TYPES OF TOURISM ASSOCIATED WITH GROUND-WATER RESOURCES IN THE ADJOINING COUNTIES OF SATU MARE AND SZABOLCS-SZATMÁR-BEREG

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ABSTRACT. – Types of tourism associated with ground-water resources in the adjoining counties of Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. Bearing a long and unceasing history based on harnessing the healing effects of thermal and mineral springs, curative tourism represents one of the earliest forms of travel. Due to its multiple facets of medical, social and economic nature, this form has been aligned on a global upward trend, marking thus a shift towards health tourism. At present, the spectrum of health tourism comprises both the medical and wellness dimensions reuniting several specific types (surgical, therapeutic, medical wellness, leisure and holistic), however the practice of such activities strongly depends on the destination components (natural assets, general and tourism infrastructure). In the case of Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties, spas and localities endowed with therapeutic factors (mineral and thermal springs completed with the bioclimatic component) tardily undertake this trend in an attempt to reorganise their touristic offer. Within this context, the present paper aims to explore the prespectives for health tourism development through ground-water resources by emphasising the touristic potential of thermal and mineral springs from the two neighbouring counties. Furthermore, the study has revealed that therapeutic and wellness tourism represent viable directions to generate revenue and revitalise the economy of the area.

KEYWORDS: balneary offer, mineral and thermal springs, health tourism, wellness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marginalised and apparently obsolete, curative tourism stands out as a representative category for the Romanian tourism sector, particularly addressing to older age groups (Ciangă, 2007). Nevertheless, due to the increasing interest in preserving youth, vitality and beauty through natural therapeutic means, this type of tourism is situated on an ascending trend, marking the transition towards health tourism. The latter currently encompasses both the traditional curative tourism and also the wellness dimension (Smith and Puczkó, 2009; Stăncioiu et al., 2013), promoting the adoption of a new well-balanced lifestyle in which diet, exercise and relaxation represent decisive elements.

Nowadays, health tourism offer focuses on two aspects, namely the curative tourism, oriented towards treatment and cure of certain diseases,

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completed with the new health tourism, which is centred on prevention and achieving physical/mental well-being (Hall, 2011; Hofer et al., 2012). At present, health tourism implies a wide spectrum of balneary cures, medical, rehabilitation and prevention procedures, beauty treatments, fitness, meditation and yoga. For each of these products an equivalent tourism type emerges, as well as specific tourism facilities, as presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. ***The current spectrum of health tourism***

MEDICAL		**WELLNESS**		
Surgical	**Therapeutic**	**Medical wellness**	**Leisure and recreation**	**Holistic**
Cosmetic surgery	Treatment and cure	Therapeutic recreation	Beauty treatments	Spiritual counselling
Dentistry	Rehabilitation	Occupational wellness	Pampering	Meditation
	Thalassotherapy		Exercise	Yoga, pilates
	Detox and nutritional programmes (raw-vegan trends)			
RELATED HEALTH TOURISM FACILITIES				
Clinics and hospitals	Medical centres and spas (medical spa, day spa, spa salon, wellness centres)			Holistic centres
Resorts and hotels (lifestyle resort, SPA resort, wellness hotel)				Ashrams

Source: after Smith and Puczkó, 2009; Voight et al., 2010; www.desprespa.ro

Using the current spectrum of health tourism, the present paper aims to highlight the way in which ground-water resources are exploited for tourism and also the prospects for further development.

2. AREA AND RESEARCH METHODS

Against the background shaped by depreciation of environmental quality, stress-related illnesses and a growing concern regarding physical and mental well-being, the neighbouring counties from Satu Mare (Romania) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (Hungary) are undergoing significant changes within their balneary offer. The study area is characterised by the richness in thermal and mineral springs of certified therapeutic value, among which only a few are still exploited for balneary purposes. Thus, the present paper highlights the remarkable health tourism potential of two counties featuring similar assets, the existing balneary arrangements completed with further directions concerning healthcare tourism development.

