the land, and its stories, while incorporating ethnobotany activities like foraging for wild foods for post-walk meals or tea ceremonies.

The study gathered empirical data from two guided forest bathing tours organised by MSPAAS and FTSEE, each involving 1.5 to 2-hour forest walks and accommodating around 20 participants. The first author took part in both tours as a participant and a researcher. Her sustained immersion in the research setting allowed her to share social and physical spaces while walking with others (Rantala *et al.*, 2020). Crucially, blurring the boundaries between the researcher and the researched allowed for ‘rematerializing all bodies’ (Cozza, & Gherardi, 2023) while capturing insights into the events unfolding at all stages of the tours. During social times (lunch, tea ceremony or travelling to and from the base), the first author conversed and became more intimate with the tour attendees (van Enk, 2009). These verbal exchanges rendered insights into the affective flows and capacities, and represented an opportunity for participant recruitment. The walking conversations were a vital and effective method in the moving settings, as they helped to overcome the limited time available for interviews *in situ* (Evans & Jones, 2011). Despite the temporal constraints imposed by the length of the tours, the depth and breadth of empirical material were achieved. Like others, the researcher took photos and recorded short videos, which subsequently became the material for reflection and contextualisation of the data gathered through conversations and media exchange. The researcher eventually had insightful conversations with 23 participants, some of which happened in various settings during the tours (on the catamaran, during lunch, during the tea ceremony, or the trip home). Some took place post-tours, while no interviews took place during the guided walks as they required mindful presence and active, undisturbed participation in invitations.

New materialist researchers view the material conditions of research as agentic elements, while viewing the interviews as assemblages (Mazzei, 2013) or as “agential conversations” (Müller & Kenney, 2014). We follow Fox and Alldred (2022), who proposed that interviews are a productive way of capturing insights into the relations and affects in forest settings, allowing us to better understand what these interactions may produce. Both the conversations and interviews were conducted in Serbian by the first author; they were recorded, subsequently transcribed, and translated into English. While the translation involved converting words and capturing cultural nuances and contextual meanings, the researcher’s understanding, background, and interpretation played a crucial role. Having lived in Serbia and the UK, and being fluent in English, the researcher possessed the linguistic and cultural acumen necessary to discern and convey nuanced expressions during the translation process. In granting attention to the participants’ forest bathing experiences, the researcher did not impose on them any of the theoretical constructs we utilised in this study. Instead, the conversation was based on the open, empathetic, and everyday understanding of the lifeworld that the participants revealed through their narratives. For example, in response to a broad question such as “How did the forest make you feel?”, they frequently reflected on the idea of dis- and re-connection: with self, with tacit, local knowledge, or with non-human lifeforms. Crucial here is that the participants constructed their experiences in relation to their everyday relations with things (laptops, cars and other technologies), turning their attention to more

fluid categories, such as unity with nature or nostalgia, that are given meanings through participants' intentionalities across temporal and spatial scales, and thus put into motion as dynamic, unfolding relations.

The analysis involved identifying and examining patterns or agentic forces that emerged from the entanglements of material-discursive practices (Fox & Alldred, 2022). Understanding the collected material assumed multiple readings of the transcribed data, the process in which all co-authors were involved. In analysing the data, some qualities became dominant in the participants' narratives; themes such as longing (for nature) versus not belonging (to the alienating world) and reconnecting (with self and nature) are here discussed within the broader discourses on Weber's *disenchantment of the world*, followed by the analytical discussion of re-enchantment through entanglements enabled by forest bathing, highlighting the sensorial engagement and the sense of nostalgia.

Grimwood and Höckert (2023, p.12) recently asked: "how can people slow down in tourism to become re-enchanted by their senses mingling with beings that they had not realised were forgotten?" To partly answer their, and our own questions, we approach the forest as a relational space that both entails and transcends the material realm, which has agency in opening up new possibilities for engaging in alternative ways of thinking and being in the world. The process of re-enchantment can, therefore, be resurrected as an analytical category that finds its ethico-onto-epistemological foundations in feminist new materialist theorising. We turn to the presentation of the findings across two ensuing sections: *Other than the iron cage* and *Re-enchantment through forest bathing*.

