

Perspectives of the Balneary Tourism in Romania

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Abstract

Tourism is far more than an economic sector. It is a complex system in which potential interactions with other economic sectors can be developed in a sustainable way both upstream and downstream. For this reason, it is essential to implement and develop projects in Romania in a much larger context.

Contemporary tourism succeeds in being a complex activity, having numerous economic, social and cultural implications. The development of tourism is constantly in close correlation with the growth rhythms of other economy branches. Lately, balneary tourism, known also as health tourism, benefits from an increased attention, as it presents outstanding resources, such as health care factors, which help to maintain the health. Given this, we have chosen to conduct a study on the importance and development of the balneary tourism in our country.

Key words: tourism, balneary tourism, Romania

J.E.L. classification: Z30

1. Introduction

At the base of modern tourism there were two major precursors: pilgrimages to sacred places, which created basic services for travelers and formed trails that prefigured the modern tourism itineraries for sightseeing touristic landmarks, spas or thermal springs, to which the members of the European top class gathered to "take the waters," which have prefigured the popular modern holiday tourism on the seaside beaches.

The growing economy, the living conditions of the people in today's modern society and the hurried pace of life lead to the emergence of negative aspects such as increased pollution, which affects the development of the human body, having harmful effects on it, daily stress, food imbalances both quantitative and qualitative, but also the intensive work have an impact on people's health. Balneary tourism is seen as a solution to these consequences, helping to improve the damaging effects of these factors. The tourist chooses a balneary resort as a destination to recover their energy and to care for their health.

The balneary sector belongs to the health tourism market, along with medical tourism, thalassotherapy, hydrotherapy, wellness/spa and fitness. The balneary tourism is one of the forms with constant tourist traffic, having a relatively stable clientele, and which contributes to the increase of the coefficients which analyze the accommodation capacity and to obtain higher average incomes daily per tourist. Taking into account the need to adapt the balneary resorts to the requirements of the tourists, in the following paragraphs there are going to be highlighted some aspects regarding the content and character of the balneary tourism, as well as the importance of balneary resorts and the prospects for the development of this kind of tourism in Romania.

2. Literature review

The term "balneary" originates in Latin, in the singular form "balneum", which translated means bath. According to the Dictionary of Touristic Terminology, balneary tourism is the "specific form of tourism for (long stay) rest, practiced by people going to balneary resorts for health care or disease prevention."

This form of tourism dates back to the ancient times, but has developed in the last decades simultaneously with the evolution of many diseases that affect the wellbeing and health of people. People, in the old days, were exploiting the properties which the thermal and mineral waters, heliomarine sludges and slides in resorts such as Herculaneum (Băile Herculane) in Romania, or Pamukkale in Turkey had.

The balneary resort is considered to be a city or at least part of a city where natural factors of cleanliness are found, which are the main components that contribute to the prevention of illnesses and health care. The resort has indispensable facilities and the means for obtaining balneary products.

The balneary resorts highlight the interdependence relationship that links two concepts of great significance, the tourism-medicine relationship, forming a close connection between the two. From the point of view of the above, it is clear that the number of tourists increases, because some can be just visitors and others can be patients in a balneary resort. Account shall be taken of the diversity of the customers forming the market segments for these service typologies.

The needs of the clients are very well individualized and highlighted in the spa tourism. In addition to medical services, they must also benefit from the rest of the good quality tourism services as much as possible. Medical treatment recipients must be looked after as any other type of tourists, they do not differ in anything, so they have to enjoy the whole package offered by the balneary resort.

Balneotherapy uses mineral water and mud baths that are applied as treatments for diseases. This technique uses mostly spring water, whose quality is limited to mechanical effects. Mineral waters and therapeutic mud are known from ancient times. The first practical, therapeutic applications appeared at the ancient Greeks and Romans, especially mineral waters and springs, which were well known as places with medical qualities.