The former phase of the investigation aims to provide a theoretical framework for the issue of health tourism, the method used in this regard being the study of bibliographic materials and sources of secondary data. Combined with field observations, this method also facilitated an inventory of localities possessing

ground-water resources and identification of the most suitable sources able to support the development of connected tourism activities. The latter stage of the study was based on the comparative approach, an essential method for underlining the attractive resources and the tourism offer from the two adjoining counties. The cartographic method was used to illustrate the spacial distribution of the localities with hydromineral resources and the arrangements related to these assets. The analysis and synthesis methods enabled the centralisation of the acquired information, its processing, followed by the formulation of main conclusions and several development directions for health tourism.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

With regard to the touristic exploitation of the existent ground-water resources from Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties the study reveals certain directions for development as it follows:

3.1. Therapeutic tourism

This type of tourism entails travelling to a resort or locality with balneary factors in order to fulfill therapeutic, rehabilitation or prophylactic procedures. Such services are provided by the Szatmár-Bereg Hospital and Thermal Baths, located in Fehérgyarmat. Exploiting the curative properties of the thermal water (45 ºC) with high content of chlorine and sodium, it offers patients the following procedures: therapeutic baths, medical and relaxation massage, electrotherapy, physiotherapy, hydrokinetotherapy, sauna (www.szszbmk.hu/fehergyarmat).

Resort of national interest, Sóstó Thermal Baths are included into the international circuit due to the quality and diversity of services, competitive prices and easy access (being located at 5 kilometres from the county seat at Nyíregyháza; 100 kilometres from the border crossing point Petea, Romania; 70 km from Chop, Ukraine and 80 kilometres from Streda nad Bodrogom, Slovakia). The resort comprises the following units: Júlia Baths, situated in the centre of Nyíregyháza and declared a resort of regional interest, the complex and waterpark Aquarius, the Park Baths, the Salt Lake Spa and the Spa Hotel Fürdőház***. The medicinal water, due to the high containment of hydrocarbon ions, iodine, bromine and sodium chloride is recommended for treating rheumatism, illnesses related to the locomotor system, dermatological and gynaecological diseases. Beneficial effects are also observed in the case of post-operative treatments, indispensable when it comes to orthopedic surgery (such as hip or knee orthopedic implants) (www.sostort.hu).

The spa complex from Nyírbátor, consisting of Sárkány thermal baths and wellness centre, makes use of the Báthory medicinal water rich in calcium, magnesium and hydrogen carbonate, with total mineralisation of 1.526 mg/L (www.sarkanyfurdo.hu/index.php?id=15). It provides cure opportunities in two pools with thermal water (34-36 °C or 36-38 °C) with jacuzzi and massage jets, along with six outdoor pools.

In the case of Szilva thermal baths from Vásárosnamény, the natural therapeutic factor is represented by the medicinal water with temperature of 45 ºC, containing minerals indicated in treating digestive disorders, joint and gynaecological diseases. Pool water has a temperature of 36º-38 ºC, the therapeutic pool containing orifices which enable cervical, lumbar or sole massage. The alkaline water, rich in hydrogen carbonate, fluorite and iodide from Kisvárda is also recommended for gynaecological and musculoskeletal disorders as well as the medicinal water from Mátészalka (registered as the Treasure of Szatmár), Nagykálló, Fehérgyarmat or Tiszavasvári (Virág et al., 2011).

The opportunities for therapeutic tourism practice are more limited in the case of Satu Mare county, although it comprises similar resources. As soon as the thermal baths were rehabilitated in 2012 and the first water park in the region was opened during the following year, Satu Mare re-enters the health tourism circuit. Cure facilities consist in outdoor thermal pools and aero-heliotherapy arrangements, completed with the thermal pool used for hydrokinetotherapy and the health care centre from Aqua Medica, functioning within the Aquastar water park. The chloro-sodic, bicarbonate, sulphurous thermal water is rich in minerals (especially boron, iron, lithium, calcium, magnesium, manganese, zinc) and is therefore recommended in treating locomotor, osteo-muscular and articular system disorders, rheumatism (inflammatory, degenerative, abarticular), neurologic, gynaecological and skin diseases (Berlescu, 1982), thermal water being also an agent in accelerating the recovery process.