4. *Other than the iron cage*

Weber's (1905/2001) concept of disenchantment was useful in our analysis of people's resistance to and longing for the escape from what he called the iron cage of modernity, in that it points to the effects of rationalisation and alienation, through which we were able to make sense of participants' narratives. During post-walk tea ceremonies, some attendees were reflecting on how forest bathing affected them, attempting to articulate what it meant in the context of their fast-paced urban lives. For example, Tatjana expressed her tensions and feelings about the postmodern condition, which stifles people's creativity, limits freedom and disconnects us from each other (Vidon & Rickly, 2018). She expressed her dissatisfaction with the capitalist system, explaining that she is drawn to everything that brings people back to their roots, and nature. Industrialisation and neoliberalism, she claimed, "pushed people into a hamster wheel, where they spin in an endless vicious circle, where all they do is work to earn money so that they can spend money or pay debts". Expressing her frustration with the current state of the world, Tatjana believed that there was still hope for restoring peace of mind and balance:

People are the slaves of the system. Some systemic things can't be changed overnight, but the impact of that rat race can be mitigated. Only one stroll through the woods, long enough to release the accumulated stress, can restore the lost balance and faith in the fact that people are in control of their own lives. Not everything is beyond our control though. I feel that the return to nature will restore the people's shattered balance, their broken health, slow them down, awaken new processes and they will realise that life can, and should, be lived differently.

Sheldon's (2020) called for the awakening of the human consciousness is reflected in Tatjana's proposition that life should be lived differently. The idea that nature has the capacity to restore balance recognises the agency and vitality of non-human entities, viewing

the forest as an active participant in the construction of wellbeing. A more frequent escape from the iron cage might prompt a realisation that life can be lived differently, while promoting a more sustainable and balanced existence that respects the interconnected life on the planet. The appreciation of the forest was evident during both walks when the attendees deliberately slowed their pace to engage in tactile experiences like touching and smelling tree barks, hugging trees, and sensing the leaves beneath their feet. These activities initiated the emergence of the processes and interactions within the group, prompting reflections and deeper conversations among them. While minimising the use of digital technologies during forest walks may be understood as an escape from the iron cage (Farkic, Isailovic, & Lesjak, 2023; Cai & McKenna, 2021), complete detachment from these technologies was difficult. To document and share their experiences, participants frequently engaged with mobile phones. It was interesting to observe how their utilisation had agential capacity in fostering connections among participants, and between participants and the forest, alluding to what Jenkins (2000) termed ‘disenchanted enchantment’. ‘Data collection’ was no different; the first author utilised digital devices whenever she could, seeing the material conditions of research as agentic elements which intra-acted with other entities, while making the knowledge generation possible (Nordstrom, 2015).

However, participants do need to occasionally detach from digital devices. Emilija, who appears to have succeeded in breaking free from the constraints of the iron cage and its rationalities, explained the innate need to be in nature:

One of the reasons I am attracted to the forest is the overwhelming need to get back to my roots, to nature, because a lot of time I spend indoors, at my computer. [...] I think that this need of modern humans to get back to nature is not only a global trend, but also a matter of our existence and our being.

Temporarily stepping out of disenchanted life into what appears to us as marginal, irrational and un-organised arboreal space, Emilija articulated as an existential need rather than a search for hedonic pleasures or consumerist, commodified enchantments often sought in tourism spaces (Lovel & Griffin, 2022). Existentialist, biophilic thinking we can also notice in Cvetka’s optimistic take on how the condition of disenchantment could be overcome by “opening the windows and doors at the backyard of the forest” as we entangle with the space which can potentially re-enchant us. She proposed thus:

Modern humans need to, at least once a week, return to where they came from: nature. What they might have lost during their growing up – love and faith in people – still awaits. [...] If they know how to open windows and doors to the backyard of the forest – they will accomplish their life mission: to be a human.

This quote asserts that a regular return to nature is indispensable for modern humans reconnecting with their origins and rediscovering lost values such as love and faith in people. The emphasis on opening ‘windows and doors to the backyard of the forest’ implies a sense of relationality, acknowledging the agentic capacities of both human and non-human elements in shaping the experience of interconnectedness. Engaging with forest materialities may deepen reciprocal relationships with other living beings, fostering sensitivity, humility and nobility in people, which in turn might give us an answer to what it means to be (more-than)-human within the Anthropocene.

In taking the opportunity to ask how this meaningful engagement may be facilitated, the researcher approached the forest guide, Ivana, who was ‘off duty’ and in the role of an attendee that day. She provided a vivid illustration of how she mediates between people and the forest:

[...] eyes shut, [I ask them] to listen and smell the forest, release roots deep into the ground, to again open the eyes and fall in love with the beauty of the forest, to touch the soil that feeds us and smell its minerals, to dive into their own existence as well as the existence of the world around us, the world that is ours and interconnected, and we [humans] have forcefully broken these ties and today's humans wander about aimlessly, in search of our own selves.