Balneo-medical treatments can be procedures, ways in which tourists treat their affections through natural therapeutically means, at the advice of doctors in specially arranged areas, different from the usual environment in which the tourist performs daily activities. "The treatments are complemented by all the therapeutic procedures specific to treating traveler's illnesses, which, in such an approach, become associated services (e.g. inhalations, pulverizations, sauna, underwater massage, electro-physiotherapy, slimming treatments, diets, mud treatments, medical gymnastics, geriatrics and more). Throughout the treatments or prescribed treatments, patients receive medical assistance from specialist and auxiliary staff. In this way, medical consultations and medical assistance are also a special form of balneo-medical services "(Snak, O; Baron, P; Neacsu, N; 2003, p. 291).

Thus, in antiquity, spa treatments have occupied an important place in the therapeutic arsenal of alternative and traditional medicine. Thereby, neither the passage of time, nor the emergence of technological advances in medical science have succeeded in diminishing the significance of balneotherapy. This type of treatment has been improved, tinted with precise indications and contraindications, enriched with new procedures and even gaining the title of scientific treatment.

Often, to define the concept of balneary tourism, various terms are used, such as health tourism, medical tourism, wellness tourism, and spa tourism. The terms are seen as synonyms, but each one designates a different category and does not have to create confusion.

Health tourism requires the trip or the stay to be done for health care. This type of tourism has long been known in Croatia, and is currently in a rapid development phase, in line with market trends. Health tourism is that form of tourism that involves a trip to the balneary resorts and offers specialty treatments naturally or in other destinations whose purpose is to improve the health of tourists. Health care treatments are done through a regime of physical exercise and therapy, medical services and a controlled alimentation, relevant to maintaining and/or improving the health.

Medical tourism requires people to travel with the objective of receiving medical procedures that are not available in the city or country of residence. The move also involves the need for the tourist-patient to gain expertise and the possible advantage of lower costs for the intervention.

The American doctor, Dunn, was the one who developed the concept of **wellness** in 1959, which describes it as a special condition of health, a condition that embodies the wellbeing of the whole body but also of the mind or spirit.

The **Wellness** also promotes the activities which are directed towards fitness and physical training. The emergence of the notion is largely due to the awareness and concern of the people for their health. The term wellness should not be confused with health tourism because it requires you to adopt a healthy lifestyle or do something healthy to prevent illness, not to treat them.

Through recreational or spiritual activities circumscribed to this concept, there are attempts to find ways of relaxation to help achieve physical, mental, and spiritual balance.

The **spa** concept is a place where water is used for therapeutic purposes. Worldwide there are met such procedures, where the water's properties are exploited, but a greater spread is found in Europe and Asia. "Faith in the curative powers of mineral waters returns to prehistoric times" (Georgescu M., Necşoi A, 2013, p. 361).

The spa concept is in close connection with the wellness one, because water is not only used to treat, it also brings a state of freshness, of well-being. Spa and wellness procedures do not need to be done by well-trained staff, a modest training is enough. Also, spa and wellness centers can be arranged in any area, not necessarily within a balneary resort. Cleaning factors are an option within these centers, they do not have a mandatory role, and if they are used, they can come from that respective area or have another provenance.

Balneary tourism is part of the health tourism, due to the motivation behind the practice, that of health care. It also coincides to some extent with medical tourism, because the medical procedures used are made by highly knowledgeable staff in the medical field. It is also a part of the wellness and spa tourism, because of the concern for the mental or spiritual well-being and finding a physical balance for the patients.

Balneary tourism presents numerous features that make it possible to overcome some shortcomings due to the characteristics of the tourism industry. Seasonality or a low level of complexity and loyalty, are some examples of tourism industry characteristics that make up for the deficiencies, which represents a hindrance to other forms of tourism.

Balneary resorts are very widespread on the territory of our country, in the Carpathians, Subcarpathian, the Western Plain and the East of the Romanian Plain, Transylvania and the seaside. These areas have natural therapeutic factors that are exploited, protected and used under special legal regulations. These resorts are well equipped and adequately designed for the activity which they have.

The resort represents "the city which presents, through its location and facilities, a special touristic interest". As far as the touristic resort is concerned, it is the "place that presents a set of attractions and is equipped with means of accommodating and receiving tourists. At the same time, it can be a balneary resort, climatic, thermal or which is focused on grape therapy, if it additionally offers the specific characteristics of these resorts "(Candea M., Erdeli G., Simon T., Peptenatu D., 2003, p. 176).