The only settlement in Satu Mare County having the status of resort (of local interest) is Tăşnad, which valorizes the hydrothermal deposits from 1200 m depth, with flow of 1500 m^3/day and surface temperature of 72 °C. The hyperthermal chloro-sodic and bromoiodide springs are indicated in treating degenerative and abarticular rheumatism, post-traumatic disorders and diseases of the peripheral nervous system (Maruşca, 2008). The existing infrastructure includes one indoor and three outdoor pools with thermal water, associated services being also available for tourists (massage and mud pack treatment). During the last decade, several accommodation units have been developed within the resort, some of them endowed with health centres.

The treatment complex Hotca-Albina from Neregti-Oaş recommends the salty, iodine-sulphurous water in treating rheumatic diseases, spondylitis and poliartritis while therapeutic baths based on herbs are indicated in detox programmes, also improving respiratory and cardiac problems (www.baile-albinahotca.ro/index.html). The existence of mineral springs from Oaşului Land, especially the carbonated waters found at: Tarna Mare, Bixad, Negreşti-Oaş, Certeze, Valea Măriei, Turţ, Orașu Nou, completed with the sedative–indifferent bioclimate and the attractive landscape of Oaşului Mountains constitute a definite advantage for Satu Mare county. In the majority of cases, due to lack of interest and proper investment, the existing infrastructure built around these mineral springs got degraded in time.

In addition, the list of the most important localities with balneary factors from Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties, as well as the related infrastructure, can be found in the table 2 below. The distribution of resorts and localities with balneary factors is also presented in figure 1.

Table 2. ***Localities with balneary factors in Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties***

Locality	Natural therapeutic means	Infrastructure and services
Satu Mare	bicarbonated, chloro-sodic, hyperthermal (65 ºC) water	thermal baths, Aquastar waterpark, Aqua Medica
Carei	chlorinated, sodium, iodinated, bicarbonated, calcium, magnesium, hyperthermal (52 ºC) water	thermal pools, cure facilities, water aerobics
Tășnad	chloro-sodic and bromoiodide hyperthermal (72 ºC) spring	resort of local interest
Acâș – Mihăieni	bicarbonated, chlorinated, sodium, calcium, magnesium, hypotonic water	indoor and outdoor thermal pools
Beltiug	chlorinated, sodium, calcium, magnesium hyperthermal (65 ºC) spring	functioning baths until 1986
Ady Endre	bicarbonated, chlorinated, sodium, hypotonic, hyperthermal (72 ºC) water	unexploited
Vama	sparkling, bicarbonated, sulphuruos, chlorinated, iodinated water	Puturoasa Baths fell into decline after 1945
Bixad	sparkling, chlorinated, sodium spring, as well as sulphurous, chlorinated, calcium, magnesium, sodium spring; sedative–indifferent bioclimate	the famous XXth century baths are no longer in use
Turț	ferruginous, sulphated, vitriolic, hypotonic water; sedative–indifferent bioclimate	former seasonal resort of local interest, currently degraded
Certeze	ferruginous, bicarbonated, chlorinated, sodium, calcium water	sparkling water bottled since 1909 (Apolo spring)
Orașu-Nou	bicarbonated, chloride, sodium, isotonic, oligomineral springs	two sources were exploited in the past (at Ardeleanului and Nadoș baths)
Negrești-Oaș	sparkling, bicarbonated, chlorinated, sodium, poor sulphurous, hypotonic water	sparkling water bottled after 1930 (*Perla Oașului*)
Valea Măriei	sparkling, bicarbonated, chlorinated, sulphated, sodium, isotonic water; thermal spring	recreational complex with accommodation, catering units and leisure facilities
Csenger	bicarbonated, chloride, iodinated, hyperthermal (57 ºC) water	currently under arrangement
Vásárosnamény	two hyperthermal sources: at Gergelyiugornya (56 ºC) and Szilva (45 ºC)	Atlantika waterpark, Szilva Thermal & Wellness SPA
Sóstó / Nyíregyháza	alkaline, salt, bromine, iodine thermal water (40 ºC)	Aquarius waterpark, Júlia Baths
Mátészalka	hyperthermal (58 ºC), medicinal water	thermal baths
Nyírbátor	calcium, magnesium and hydrogen carbonate medicinal water	Sárkány thermal baths and wellness
Fehérgyarmat	chloro-sodic, carbonated, hyperthermal water (45 ºC)	Szatmár-Bereg Hospital and Thermal Baths
Kisvárda	alkaline water, rich in hydrogen carbonate, fluoride and iodide	thermal baths