Through her guiding practice, Ivana aims to invoke the intimate and reciprocal relationship that primitive societies had with the environment. The entanglements of all agents and the understanding that they are interdependent, each having their own purpose and agency, is a crucial priority in understanding and identifying with the world in flatter and humbler ways. By interpreting the power and energy in forest ecosystems and raising awareness of the significance of trees for our planet and its health, guides are also performing stewardship. As disenchanted tourists enter forests, often perceived as an alien realm, the experiences they construct may enable them to tap into the power of their relationship with the world, developing a larger appreciation for spaces beyond the metaphorical 'iron cage'.

5. Re-enchantment through forest bathing

Sensing more-than-human relationships

Most participants were time-deprived urban dwellers who perceived forest bathing as an opportunity to escape to nature, detach from the busy everydayness or do something good for their health. While their expectations were focused on escape, relaxation or recovery, the gift of engagement in this practice went beyond the expected; as Rantala (2010) alluded to, forests may afford spontaneity and unexpected surprises. To better understand what happened in the forest encounter, we follow Lovell and Griffin's (2022) proposition of enchantment as a process largely reliant on destabilisation and unexpectedness. We notice how the agency is not pre-ordered but dependent on emergent configurations of human and non-human relationships. It was fascinating to witness how forest bathers' experience was deepened by the emergent, yet unexpected sensations of unity with nature, the evoking of fond memories or the sense of comfort with being an inherent part of the natural environment.

The guides combined the elements of folklore with Jungian psychology, eco-therapy and mindfulness. While their mediation was largely underpinned by scientific knowledge, they subtly assisted the group in connecting to the forest in deeper and more imaginative ways, aiming to slow them down and open their senses. Through their entanglements with the surroundings, participants absorbed the rhythms of the forest, while guides passed on narratives, stories of the land, or myths to connect them to the environment: bodily, sensually and emotionally. The mindful invitations enabled participants to also engage other senses, such as body radar, imagination, heart sense or proprioception, whilst moving into a deeper relationship with the more-than-human world (Clifford, 2018). These openings of other sensorial pathways helped participants to reawaken their dormant senses and feel those strange sensations of rootedness, interconnectedness, or awe. What was felt among most participants, however, was a strong ontological connection with the world, articulated through qualities of unity, compassion or gratitude. Ljubica, whose existence has, in the meantime, taken a different form, explained this in the following way:

Guided group walk in the woods led me to feel a sense of being connected to the planet. Through the earth, through the visualisation of releasing roots from my feet. Such a wonderful sense of belonging, integrity, harmony, and security. [...] I try not to think much, but concentrate on the scenes, sounds, smells, living beings ... I feel unity with nature and gratitude for being a part of it.

Facilitating mindful states during one of the invitations was crucial as they allowed attention to be paid to processes that usually remain unnoticed in our disenchanting realities (Farkic *et al.*, 2021). The guide helped the attendees to develop deep, intimate connections and emotional bonds with the forest materialities and other living beings. Ljubica used a metaphor of releasing the roots to describe the process of becoming with the forest (Figure 1). She began to understand her interdependent being-ness as a human, through which the blurring of the boundaries between human and non-human entities became obvious. Her body was at once both an agent and a vehicle in this experience, serving to transform the forest into a place imbued with meaning, which she felt a part of – as Benson (2019) explains, not at the centre or top, but as an equal part of the larger ecosystem. Understanding the forest as a place where the sense of unity with other non-human entities, such as birds, tree trunks or vibrations, was also articulated by Cvetka:

The natural scent of the forest, to which all living beings of certain environments contribute, the talking, that is, the singing of birds [...] I felt the strong but smooth trunk of the tree under my palms, and the vibration that took over and I realised that we all became one.