The activities are based on specific procedures, thermal baths, mud packs, sulfur or gaseous water baths, or medicinal water cures. In addition to the natural resources that allow the treatment of certain affections, there have been created conditions in order to allow several specific procedures, such as physiotherapy, electrotherapy, thermotherapy, hydro-physiotherapy, sleep-therapy, aerosols, inhalations, etc.

Romania has a very varied and rich pool of natural therapeutic factors, mineral water, sludge, gas emanations, etc. which are spread generously on a fairly large area of our country in different climate zones. This is due to the geographical location and structure of the country. The presence of these natural factors allowed them to be used for treatment and the construction of some forms of touristic organization.

3. Research methodology

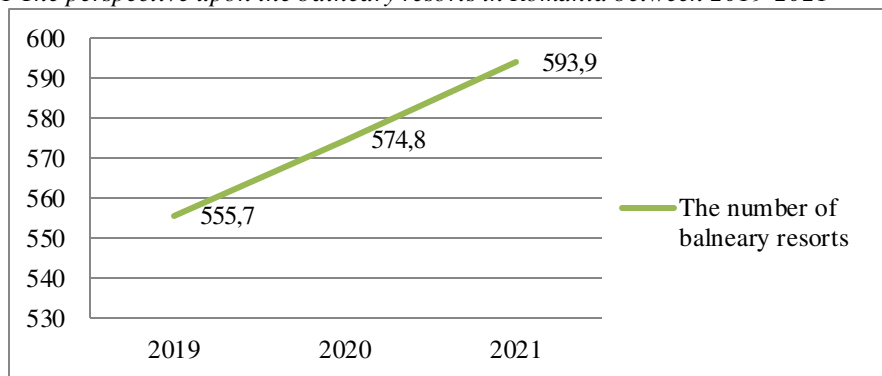
The touristic offer represents the package of materials and services that are able to satisfy the needs of the tourists during their stay, meaning the period from when they left the city of residence and until their return. The content of the balneary touristic offer includes accommodation, treatment and food services, these being the basic services to which recreation, transportation and more can be added.

Three methods of forecasting, namely the method of average growth, the average index and the linear trend, were used for the forecasts regarding the offer and the touristic demand in Romania. The forecast was made with the method which took the smallest value of the variation coefficient, resulting in the most effective value for performing the analysis.

4. Results

The evolution of balneary tourism will not be the way it deserves, as the number of days from overnight stays and from average stays decreases from year to year. These figures should not be discouraging, as there are solutions to redress the situation that will occur and bring it to a point where it is possible to develop the balneary tourism activity.

Figure no.1 The perspective upon the balneary resorts in Romania between 2019-2021



Source: Drafted by the authors based on data from INSSE

As far as the number of accommodation units, the value of the variation coefficient was 6.54%, being the lowest through the linear trending method. There is a decrease in the number of balneary resorts in 2018 compared to 2017 by about 21, but also in 2019 compared to 2017 with almost 3 resorts, even though there is a slight increase compared to the previous year. Only in 2020 we are witnessing a positive evolution, according to the drafted forecast, the number of balneary resorts will be around 594.

Table no.1 Current touristic accommodation capacity

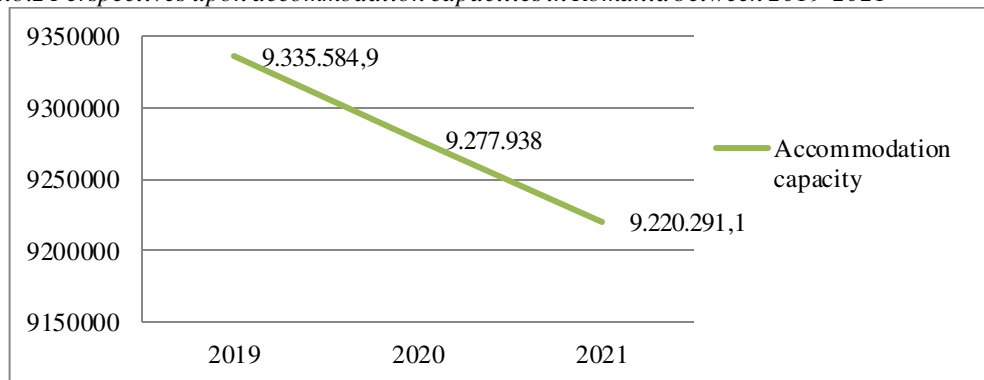
Year	Balneary resorts (number of places)	Romania (number of places)	Share in total in Romania (%)
2015	9,136,031	81,872,539	11.16
2016	9,321,299	83,323,220	11.19
2017	9,852,659	87,655,762	11.24
2018	9,845,187	89,075,891	11.05

