

Development opportunities for spa tourism in Vâlcea Subcarpathians: Towards a single European market

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Nowadays tourism has undoubtedly become essential to both national and international economies and each country is currently trying to face the challenges imposed by this industry. In this respect, Romania has introduced a new range of treatments in the spa tourism field which proved to be therapeutic for a significant number of patients. The article aims to assess the feasibility of spa tourism in Vâlci Subcarpathians offering a clear analysis of the evolution of the material and technical base of the resort. Therefore, the study focused on the evaluation of both natural and man-made resources favourable to the emergence and development of the spa resorts from Vâlcea County, Romania. At the same time, the authors gave it a touch of originality by shaping the development perspectives of Vâlcea Subcarpathian region. The research has a solid theoretical background based on relevant papers and fundamental studies in spa tourism meant to offer a significant overview of the subject. The main results are based on a survey which was conducted in order to determine the quality degree of the accommodation and treatment in the region under study as well as the accessibility of the population to such services. At the same time, the paper outlines the main weaknesses and opportunities regarding the activities of spa tourism in Vâlcea Subcarpathians as a starting point for a further development strategy.

Key Words: *European market, Spa tourism, Tourism programmes.*

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Introduction

One Tourism is arguably the second largest industry in the world; estimates from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) suggest that in 2013 it generated 265.855.000 jobs world-wide and accounts for 9,5% of global GDP.

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This includes employment by hotels, travel agents, airlines and other passenger transportation services (excluding commuter services). It also includes, for example, the activities of the restaurant and leisure industries directly supported by tourists.

Tourism plays an essential role for local economies, too and its importance extends well beyond core hospitality and transportation sectors. It generates jobs and therefore reduces unemployment. It also has a major contribution to attracting workers from the labour surplus in other fields. In Romania, the revival of spa tourism became a major objective for the authorities involved in organizing and promoting this type of tourism. Apart from the economic benefits, the need of health facilities shaped as tourist products is dictated by the population who is currently affected by an unhealthy lifestyle, unbalanced diets, alcohol and tobacco consumption etc. Moreover, the new tourists no longer see spas as places to "take the waters or undergo treatments, but have instead become places that mix pampering and wellness by offering relaxation, fitness and stress relief". In this respect, health tourism does not only include treatment with curative intent (mostly designed for seniors), but also prevention treatments for relaxation (enjoyed by youngsters, too).

Spa tourism – a strategic asset for economic development in Europe

Tourism is a priority for European Union, too, due to the contribution to reaching its social and economic objectives, especially to "employment and regional development, sustainable development, an enhanced natural and cultural heritage and shaping of a European identity". Its importance is underlined in official discourses and papers, mostly by the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions¹, and stated in the Lisbon Treaty in the Article 2 E:

The Union shall have competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States. The areas of such action shall, at European level, be: (a) protection and improvement of human health; (b) industry; (c) culture; (d) tourism; (e) education, vocational training, youth and sport; (f) civil protection; (g) administrative cooperation.¹

The spa product (also named balneomedical) is the result of a mixture of natural healing factors used through a wide range of procedures and treatments performed in resorts (Rouzade G., 1998)

Given the importance of tourism to EU countries, a series of resolutions, documents and directives on this activity have been adopted. They provide measures that consider several issues divided into distinct areas. Some of these actions refer to quality standards in the hotel industry in Europe, to medical tourism, tourism development, etc.

With regard to medical tourism, European spa sector seeks revival through: use of all available Community Programmes (including The Second Programme of Community Action in the Field of Health) to promote medical tourism;

¹ Economic and Social Committee, *Opinion on the european tourism policy*, Brussels, 24-25,2003, pag. 2.

involvement of insurance undertakings to support medical tourism, the adoption of specific Community directives to define the recognition and the use of spa resorts and the role of health tourism and thermal cures alongwith existing tourist resources (S. Clift, J. Page, 1996) .

The emergence of spa resorts can be traced back to Classical Greece and Rome where incipient health tourism developed, aimed at promoting health and vitality for the individual. The proof lies in the tourism infrastructure we inherited from the Roman Empire that existed to facilitate access to thermal health spas. These were constructed throughout Europe and still provide the foundations of many of the world's most identifiable resorts and destinations, such as Aix, Aachen, Bath and Baden .

During the medieval period, especially in the 17th century, several other resorts became famous due to their healing waters: Montecatini și Lucc in Italy, Varna in Bulgaria, Epsom and Tunbridge in England. It appears that the origin of the word spa dates back to the same period when the Belgian blacksmith Collien le Loup went in 1326 to Espa² spring near Liège, southern Belgium, to cure his body. However, it is commonly claimed that the word is an acronym of Latin phrases such as "Salus Per Aquam" or "Sanitas Per Aquam" meaning "health through water"

Also for spa tourism a wide variety of concepts are used. French specialists use the notion of balneotherapy "representing the use of water, for therapeutic purposes (not of mineral, thermal or seawater)" (Rouzade G., 1998). The term health tourism is also used. The meaning of the concept, is diversified, and ranges from "the insurance of health, using the country's natural resources, in particularly mineral waters and climate" (IUOTO,1983) to "spending the free time, away from home, and one of the objectives is to improve one's state of health"(Clift S., Page J., 1996)

The analysis of the so-called international spa tourism was conducted by many states due to the fact that the European spa resorts attract patients ready to pay a great amount of money for a self-tailored spa treatment. This affirmation is also strenghtened by the increased demand of this type of products, which is influenced either by general factors (such as population growth, higher living standards, increased need for rest and leisure etc) or more specific factors such as the tendency to combine medical treatment with recreation and rest in a pleasant natural environment.