What was perhaps not sought for in a forest bathing walk, but was instead spontaneously experienced, was the feeling of unity with others. Here, we can make links between the feminist new materialist ideas to the romantic values of transcendence in the process of re-enchantment. Romanticists were united in their belief in nature as the source of healthy emotions, the place of discoveries, and the place that delights the senses (Jones, 2011). Mindful interactions with the forest affected Cvetka's sensory experiences and emotions, contributing to her realisation of the complexity and interconnectedness of material and non-material dimensions. In the above narratives, we notice the paradox of scientifically rationalised practice claimed to contribute to improving individuals' wellbeing, and its capacity to facilitate profound change in humans and promote the health and vitality of forest ecosystems. This espouses the idea of re-enchantment within ecological and social contexts; such holistic understanding being a crucial priority of planetary wellbeing. Wellbeing cannot solely be determined by human actions but also by the affective qualities of the environment. Furthermore, the emphasis on beauty and subtlety in forest aesthetics and materialities (Rantala, 2010) highlighted qualities such as relationality, entanglement, and continuity with the more-than-human world. The experience of extending beyond the physical body, becoming one with nature, also emerged as a significant aspect of re-enchantment. From this, we can learn that a different positioning of self, one that is only a small part of the living system, can make us feel humbler and kinder towards our communities, humanity, and planet Earth.

Invoking nostalgia and alternative ways of life

Some participants recalled spending more time in nature in the past, but from which they have grown apart by living their hectic, urban, disenchanting lives. For Ana, the smells greatly mattered. She explained that smells are different in each forest, but what is common for them are their comforting sensations, which trigger nostalgia. The smells held strong associations with her childhood when she used to spend much more time in the forest; however, that habit disappeared over time. The return to the forest and inhaling its air helped her activate her imaginal sense and restore her memory of pleasant images of the past (Clifford, 2018). The forest smells, despite being scientifically rationalised as material particles that our olfactory system can sense, played a crucial role in making connections with the forest. In forest medicine, the aromatic oils (phytoncides) that trees release are the main agents in improving

people's health and moods (Li, 2018). While scientific explanations of their positive benefits are crucial for designing forest bathing products, the focus was on allowing the participants to experience for themselves how the forest air might affect us. When surrounded by trees, other participants, too, returned to their childhood. Emilija nicely encapsulated one of her fondest memories:

Forest bathing awakened in me positive emotions and memories of the past. I remembered our family house at the periphery of a small town and the balcony from which the sight reached the forest in which I didn't walk much, but I observed it while sitting at my desk. Just looking at it prompted a kind of serenity in me.

The forest bathing experience was often freighted with nostalgia, which opened possibilities for emotional letting go (Barsham & Hitchcock, 2012). In reflecting on their experience, time and space were bent in participants' minds, and the boundary between reality and imagination and past and present, was blurred. For them, the evoked memories had both reconnective and sentimental values, intimating the kind of carefree and cosy world that only a child knows. Such affectionate remembrances of the past we can understand as part of the process of re-enchantment; as a deeply personal and intimate, even sacred experience. As Hanna (2013) argued, what constitutes 'sacred' and prompts powerful emotions is not always specific to the place, but instead arises from the interactions between the individual and environment, and through a series of past-present processes that enabled forest to be encountered viscerally. In offering the participants space of intimacy, forest bathing allowed us to access to that sacred realm and embark on inner journeys. To make more sense of such experiences, we refer to de Jong and Varley's (2018) understanding of nostalgia as something contextualised, as a fluid process of becoming. The guide's narratives of the forest, their mediation between the participants and the forest, alongside forest materialities, generated a sense of familiarity and pleasantness. Here, nostalgia can be understood as a reconnective agent between past and present, as "something productive and future-focused, rather than reductionist and backward-looking" (de Jong & Varley, 2018, p. 694).

How nostalgia enables re-enchantment, we can seek explanations in the conditions of the Western capitalist, consumerist world, which encourages technological progress, enrichment economy, or conspicuous consumption, while simultaneously creating narratives surrounding sustainability, equality, environmental literacy, or planetary wellbeing. As a way to respond to global issues, disenchanted consumers, therefore, attend to certain neo-romantic or neo-spiritual practices. Forest bathing, in its unique way, blurs the boundaries between scientific and traditional, or rational and magical, and enables new relations to emerge. Through guided walks, which include activities such as smelling or licking the air, walking as a fox, picking berries, starting a campfire, reciting haiku, or searching forest spirits called kami, we began to make sense of the other, alternative ways of being and relating to other living and non-living entities (Salmela & Valtonen, 2019). These activities are child-like and simple, yet increasingly desired in our troubled world in which deceleration and peace of mind are longed for. Forest bathing, though may be understood as a 'new age' intervention, is a practice which greatly contributes to re-establishing the lost connections with the human and more-than-human world; such feeling help us become more hopeful, and create a more sustainable and secure world (Farkic & Kennell, 2021; Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011).

