

The importance of harnessing natural resources through health tourism in Romania

Alina-Cerasela ALUCULESEI, PhDs

*Faculty of Commerce, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies
email: alina_cerasella@yahoo.com, Piata Romana nr. 6, Sector 1, Bucharest, Romania*

Professor Puiu NISTOREANU, PhD.

*Faculty of Commerce, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies
Piata Romana nr. 6, Sector 1, Bucharest, Romania*

ABSTRACT

Health tourism is an area with an extensive history in Europe, being dependent on the natural resources from the area where it takes place and on the existence of potential curing factors. The main resource that is used in this field is water, which can be used in various forms. It can be used in the treatment of many diseases for prophylaxis or for maintaining the welfare of tourists. One of the European countries that are characterized by the abundance of resources that can be used in health tourism is Romania. The main advantage of this is that a single resort can treat many illnesses, but that infrastructure modernization delayed to be made resulting in a poor positioning of the destinations in Europe, despite the history, experience and renowned resorts such as Băile Herculane.

Keywords: spa tourism, natural resources, health tourism, spa tourism in Romania, potential spa resorts in Romania, treatment factors, website spa, resort spa online

INTRODUCTION

The importance of natural resources has never been more acknowledged than today, when everyone makes efforts to maintain their quality. One of the areas that is directly dependent on resources is tourism, which can be considered more elastic or less elastic depending on the type and the area which is considered. One of its branches which cannot adapt to changes in a short time is health tourism, which is often defined by the treatment factors. The objectives of this paper are to highlight the importance of spa tourism resources and strengths of Romania in this field and also to show how are promoted Romanian resorts in the online environment.

NATURAL RESOURCES - A COMPONENT OF THE TOURISTIC OFFER

Natural resources are a mainstay component of human life from the beginning, being those who have contributed both to its survival and progress to a level never seen before. Human society has been used since the early stages of its development resources provided by nature, such as water, forest, soil. The only thing that has changed in the meantime is the contribution to the disruption of equilibrium environment, a support which has increased with the scientific and technical progress (Teodorescu & Alexandrescu, 2004, p.7).

When we refer to natural resources we must take into account their type, if they are renewable or not (Răducanu, 2000, p. 243). A resource which cannot be exhausted is one that can generate economic effects to infinity, while the exhaustible resource is derived from a finite stock. Taken as a whole and adding the “time” aspect we can say that any resource cannot be

fully exhausted and it is characterized only by the length of time - lower or higher - required to regenerate. An example in this case is water (Hartwick & Olewiler, 1998, pp. 5-75).

Water is a key natural resource, regardless of the industry, with a direct or indirect contribution, the most visible contribution having it in agriculture. The fact that it is indispensable in many areas has made it one of the most polluted resources and arranged degradation. This situation is still kept in underdeveloped countries and developing ones. In developed countries, the industry began to look for measures to protect it, even if mostly of these come from tax considerations. An example is given by the United States, where each cubic meter of water is reused in the industry for about 17 times (Ciobotaru, 2004, p.74).

But it is not only a useful resource in industry and agriculture, but also in tourism - a sector that has experienced a rise since the Second World War (Huybers& Bennett, 2013) and which, according to the European Commission in 2010 generated 5% of continent's GDP (Dionysopoulou, 2012, p. 284).

Tourism, like agriculture, is highly dependent on the existing natural resources and the climate of that area (Cabrini, 2010, p. 50), we can say that the climate may be considered a resource (Perch-Nielsen, Amelung & Knutti, 2010, pp. 363-364).