Source: Drafted by the authors based on data from INSSE

Regarding the existing accommodation capacity (places), in 2015 in balneary resorts there were 9,136,031 places. Starting with 2016, there is a visible increase in the number of accommodation places, as in 2017 there were 9,852,659 places. Their number has increased from year to year. The share of accommodation places in the balneary resorts in all Romanian accommodation places increases and decreases so that in 2015 it was 11.16%, then in 2016, in a similar percentage of 11.19%; and in 2017, 11.24%. In 2018, the percentage of accommodation

units decreased by 0.19 percent. About the total number of accommodation places in Romania, we can say that they have grown every year, there have been no fluctuations, from 2015 until 2018, they have grown consistently.

Figure no.2 Perspectives upon accommodation capacities in Romania between 2019-2021



Source: Drafted by the authors based on data from INSSE

Regarding the number of places and of the accommodation capacity available, the least variation coefficient was in the linear trending method. The negative evolution of the accommodation places is closely related to the number of balneary resorts. As the number of resorts will be lower and places will be fewer in number, in 2020 there would be a number of 9,277,938 according to the forecast presented above.

Thus, we are witnessing disappointing figures, as the number of accommodation and balneary resorts will be smaller with the passage of time. I consider that this decline is due to the lack of involvement of the stakeholders in the field of balneary tourism, a lack which directly and inevitably affects the balneary tourism offer.

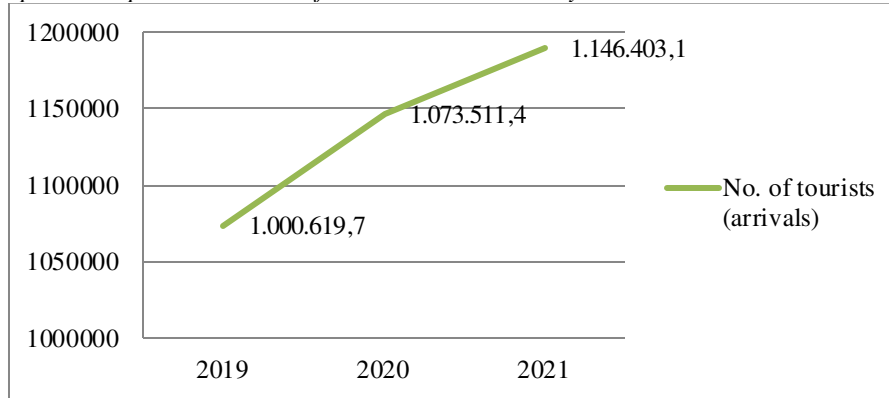
Table no.2 The number of tourists between 2015-2018

Year	Balneary Resorts (no. of tourists)			Romania no. of tourists			The Share of Tourists from the Balneary Sector in Romania (%)		
	Total	Romanians	Foreigners	Total	Romanians	Foreigners	Total	Romanians	Foreigners
2015	779,325	735,869	43,456	9,921,874	7,681,896	2,239,978	7.85	9.57	1.94
2016	851,040	804,955	46,085	11,002,522	8,521,698	2,480,824	7.73	9.44	1.85
2017	945,257	896,515	48,742	12,143,346	9,383,266	2,760,080	7.78	9.55	1.76
2018	1,018,721	979,243	39,478	12,905,131	10,108,509	2,796,622	7.89	9.68	1.41

Source: Drafted by the authors based on data from INSSE

As a result of the distribution of the Romanian and foreign tourists' arrivals in the Romanian balneary resorts, we find that the Romanian tourists account for 90% of the registered arrivals, a dominance that remains constant although the evolution of the number of arrivals of foreign tourists is a positive one. The reasons for this development are numerous, but little relevant, given the low level of the absolute numbers of foreign tourists, irrelevant for the development of export competitiveness of the Romanian balneary sector. As far as the Romanian tourists are concerned, their arrivals at the balneary resorts are equal to the steady growth trends (between 2015-2018) illustrated above by the general figures.