We can also see how nostalgia was interwoven with the narratives of primitiveness and the traditional way of life. In the construction of the forest bathing experience, local traditions and simplicity of living were frequently brought together. Casey (1993, p. xiv) argued that people's desire to return to their 'authentic nature', is distinctively modern, yet largely premodern in inspiration. We can observe this longing through participants' romantic

imaginings of the pre-modern, un-rationalised past. While we shared the trip back home, Marko reflected:

I enjoyed cooking and eating in the clearing after the walk. The smoke and smell of the campfire and us being sat on logs around it and eating from our laps reminded me of some pre-historic tribes that went hunting for food and now eating what they'd caught. We were sunburnt, dirty, and lazy, and it looked as if no one was aware of the time and that the only thing that mattered was food. What bliss!

Marko articulated his intuitive longing for primitiveness, reconceiving the idea of hunter-gatherers' practices. Recognising this, the guides made attempts to evoke primitiveness whilst drawing on rational understandings of the idea of the 'traditional'. By combining forest bathing with engaging tourists in the collective gathering of wild herbs, fruits and mushrooms, and cooking on a campfire in the open air, the 'lost practice' of foraging and strong construction of localism were contained in the idea of wild tending, in which all participants eagerly took part. In addressing the perceived disconnection from nature, the guides recreated the pre-modern past, which generated the feeling of tranquil order and sparked the magic of the simplicity of being – which Marko termed as bliss.

Slowing down, sharing and deepening the knowledge of living off the land is crucial in the process of re-enchantment. Just as Emily was slowing down and becoming intimate with blueberries (Grimwood & Höckert, 2023) or as Monica was connecting and thriving with snow (Nadegger, 2023b), we were also gathered around and becoming more familiar with the locally sourced food at the quaint pop-up bazaar in the clearing. The identification of mushrooms and herbs and their medicinal properties are normally a part of forest bathing tours. We had the opportunity to taste and buy mushrooms, tinctures and herbal beverages from the locals, while at the same time learning what they 'do' to humans (Bennett, 2010). Traditional communities possessed knowledge of the healing properties of fungi and plants living in their immediate environment and a developed understanding of their powers in remedying certain medical conditions. We highly appreciated being introduced to the healing properties of plants and the alchemic approach to their preparation. To this extent, the researcher, even a couple of years later, continues to brew reishi tea to enhance her immunity whilst her appreciation for and fascination with mycorrhizal fungi and their capacity to regulate climate, continues to grow. It was pleasing to learn from one participant that she knew this practice. Ana explained:

I've had close contact with forests my whole life and grew up in a family that had been traditionally engaged in forest therapy and delivering treatment with forest herbs. I regularly drink tea mixture made from medicinal plants from the regional forests and meadows, not only to prevent illness but also to achieve a better quality of life.

The positioning of this participant as a supporter of alternative practices that permeate her everyday life evidences the learning-from and living-with natural environments. The belief in the 'non-conventional' approach to both healing and keeping in good health, may be grounded in radically different cosmologies; however, it is believed to work, and much appreciated. The idea of re-enchantment assumes the realisation that people can, and should, make a conscious decision to live differently. We can perhaps learn from the above examples and, if not adopt them as a routine of our everyday life, at least choose to experience the simplicity of living in, and with, nature through more frequent entanglements with the forest.

6. CONCLUSION

Taking the feminist new materialist approach, this study explored human entanglements with the forest by introducing the notion of re-enchantment. We suggest that forest bathing as a tourism practice not only addresses human wellbeing but also has the immense power to transform the way we relate to, think and act in the Anthropocene. Extending the post-anthropocentric literature on nature tourism and more-than-human relations (Rantala *et al.*, 2024; Nadegger, 2023b; Grimwood & Höckert, 2023; Rantala *et al.*, 2020), we hope to make a small contribution to knowledge by unpacking the processes of re-enchantment and the ways in which it comes about through engaging in multiple relations with others; both living and non-living agents. In our interrogation of the tourist experience, we did not observe the arboreal space as an enchanted forest; instead, we approached it as a space which offers possibilities for re-enchantment, in which people can feel “free from surveillance, free to be themselves and at ease, in the deepest psychological sense, in a world that might at times be experienced as threatening and uncontrollable” (Saunders, 1990, p. 361).