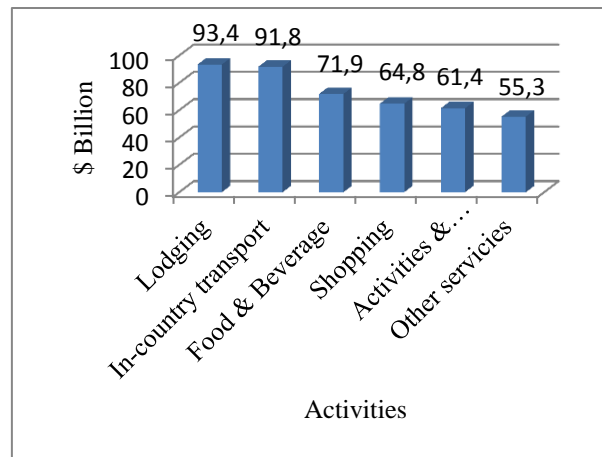
Natural resources often defined tourism areas, being those that provide the necessary basis for conducting certain activities. Even if their presence provides an indisputable advantage in the field, they do not necessarily bring a proper level of competitiveness (Bobirca & Cristureanu, 2008, pp. 76-78).

The water, seen as valuable natural resource, is affected in several ways by human actions with immediate or delayed results, but predictable, such as global warming (Ruhanen, 2012, p.155). Because this resource predisposition to pollution is high, affecting directly the practice of tourism, efforts in this area are being made to slow down and stop its degradation. In these circumstances concepts such as sustainable development (Nistoreanu, 2006) or environmental protection appeared (Huybers & Bennett, 2003, p. 229).

As a tourism resource, it can take different forms and can be used for recreation, for practicing different types of sports or boat trips and also for curative purpose in health tourism. Lakes are those that have always attracted tourists. The lake tourism development areas play a vital role with certain characteristics, such as water surface, physicochemical parameters, basin morphology, natural surroundings, climate and access routes (Negru & Vodă, 2005).

Regarding health tourism, it is based on the existence and browsing a series of natural factors, using different techniques in bathing cures such as: thermo-mineral waters, therapeutic lakes, sludge treatment, therapeutic gases, salt, herbs, climate cleaning (Țigu, Țală, Talpeș, Lungu & John, 2003, pp.91-92). These resources can be used in specific treatments after scientific testing, which certifies the curative properties and how to use them (Giljanovic, 2008, p.109). It can be seen that this type of tourism is directly dependent on the natural resources from the area where it is practiced.

This direct link between the practice and the resources used in health tourism is clear from the definition of this form of tourism which is practiced in Europe for over 2000 years. Health tourism and spa therapy involves treatments that are developed especially in countries where there are many sources of thermal and mineral springs, which are used for therapeutic purposes (Tefner, Nemeth, Laszlofi, Kis, Gyetvai &Bender, 2012, p. 3163). Health tourism experienced a real boom and significant improvement of treatment facilities and recreational facilities after the Second World War (Ianc, 2005, p. 82). The importance of this type of tourism and of the wellness tourism, in special, in terms of revenues, is shown in the following figure.



Source: Global wellness Institute, 2013, p. 7.

Figure No. 1. The wellness tourism economy

According to the Global Wellness Institute, wellness tourism involved in 2013 \$438,6 billion, which represents 6% of all domestic and international trips. This total represents the sum of the main activities for which tourists pay. The biggest sum is paid for lodging: \$93,4 billion followed by the transportation (airlines, rental cars, public transit, trains, taxis). The smallest sum belongs to other services, like: insurances, telecom, which represents \$55,3 billion. The importance of wellness tourism comes not only from the incomes, but also from the high level of direct jobs which are generated: 11,7 million.