Source: after Berlescu, 1982; Pricăjan, 1985; Virág et al., 2011

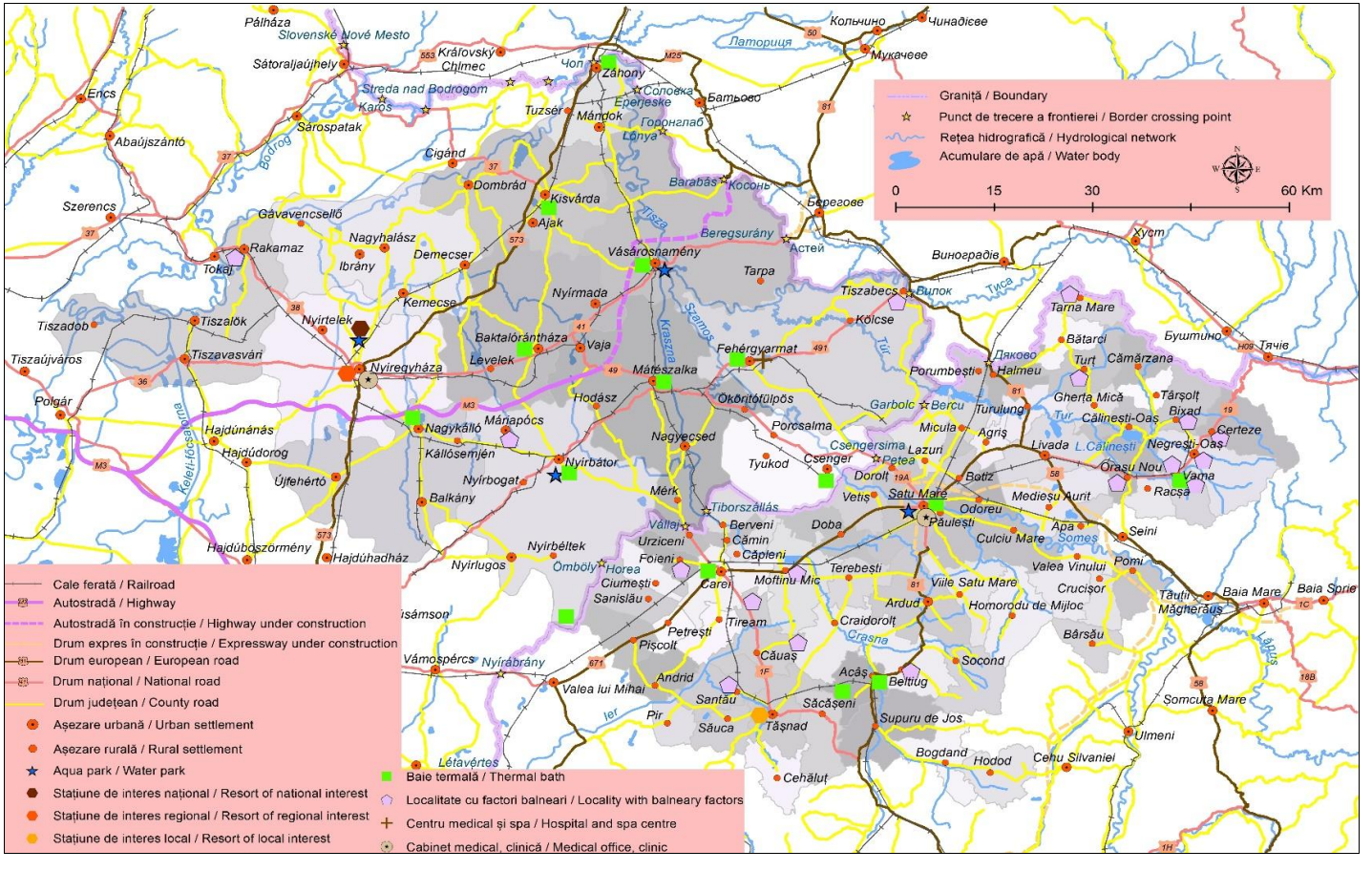

Fig. 1. ***The distribution of resorts and localities with balneary factors in Satu Mare and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties***

3.2. Wellness tourism

Wellness tourism implies a travel undertaken with the purpose of maintaining or improving health and life quality, inducing its followers the state of well-being through achieving a balance between physical, mental and spiritual dimensions. The procedures are meant to deal with stress, anxiety, obesity using the therapeutic effects of natural healing factors as opposed to medication in order to restore health, beauty, vitality and inner balance (Smith and Kelly, 2006; Smith and Puczkó, 2009; Voight et al., 2010). In this context, wellness products become very competitive and appealing, being addressed to a wide range of potential tourists with high income but also pretentious when it comes to service quality. Possessing an exceptional potential for health tourism development, the two analysed counties should restructure their offer by focusing on healthcare and wellness, highly effective tourism types that can be practiced all year round.

3.2.1. Thermal tourism

In the case of the already mentioned thermal baths and resorts another type of tourism can be identified, which can be placed between therapeutic and leisure/recreation tourism. Thermal tourism generally implies a one-day or week-end visit to a thermal bath with the main motivation of relaxation, being aware of the beneficial effects of water on health and well-being. This type can be considered a form of therapeutic wellness, along with the occupational wellness, a dimension which promotes the idea of reaching welfare through work-life balance and occupational performance (Smith and Puczkó, 2009).

3.3.2. SPA tourism

