

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES TO HEALTH TOURISM CASE STUDY BULGARIA-SERBIA REGION

Krasimira Staneva

University of Forestry, Sofia, Bulgaria, bagg.ks@gmail.com

Abstract: The aim of this study is to evaluate potential of Cross-border region Bulgaria- Serbia for development of sustainability health (medical SPA and SPA tourism) destinations, using geomедical and social –economical assessment of tourism resources.

More than 30 mineral springs (13 were selected) and 180 touristic objects have been studied –13 (were selected) (2018). There are good medico-biological conditions for the development of intensive medical SPA, Wellness and SPA tourism. The combination of free spring's flow and specific climate conditions is a big advantage for the development of high specialized tourism destination as medical SPA.

An algorithm is proposed for modeling a representative tourist destination in the field of health, medical SPA and wellness tourism. It is connected to the development of new tourist services - accessible and varied, aimed to a new target group of high price customer segment, focusing on local resources - scenic views, natural landmarks, specific landscape, local traditions and preserved environment. Destination management is related to its availability and development of alternative routes. The resilience of the health tourism destination is determined by its special social focus - creation and maintenance with a view to overcoming difficulties in the local economy and improving the quality of life of the local population also. For the success of those complex tourist product, it is necessary to manage different nonditional market sources, which implies the dominant role of digital marketing and application of virtual tourism tools to attract satisfied customers.

Keywords: health, Wellness, medical SPA tourism, Cross-border region Bulgaria- Serbia

1. INTRODUCTION

The article presents the main results of a national research project "Evaluation of the potential for development of representative SPA and balneo tourist destinations in the Republic of Bulgaria ", contract № B 28 / 07.03. 2018, University of Forestry.

2. DESIGN OF INVESTIGATION

2.1. Research tasks

The objective of the study is to evaluate potential of Western cross border region (CBR) Bulgaria-Serbia for development of health (medical SPA, SPA and Wellness) tourism.

The main tasks of investigation were:

- Evaluation of geomедical prerequisites for developing of sustainability health (medical SPA and SPA) tourism destinations in the CBR Bulgaria –Serbia;
- Social-economical assessment of conditions

2.2. Methods of investigation

A specifically developed methodology has been applied for implementing the set tasks and achieving the project objective, which has the following sequence:

- ▶ Analysis and assessment of geomедical characteristics of the investigated areas;
Evaluation of social –economical conditions for development of the medical SPA, SPA and Wellness sector in CBR using assessment of the current status of the deposits and their impact on the socio-economic outlook of the region [6];
- ▶ Assessment of the prospective areas for investment purposes;
- ▶ Evaluation of the potential of the areas for development of Wellness, medical SPA and SPA tourism destinations

3. RESULTS

Table 1 Outcomes

Obtained results	Cross-border region objects
An evaluation of the hydrogeological potential	13 mineral springs
Medico-biological assessment of mineral waters	13 mineral springs
Touristic infrastructure audit	13 SPA and medical SPA centers
Geomedical assessment (indoor and outdoor audit)	13 plots
Assessment of SPA centers	13 SPA and medical SPA centres
Assessment of Certification status of SPA centers	13 SPA and medical SPA centers
Medico-social assessment of potential tourism destinations in CBR	13 geographic places
Model for sustainability development of health tourism destinations in CBR	Applicable for all area

Description of thermal springs and their potential for development of health tourism

All of them are situated in Cross-border region Bulgaria- Serbia. More than 13 mineral springs (above 35 wells) have been studied in the Stara planina area, which are in the volume of several hydro geological basins, belonging in geographical respect to the different administrative districts. All of them has own chemical and physical characteristics, but common origin of some of them gave us possibility to combine the springs in some hydro geological groups/basins. The existing abundance of mineral waters, affiliated to different genetic classes, provides the possibility of using it for drinking-domestic purposes (including hygiene needs), irrigation, bottling, heating and cure [2]

➤ **Republic of Bulgaria (7 thermal springs)**

- **Montana district: Varshets basin:** Varshets, Spanchevtsi, Barzia, Slatina, Opletnya, Gabrovnitsa-Elov Dol;

➤ **Republic of Serbia (6 thermal springs, 25 wells)**

-**Vranjachka Banya-** 11 working wells with high geothermal potential , **Topilo-** 18 wells; **Nishka Banya-** Glavni izvor, Suva banja and Školska česma; **Zushanitsa-1;** **Gvozdena-** 1; - **Soko Banya** – Soko area and Joshinska area.

In line with our investigation plan, we evaluated more of 30 springs and choose some of the achieved results and discuss them. The main preconditions for sustainability development of medical SPA, SPA and Wellness are the presence of suitable environmental conditions: fresh air, suitable climate for four tourism seasons, mineral springs with wide medico-biological application, good technical equipment of the wells, free flow rate of springs, high professional experience in the area of medical rehabilitation (Staneva, 2018). Some of investigated objects are well known tourist centers, where there are good hydrogeological conditions for the development of intensive health medical SPA, Wellness and SPA tourism: Varshez, Vranjachka banja, Soko bannja, Barzija.