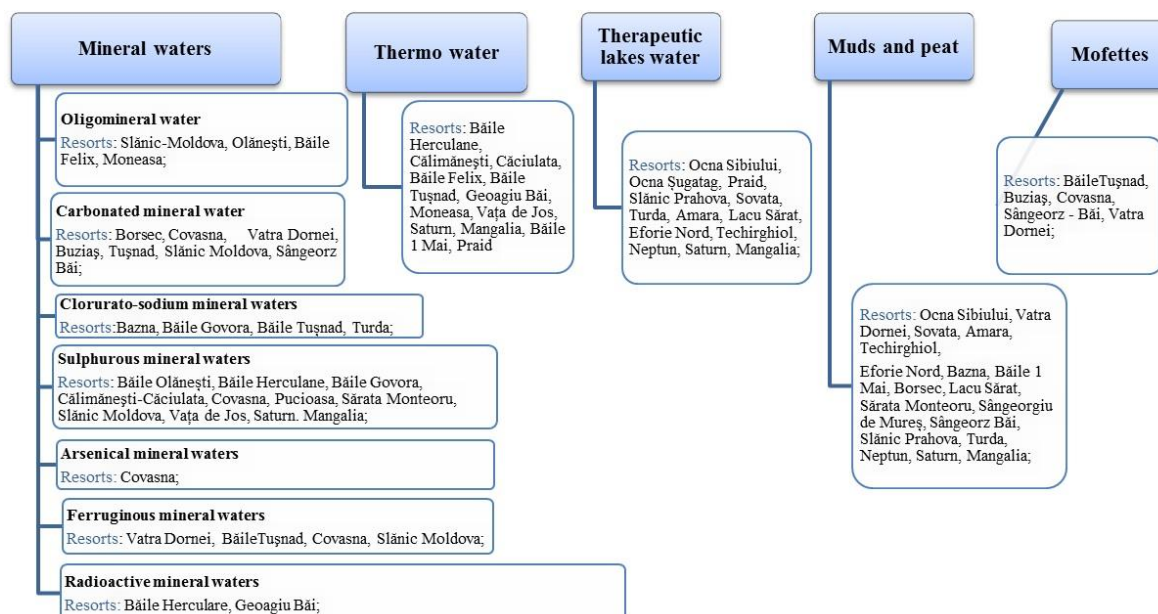
BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES OF ROMANIAN SPA TOURISM

In Europe, one of the countries that have real potential in spa therapy is Romania, because of the variety of natural resources and because of the fact that they are accumulated in certain destinations, and may treat many diseases in the same place. Also, its experience in the field is appreciated here is exploiting spa treatment factors over 2000 years (Stăncioiu, 1999, p.207) currently there are over 200 spa resorts (Nistoreanu, 2005).

The reasons why resorts from the country deserve to be placed on the international map of destinations spas are numerous and are mainly based on the wealth of resources. The large number of localities that have cure factors, the large number of diseases that can be treated, the fact that about a third of the natural mineral springs in Europe are in Romania (Stăncioiu, Băltescu, Botoș & Pârgaru, 2013, p. 129) provides ideal tourism conditions.

For a better viewing, the figure below (figure. No. 2) shows the cure main factors: mineral waters, thermal waters, lakes therapeutic muds and peat, mofetta gas and their association with health resorts where can be found.

Romania also can be an important destination not only for the treatment but also for prophylaxis or treatment procedures like occupational stress (Neacșu, Snack & Baron, 2006). The treatment of diseases caused by the requesting service, which in the past were not as present as today made to develop so-called spa, which in addition to the treatment of certain disorders handles to ensure and maintain the welfare of tourists and especially of the segment of female to the 48 (Graf, 2011, p. 220).



Source: Adapted by the authors after the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, 2011

Figure No. 2 Classification of health resorts in Romania for resources

Although major changes have occurred in the demand for health resorts in Romania some of these destinations still resonate among tourists as Băile Herculane (Ciangă & Pătrașcu, 2010, p. 16). This is a famous resort known internationally appreciated especially during the occupation of the Austrian Empire (Voinea & Baran, 2008, p. 175).