To frame the study, we built on Weber’s idea of *disenchantment of the world*. In agreeing that the processes of disenchantment and re-enchantment are entangled and depend on one another in messy ways, we followed Jenkins’ (2000) claim that rational logics and processes can be re-enchanted from within or become the vehicles of re-enchantment. This prompted us to acknowledge the “complexity of a world that is neither definitively enchanted nor disenchanted” (p. 17). Scientific worldview could exist in accord with the traditional way of life, only if not put in the service of economic and technical rationalism by those with a practical-rational worldview (Schroeder, 1995). Crucial here is attending to the diverse ways in which the world is understood, interpreted, and experienced in ethical and sustainable ways, rather than celebrating the dominant structures and ‘truths’ perpetuated by and within the Anthropocene.

While the practice of forest bathing might be grounded in scientific knowledge, the construction of re-enchantment itself is situated and emergent, and dependent on relations; it arises from the continual interplay between humans and non-humans, the facts underlying the design of the walk (the positive impact of phytoncides on human health), guide’s facilitation (“while you keep your eyes shut, stick your tongue out and notice the flavour of the air”), and the tourist interpretation of their lived experience in relation to forest materialities (the soothing smell of forest air took me to the carefree childhood). In the development of the forest bathing tourism product, the guide’s role becomes pivotal. Beyond merely facilitating experiences, they assist in deepening the ontological connection with the world and facilitating the positioning of oneself within it. As de Jong and Varley (2018) proposed, there is a political potential in this process as it enables tourists to gain understandings of broader social or environmental issues, and how their small actions can make an impact across different contexts and scales. With such experience and knowledge, people may develop what Huijbens (2023) termed *earthly attachments* by forming meaningful relationships with earthly elements. Through appreciation and the sense of belonging to the planet, people are likely to develop environmental literacy and protect the forest, as it is the place from which we emerged, and to which we more often need to return.

We found feminist new materialism useful in understanding how even commodified scenarios like forest bathing trips, might enable meaningful relationships to unfold. We argued that tourist embodiment in an arboreal environment has the capacity to produce re-enchantments, which contribute to both human and more-than-human wellbeing, which in this study, we referred to as planetary wellbeing. While the forest experience can be to an extent commodified, and the much-romanticised ‘authenticity’ or ‘primitiveness’ can be facilitated, the enchantment here is conceived of as a quality emerging from within,

constructed through the entanglements of various agents that united in the given time, in the given forest. As Clifford (2018) suggested, forest bathing is open-ended; there is no prescription for what a person 'should' experience, or what benefits they 'should' receive. Our participants were affected by the forest and its materialities and embarked on journeys from modern to pre-modern self, evoking the sense of calm, security, belonging, and ensconcing in a sincere, motherly embrace, realising that life can, and should, be lived differently, and in a respectful symbiosis with nature.

The forest, therefore, defies mass-production of the artificial, spectacularised quasi-magic tourism experience produced in cathedrals of consumption; it appreciates sensitive encounters and unique narratives. The voices heard in this study whisper their own stories of dis- and re-enchantment, and invite the readers to embrace bathing in the forest more frequently; to search for the forest spirits, or let the spirits find them; to experience the authenticity of being-with through interrelatedness of nature, culture and tradition; to learn from sunlight, wind and mushrooms; to make their own forest souvenir and tell a small, yet meaningful, story about it. To reiterate one of our participants, we should dive into our own existence as well as the existence of the world around us, the world that is ours and interconnected. We have forcefully broken these ties and wander about aimlessly, in search of our own selves. We should, therefore, meditate on the idea of *witness* across space and time, across selves and species, across myriad artificial un-belongings we have manufactured as we drifted away from our elemental nature. Through invoking the sense of interconnectedness, we should recognise that the re-enchantment might emerge from a very simple forest encounter. There is, however, no promise that one will 'get re-enchanting'; we should allow it to unfold from *within*, and *together with* other humans and non-humans.

While our narrative may appear as a rosy picture of re-enchantment of the world through forest bathing in which 'social wrongs can be righted', we aimed to discreetly illuminate one way of reconceiving the idea of planetary wellbeing and encourage rethinking our rationalised, disconnected and self-centred lives within the Anthropocene. Ultimately, we second Gibson's (2009) proposition that the re-enchantment of nature - if coupled with the political courage to act - may offer a chance to, in a sense, remake the world.



Figure 1. Ljuba, becoming with the forest

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