Figure no.3 Perspectives upon the number of tourists in the balneary resorts in Romania between 2019-2021



Source: Drafted by the authors based on data from INSSE

According to the above forecast for the years 2019-2021, the number of arrivals within the balneary resorts in Romania will increase, which means that the interest of the tourists it is not only maintaining itself, but there are no decreases, and there is even an increase, demonstrating that they put more and more value upon their health and want to turn their attention to the places where they can have the treatments which they need and the relaxation they want.

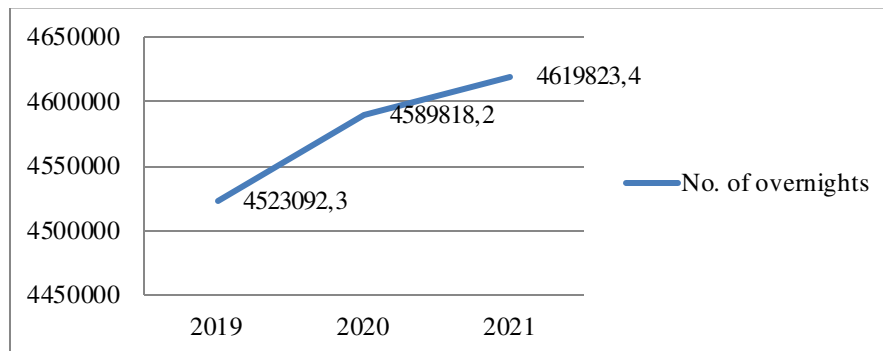
Table no.3 Overnights of tourists in the balneary resorts

Year	Balneary Resorts (no. of tourists)			Romania no. of tourists			The Share of Tourists from the Balneary Sector in Romania (%)		
	Total	Romanians	Foreigners	Total	Romanians	Foreigners	Total	Romanians	Foreigners
2015	3,917,389	3,747,388	170,001	23,519,340	19,047,701	4,471,639	16.65	19.67	3.80
2016	4,192,978	4,021,567	171,411	25,440,957	20,609,141	4,831,816	16.48	19.51	3.57
2017	4,204,898	4,032,534	172,364	27,092,523	21,801,487	5,291,036	15.52	18.49	3.25
2018	4,405,740	4,266,344	139,396	28,644,742	23,315,138	5,329,604	15.38	18.29	2.61

Source: Drafted by the authors based on data from INSSE

Overnight stays have a more negative marginal evolution than that of the arrivals, with a weaker growth in the period 2015-2018, of only 488,351 tourists. This trend indicates the fact that the loss of customers is represented by those customers with stays characterized as "long-term", and do not come from tourists who go to the resort with treatment tickets. This phenomenon is quite worrying for the competitiveness of the balneary sector, indicating the fact that this sector is losing its "paying" clientele for reasons of attractiveness, but also because of the purchasing power, without replacing it with other clients.

Figure no.4 Perspectives upon the number of overnights in the balneary resorts in Romania between 2019-2021



Source: Drafted by the authors based on data from INSSE

In the case of the forecast for the number of overnight stays, the best method was the linear trend, therefore it was used. It is noteworthy that the number of nights spent in a balneary resort will increase "in small steps" between 2019-2021, as it is not an impressive increase and compared to the number of arrivals is a significant difference. This difference between the two components of tourism demand, indicates that not all tourists who come to a balneary resort, stay overnight in it. This may be due to the poorly modernized conditions and the fact that in the balneary tourism predominates the accommodation units with 2 and 3 stars, respectively, and on the other hand the expectations and claims of the tourists are higher, so that they do not fully meet their exigencies.

5. Proposals and recommendations

Creating sustainable communities as well as sustainable forms of life, including the tourism, has been a key objective for many government agencies and community stakeholders. In this context and through the activities that can be proposed, this subchapter seeks to highlight how to maximize the potential for the development of sustainable tourism in balneo-climatic resorts.