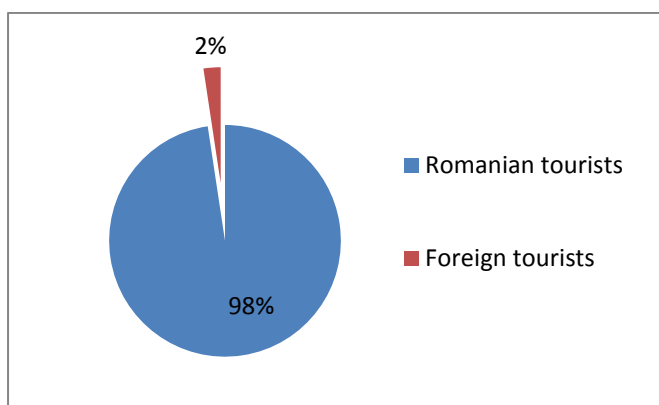
Turning to one of the main strengths of Romanian's health tourism, is that in a resort can be treated several diseases. In the following table (table no. 1) are presented the resorts which use water from the therapeutic lakes.

Table No. 1 Therapeutic health resorts around the therapeutic lakes

Nr.crt.	Health resort	Therapeutic indications
1	Techirghiol Lake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gynecological diseases Disorders of the locomotors Respiratory Illness Dermatologic Conditions Cardiovascular Disease
2	The balneoclimateric resort Amara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rheumatic diseases Traumatic disorders Peripheral neurological disorders Gynecological diseases
3	Sovata	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gynecological diseases Disorders of the locomotors Respiratory Illness Dermatologic Conditions
4	Băile Turda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rheumatic diseases Peripheral neurological disorders Traumatic disorders Cardiovascular Disease Gynecological diseases
5	Lacul Sărat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disorders of the locomotors Neurological disorders Gynecological diseases Dermatologic Conditions

Nr.crt.	Health resort	Therapeutic indications
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational diseases
6	Cîineni Băi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disorders of the locomotors • Neurological disorders • Gynecological diseases • Dermatologic Conditions
7	Ocna Sibiului	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disorders of the locomotors • Neurological disorders • Occupational diseases • Nutrition disorders

Source: Adapted by the authors based on: Munteanu & Munteanu, 2012, pp. 27-48.



Source: Romanian tourism statistical abstract, 2012, p. 52.

Figure No. 3 Overnight stays of tourists from romanian SPAs in 2011

Although in Romania the resources are numerous, it should not be overlooked an important detail, namely that the adaptation to the new conditions imposed by the tourists did not take places like in other countries. Popular destinations have taken the boundaries far beyond mass tourism, sometimes to the high end tourism. The fact that prior to 1990 - the reference year in many areas regarding change - almost half of the population spent a vacation in a resort (Minciu, 2005, p 157) gave a false assurance for industry players. Thus improvements in the treatment centers and recreational facilities to make Romania a destination internationally competitive were never made (Turtureanu, 2007, pp. 54-55).

The importance of SPAs and the big opportunity which Romania has through its resources is given by some aspects which characterized the world population today. The increasing number and proportion of the aged within the world's population, the big number of people with chronic illness, health systems - are only some reasons for SPAs development (Global Spa Summit, 2010).

Thus, under current conditions, despite the advantages it has, Romania cannot compete with countries like Hungary (Bender, Balint, Prohaszka, Geher & Tefner, 2013, pp.2 -5), Switzerland (Laesser, 2011, p 88), Germany, who already have a reputation and that tourists consider a landmark. Although the country's tourism offer is a rich potential in this regard, one cannot become effective until you meet a number of features to boost tourism consumption spa (Munteanu & Cinteza, 2011, p 63). These points are visible in the following figure, in which is presented the type of tourists in romanian SPAs.

According to INSSE, in 2011 the total number of tourists in Romanian SPAs was 4342157. From this, the largest share is represented by Romanian tourists, which are 98% of total. This situation can be explained through the bad condition presented in the SPAs and through the policy followed by some hotels which are focused on the domestic tourism. The social

programs are also an important factor. Because of these, some hotel's managers consider that the tourist will come regardless of the conditions because the prices are very low for Romanian tourists who meet certain criteria. So they are no longer interested on attracting foreign tourists who are more exigent.