The medico-biological and medico-social assessment of mineral resources is necessary to manage sustainability tourism destinations. Our portfolio of destination will content special information about geological conditions of water formation, the way of water recharge, which are directly related to the flow rate of water sources and longevity of their use, the hydro technical state of the water sources with the aim of ensuring the necessary sanitary-hygiene and the environmental standards for their exploitation. Finally, the submitted special information about the hydrothermal deposits in CBR with data characterizing the resources, temperature and content of biologically important macro components in the water, as well as description of the individual water sources was the basement of medico-biological assessment of mineral resource for tourism development.

Accommodation and food establishments in CBR

According to on-line reservation company and owner of website Booking.com there are more 100 good equipped tourism objects for accommodation and food. The SPA and Wellness centres has their place in tourism services. More 180 SPA hotels in Sokobanja, Vranjachka banja, Varshets and Barzija joined to web site booking.com.

The Municipal tourism reservation system in Serbia is a quite good connection between the private and public tourism sectors. It is the basement of the developed tourist identity and safety system. All of them are in line to very new managing approach for Balkan health tourism services.

4. DISCUSSION

When we try to develop an international health tourism destination we need to realize the basic role of destination planning, marketing, positioning and branding processes. Some Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of potential health tourism destination in Bulgaria were evaluated, compared to Serbia developed one.

Group of Strengths: environment, climate conditions, natural resources for tourism, thermal springs, tourism centres and well presented infrastructure. The ecological state of the deposits and the utilization of the hydrothermal resources are evaluated as of the current moment on the basis of data from the respective basin directorates. Some recommendations are given for their more rational management, control and protection.

Group of Weaknesses: poor marketing plan, not developed competency model for employees

Group of Opportunities: trade innovation, digital marketing, development of complex tourism services, implementation of unique local tourism attractions, motivation of young people to invest time and efforts in development of local tourism services. Development of Municipal reservation and tourism safety system.

Group of Threats: reduction of social services, reducing of quality of life of local society [5].



Fig. 1 Interaction between resources, economy and health tourism

In line with our results, we can describe the potential areas for health (medical SPA and SPA) tourism destinations: Varshez, Spanchevtsi and Barzia (Montana district) and Vrnachka banja in Serbia. There are preconditions for development of complex health tourists destinations including eco-tourism, geomedical and forest recreation tourism [4]. Tasting healthy authentic Bulgarian/Serbian cuisine, fishing, horseback riding and hippo therapy, sun bathing (heliotherapy) and field treatment at the individual treatment program [7] are part of health tourism destination.

Profile of sustainability health tourism destinations

The international tourism destination as a multifunctional structure has different elements. The destinations as composite products consisting of a bundle of different components including:

- accommodation and food establishments,
- mineral springs / thermal springs;

- medical SPA and Wellness centers;
- tourist attractions;
- cultural venues and the natural environment with good characteristics;
- Municipality reservation and tourism safety system.

Development strategy of sustainability tourism health destination

Creation of new touristic services - accessible and diverse, aiming to new target group (high cost income countries) [1, 2, 3];

- Focus on local attractions- an aesthetic landscape, caves, scenic views, ecological- biological environment;
- Management of destination access (development of alternative routes);
- Social focus- to reforce local economic and to improve the quality of life of local population;
- Management of different market source out of traditional as Russia, England, EU citizens;
- Development of Municipality tourism safety system

5. CONCLUSION

The cross –border region is characterized by different types of mineral waters, applicable for medical treatment and cure. The combination of mineral water and specific climate conditions is a favorable prerequisite for the development of health (medical SPA and Wellness) therapy and tourism. Finding a good balance between interior, unique environment, highly qualified personnel, quality of services and innovation products as Geomedical and Forest recreation tourism, will contribute regional cooperation for more sustainability and socially significant activity [8].

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Димитрова, Б., 2019. Когнитивно дефиниране на уелбийнг индекса. Рекреативна & Wellness Индустрия и Нишов Туризъм с. 68 – 78.
- [2] Станева, К., Е. Маринов, 2014. Концептуален модел за устойчиво развитие на Wellbeing и medical SPA в България, използвайки геомедицински индикатори, Тракийски университет, Мед. Колеж, 301-306.
- [3] Станева, К. 2017. Предизвикателства пред здравния туризъм в България. Международно научно списание за иновации „Рекреативна&Wellness Индустрия и Нишов Туризъм“, ISSN: 1314-3433, 31-35.
- [4] Станева, К., 2017. Моделиране на туристически дестинации. Изд. Авангард Прима. 98стр. ISBN 978-619-160-843-0. Второ допълнено издание.
- [5] Dimitrova, B., A. Naumovski - research in kinesiology, 2017. Opinions of Balkan consumers about quality standards for wellness services and certified skills of specialized staff. 2017/1/1, vol.45/1.
- [6] Illing, K.-T, 2006. Mental Issues of Health Tourism Industry- Macro Economic Approach to Relaxation, Personal Growth and Consciousness Exploration. 165 p.
- [7] Нешева И., Дел Пе, В. 2018. Wellness спортни програми при бременни жени (част II), Спорт и наука. Научно-методическо списание бр. 5, 190-197.
- [8] Димитрова Б., Ал. Наумовски, Т. Стивенс, И. Нешева, А. Недев, Л. Димитрова, С. Елемаа, К. Кроника, 2018. Социјално значење на велнес (wellness) култура. Velvet проект. Velvet project no 2016-1-bg01-ka202-023690. Компаративна анализа од научни податоци истражување на галуп интернешенел (Gallup international). Авангард Прима, ISBN: 978-619-160-990-1-2 Еразмус + K2, 2016-2018.