Often referred to as synonymous with wellness tourism, SPA tourism actually defines the most widely known subsegment of this market. Its main focus is on relaxing and curing the body, using as main factor water and aquatic procedures (thermal and mineral springs, mud wrapping, herbal and mineral baths) but also the therapeutic effects of steam chambers and sauna. The methods are directed towards healing, recreation and relaxation (Smith and Puczkó, 2009) and nowadays have also been associated with antistress massage and cosmetic procedures. The last category includes anti-ageing treatments such as: body and facial mesotherapy, chemical peels, microdermabrasion, lifting and facial rejuvenation, such procedures being available in certain clinics and SPA centres from Satu Mare and Nyíregyháza.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Thermal and mineral springs are considered one of the most important assets in the investigated area that allow a long-term exploitation for touristic

purposes. Thus, the present paper highlighted the necessity to readjust the region's balneary offer so as to meet the needs of a growing segment for which wellness and SPA are no longer luxury but a way of life.

More tardive than in the case of the neighbouring county, bath culture has lately become a concern for Satu Mare as well, for this reason the specific infrastructure benefitted from investments. The well-trained personnel, the service quality, the diversified and modern procedures available in Satu Mare, Nyíregyháza or Nyírbátor already mark the shift towards healthcare and wellness, the latter representing a viable direction for further development. In addition, a ludic side can also be revealed, the touristic offer also addressing to families with children in search of aquatic amusement and recreation.

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