RESOURCE RECOVERY CURRENT SPA IN ROMANIA

The multitude of resources in Romania and numerous opportunities to exploit the country does not ensure success as a leading destination in the wellness or SPA tourism. To see if there is a concern for the promotion of resorts that can create a competent tourism product we analyzed several websites, including the website of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, The Organization of Spa Owner in Romania and spa resort's websites promoted on this website. In this analysis we have considered information posted, the last update, the year the website was created, if the content is available in multiple languages and of course, if the resorts have their own website which should include information about the resort.

Organization of Spa Owner in Romania was founded in 1993 on the initiative of 19 representatives of the major resorts; currently the organization has 62 members. The organization's websites is www.spas.ro and contains multiple information about the organization, conferences and other events they organize, 31 resorts, a version in Romanian and one in English. It also has an interactive section consisting in map on which the visitor can choose the destination resort and will then be sent to a page describing the respective destination, but which does not make reference to the resort's website. Another section is the "Offices Abroad", which specifies the countries where Romanian tourism is promoted generally without making direct reference to health tourism.

First post on the site dates from January 2008 and the last date from date 11.09.2013 on the subject of the Exchange organization and Spa Tourism Forum. Data obtained from the analysis made on the website, www.spas.ro, regarding the presentation of the resorts and spa's websites are presented in the table no. 2. We considered issues such as the existence of the resort's own website presented by Organization of Spa Owner in Romania, year of establishment, language versions available if the presentation on www.spas.ro of the resort is complete and if on the resort's website of the are available a product or are available only accommodation options.

Table No. 2 *Description of information available online about health resorts*

No	Resort	Resort's website	Website since	Languages	Complete presentation of the resort on www.spas.ro	Existence on the resort's website:	
						Spa package	Accommodation
1	Băile Felix	✓	2007	RO	✓		✓
2	Băile Calacea	✓	2004	RO	-	-	-
3	Buziaș	✓	2013	RO	✓	✓	
4	Moneasa	✓	2010	RO	-		✓
5	Turda	✓	2013	RO, EN, HU	✓	✓	
6	Geoagiu Băi	✓	-	RO	✓		✓
7	Olănești	✓	-	RO	✓	✓	
8	Băile Herculane	✓	2008	BG, EN, FR, DE, HU, IT, (variante	✓		✓

No	Resort	Resort's website	Website since	Languages	Complete presentation of the resort on www.spas.ro	Existence on the resort's website:	
						Spa package	Accommodation
				indisponibile), RO			
9	Govora	✓	2007	RO	✓	✓	
10	Ocenele Mari	✓	2009	RO	-		✓
11	Călimănești-Căciulata	✓	2009	RO	✓	✓	
12	Ocna Sibiu	✓	2011	RO	-		✓
13	Bazna	✓	2008	RO	-		✓
14	Sovata	✓	2009	72 variante lingvistice	-		✓
15	Praid	✓	2013	HU, RO, EN	✓	-	-
16	Vatra Dornei	✓	2013	RO	✓		✓
17	Sângeorz Băi	-			✓		
18	Băile Tușnad	✓	-	HU, EN, RO	-	-	-
19	Balványos	✓	-	HU, EN, RO	-		✓
20	Covasna	✓	-	HU, EN, RO	✓		✓
21	Breaza	-			-		
22	Sinaia	-			✓		
23	Slănic Prahova	✓	2012	RO	✓		✓
24	Pucioasa	-			✓		
25	Slănic Moldova	✓	2009	RO	-		✓
26	Oglinzi	-			-		
27	Lacul Sărat	-			✓		
28	Amara	-			✓		
29	Eforie Nord	✓	-	RO	-		✓
30	Saturn	-			-		
31	Mangalia	-			-		

Source: Developed by authors based on information available on the spas website and on the www.spas.ro

The analysis made in the online environment of the 31 resorts, showed that 9 of them have their own website. Of the remaining 22, the oldest web page belonging to Băile Govora is dating since 2007, and 4 resorts have created an online page online only this year. Regarding language versions available 7 websites have content in a language other than Romanian, predominantly English and Hungarian. Of these 7, Sovata integrates a translator program, thus having content translated into 72 languages and Băile Herculane has 6 language versions available outside the Romanian, but do not generate any results.