This section aims to show that there are a number of activities available in the country that could be done in order to further develop the balneary tourism. What is missing is primarily the promotion of these activities as balneary tourism products, especially by interested parties, such as the national tourism organization and tour operators. Most hotels are increasingly trying to exploit the growing interest in natural health care by developing tourism packages based on different medical procedures and spa treatments.

The participation of stakeholders can be understood in two related ways. In the broader sense, it can be understood as a multitude of techniques or practices by which stakeholders are involved in deciding on the processes of the balneary tourism development. Thus, attending a meeting, engaging in a partnership or a consultation exercise could be described as forms of stakeholder participation to the development. In a narrow sense, stakeholder participation can have a deeper meaning, just like the partnership and collaboration. Thus, some believe that the participation requires more of an active role for the stakeholders, both in the decision-making process and also in the related activities.

The stakeholders can be defined in the tourism field as individuals or groups that can affect or be affected by tourism businesses in a particular market or community and who have interests in planning the tourism process. Among the stakeholders in the field of tourism are the following: the chambers of commerce, the touristic authorities, local tourist agencies, non-governmental organizations, tourism associations and councils, convention and visitor offices, tourism planning and development companies, tourism faculties and professionals, and state parks, as well as visitors and information centers, accommodation units, tourists, etc.

Depending on the type of stakeholders, their benefits within the development are different. Therefore, a clear understanding of their attitudes and interests is a necessary precursor to planning and managing sustainable tourism.

The attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with certain degrees of favoritism or disfavor. It is therefore essential to understand the attitude of local communities, as it also allows other stakeholders in the tourism sector to adopt an appropriate response mechanism to the negative influences of tourism.

The involvement of the community can be defined as being the way in how the residents are involved in the daily activities of the communities where they live. Therefore, tourism development will be more successful with the involvement of local communities, as their perceptions and attitudes are important for the decision-makers in achieving a sustainable balneary tourism.

Touristic accommodation capacities in balneary resorts need to be expanded and upgraded. However, this approach should not affect the degree of attractiveness of the resort in terms of architectural and urban planning. It is important to ensure a high occupancy of the accommodation structures and the limitation of new constructions in order not to clutter the town from an urban point of view and to not environmentally aggravate the green spaces and the neighboring natural landscapes.

Travel agencies play an important role in the development of balneary tourism in Romania. Travel agencies are defined as companies qualified to organize travel-related services on behalf of various managers from the tourism industry.

Travel agencies have a great power to influence and direct the consumer's demands in comparison to other industries. They are not just intermediaries; they act as an interface for the supply and for different segments of the demand. Also, travel agencies can take up different forms and can create very strong and important relationships with service providers in the balneary areas.

As far as the balneary offers are concerned, Romanian travel agencies, and even less so from abroad, do not have a wide range of tourist offers. Improving and diversifying the offers for these touristic areas would bring a major contribution to the development of the spa tourism in our country.

The improvement of the existing touristic offers in the Romanian balneary resorts, as well as the creation of new touristic products must also take into account the demographic changes among the tourists and the implications on their preferences and motivations regarding the trip.

Most of the problems regarding the development of the balneary tourism in Romania are related to the lack of financial resources. Thus, a major investment is needed for the restoration, protection and the touristic valorization of the heritage in these areas, as well as the adequate quipping of the resorts with new treatment technologies and current housing conditions.

6. Conclusions

Romania has a redoubtable potential for balneary tourism; however, the balneary resources are not exploited at their true value. It must be understood how to use these natural resources, the treatment units, to provide a pleasant atmosphere for the tourist so that he spends his time without getting bored. The stays within the balneary tourism, used to be the longest ones, but it got registered an annual decrease which has been worrying, in the number of days spent in treatment facilities. This should be a question mark; an alarm signal must be drawn and awareness must be raised regarding the need to make touristic offers more attractive.

The main objective for the development of balneary tourism in Romania must ensure the effectiveness and consistency of all the actions taken in all areas of activity and by all the stakeholders in order to achieve an optimal outcome. All plans for tourism development in the balneary area should focus on the competent public authority in the field of tourism (National Tourism Authority), as the institution responsible for all implementations. However, we must state that in order to achieve all the objectives that are required for the sustainable development of the balneary resorts in our country, it is necessary to involve all stakeholders through effective actions aimed at improving and promoting the medical services in these areas.

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