Analyzing the presence of spa tourism product on the website of each resort or only the presence of the accommodation, showed that of the 22 resorts, three of them do not have either of these two aspects, 5 feature spa packages and 14 and have only accommodation deals.

Of the 31 resorts presented on www.spas.ro, 14 do not have a complete description, being omitted one or several of the following: geographic location, natural healing factors, indications, contraindications, access.

Regarding the concern to promote spa resources and their exploitation www.mdrt.ro site analysis revealed that there is concern, being available to those interested in the following documents which are directly related to health tourism: Master plan for health tourism development (prepared in November 2009), 3-year action Plan - the page of these documents being last updated on June 14, 2012 - guide spas - online brochure (prepared in November 2011) and pre-feasibility study "Spatial and tourism redevelopment of Cacica, Praid and Slănic Prahova salt mine".

Thus, there is a commitment from both the authorities and the private structures, but not sufficient. Information contained in the online environment is not collected on the spa's websites; they are often limited to the posting of general information about the history, resources Spa, treatable disease without linking these issues to present tourism offers by creating a complex and attractive package. Also, the lack of posting the dates of the festivals in the area, such as "The Festival of Gypsy songs and dances" in Baile Felix, "Gypsy Festival " in Băile Herculane, in Mangalia Callatis Festival "Festival sarmale" in Praid (InfoTravel Romania, 2013) and local crafts or other types of tourism, wine tourism, gastronomic, that can be practiced, don't do nothing but to hinder the development of the areas.

By posting adequate promotion and complex information in an easy way to view and understand, would invigorate both resorts and the surrounding areas. It would create more jobs for the resident population, would encourage crafts and traditions throughout the year, given that health tourism is not affected by seasonality and would harness also other travel resources in addition to the spa.

CONCLUSIONS

Natural resources have always been the basis on which mankind has built throughout its existence to reach this stage of progress. Using them without taking into account that may degrade especially by polluting or they may even end and never be used is a way anymore taken into account. The current concern to develop and implement new concepts such as sustainable development and environmental protection must be the beginning of large-scale action to protect everything around us.

A natural resource used in many activities is water, which has a key role in many areas such as agriculture, industry and even tourism. Tourism is using it for numerous activities, from transportation, to the practice of specific sports, but it's most important branch based on this resource is health tourism.

The conclusions that can be drawn from this work are:

- Spa tourism has a long history in Europe and has been developed mostly after the Second World War. It is based on the use of treatment factors to treat various illnesses, for prevention or maintenance of well;
- Among the countries with a remarkable potential in this area and spa tourism history is Romania with internationally known areas like Sovata and Băile Herculane;
- The main advantages of the country are the large number of natural resources, their density in many towns and that in a resort can be treated many diseases;
- Natural potential unfortunately is not an enough reason for Romania to be a competitive destination, as it is not doubled by a modern infrastructure, updated to the new demands of tourists;

- Even though most resorts in the country have their own website, the information available is incomplete, often missing a spa product to promote;
- Website of Organization of Spa Owner in Romania provides information about actions and the resorts states, but this information is not complete;
- On most sites the resorts are not present current information about festivals in the area, crafts, or other types of tourism that can be practiced;
- There is interest from the authorities and from private establishments regarding Romanian spa tourism development;
- Through adequate and sustained promotion of health tourism could get good results, such as increasing the number of jobs and therefore the economic development of the area, encouraging the crafts and traditions, supporting lucrative activities throughout the year ;

Thus, in order to be considered a key destination for health tourism in Europe, Romania should consider upgrading old equipment and adaptation of supply to new trends. It is also necessary to create a tourism product and promote it; most resorts now choose to present its offer on parts, providing accommodation, recreation, treatment or food service.

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