At the moment, the demand for health tourism reached values of approximately 10-15% of total tourism demand in Europe, with Germany on top of the hierarchy (67% of the tourism demand and 330 spa resorts), followed by Austria (10,6%), Italy (4,4%), Spain (3,3%), France (3,4%). At the same time, in order to attract a large number of tourists for spa treatment European countries have taken action towards the revival of the spa resorts, investing in the infrastructure and providing a highly qualified medical assistance. In this respect, adjacent services came to meet the new demand, joining the traditional treatments and addressing a new target group: aromatherapy, stress relief, lymphatic drainage, pressure therapy, reflexology, beautification treatments etc. (Becheri, 2005).

² *Espa* in Walloon language means *well*.

The development strategy of Romanian spa tourism

Romania holds a rich variety of natural therapeutic resources, such as mineral waters, sapropelic mud, gas emissions etc. which, due to their distribution, led to the emergence of more than 150 spas of local, national and international interest. For Romania, health tourism has several major advantages, both for the customers and for the tourism industry; it features a wide diversity of natural healing factors and the products offered are cheaper than most of the other European health tourism products on the market. It is not subject to seasonality and it generates significant revenues. According to the National Association of Travel Agencies (ANAT), a medical tourist spends, on average, between EUR 1500 and EUR 2000 for treatment plus EUR 1500 on accommodation and food.

Based on the existing Romanian spa tourism offer, but also on the models provided by other countries, the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, alongside with several companies and non-governmental bodies proposed a national Spa Tourism Development Master Plan.

Therefore, the initial Romanian national strategy was based on several steps that referred to the identification of the spa areas, on setting strategic priorities that could be applied and carried out through the development of traditional spa tourism together along with the modern spa centres (Ministry of Tourism, 1993). After joining the European Union in 2007 the strategy became more specific, the action plan focusing on three distinct directions: giving credibility to spa treatments and to spa sector in general, identifying the market segments to be favoured and to setting the working principles and methods. In this respect, the proposed market segments to be favoured are: thermal towns, the anti-aging treatments spa resorts, the traditional spa sector and the revival of urban spa centres. Needless to say that all these directions ask for an accurate legislative framework, transportation and infrastructure development, environment protection, simplification of border formalities, improvement of travel insurance system and of payment system. It is also essential provide better protection and information for tourists regarding travel conditions, accommodation and tourist attractions.

The development and promotion of spa tourism in Vâlcea Subcarpathians is essential for the emergence of the resorts and for the economic development of the entire region. Even if several researchers underlined the importance of the area by analysing the settlements, the geography and the geology of the region, there is no holistic approach to offer an overview of the spa resorts and their economic and social impact.

Resorts in Vâlcea County – an opportunity to develop spa tourism that meets European standards

Situated in the Southern part of Romania, on both sides of the River Olt, Vâlcea Subcarpathians are a subdivision of the Getic Subcarpathians, representing about one third of their expansion (1350 square km). At the same time, they are one of the oldest hearths in Romania and they were first documented in January 1392, by Mircea I of Wallachia. The region is described as an intermedi-

ate landform between mountains and lower regions outside them and is an association of hills that are separated by valleys or basins (Badea et al., 2008).

Vâlcea Subcarpathian region holds a wide range of resources, both natural (terrain, climate, rich and diverse spa and medical resources) and man-made (ancient and medieval remnants, churches, monasteries, citadels and many others).

The localization of Vâlcea Subcarpathians, West of Topolog and East of Olte , the geological sub-layers, the rich landscape and favourable climate are key points that led to the presence of hydromineral sources. Vâlcea Subcarpathians are one of the most populated regions of the Getic Subcarpathians and there are traces of material culture which date back to the Neolithic Era, underlining the fact that the development of settlements was favoured by natural conditions.

The settlements, the specific economic activities and the significant number of hydromineral resources are determinants of the community's behaviour. The various mineral resources (over 50 mineral springs, therapeutic salts, vegetable slime, salt mines), combined with the suitable climate which are present in the region under study favoured the emergence and the development of the resorts in Vâlcea Subcarpathians.

Three resorts situated in this area are of international interest: Baile Govora, Baile Olanesti and Calimanesti-Caciulata). The evolution and localization of the spa centres are closely linked to the emergence, quality and size of existing hydromineral resources. Tourists enjoy, aside from rare and spectacular views, a wide range of hydromineral resources that are beneficial to treating various diseases, such as respiratory diseases, cardiovascular, digestive diseases, endocrine diseases, ENT, gynaecological, locomotive diseases and so on.

“The birth of a resort is either the proof of the first chemical analysis performed on water (which also serves as attestation certificate for the locality itself) or the publishing of articles regarding the spa treatment” (Berbescu E., 1998). The documentary attestation of therapeutic waters in the Vâlcea Subcarpathians dates back to 1829-1876, when there were run several chemical tests of mineral springs, revealing their composition and especially the quality and the benefits of these sources.

Methodology

Tourism is a complex process that uses a series of quantitative and qualitative methods that help underline the elements of potential that are present in the region.

Quantitative research is mostly based on questionnaires and it helps establish relevant aspects that have been identified in the analysed region (especially those that refer to spa tourism). Krueger and Cassey (2005) divide the qualitative research into: observation, experiment and occasional investigation (surveys). For the current paper the qualitative research was carried out with the purpose of obtaining answers from subjects (a smaller number, in contrast to the total number of tourists that come to the resorts) that focus on determining the qualitative nature of spa tourism. The focus is on outlining the main aspects of

the problem that needs research and diagnosing the situation; identifying hypothesis for future descriptive or causal research; exploring reasons, attitudes and values; testing new product ideas; identifying alternatives and analysing them; identifying new products or services, and improving existing ones at the same time.

The present study is based on a hypothetic-deductive approach that starts with a theoretical construction that is considered to be true and is then corroborated with the observed reality in order to be validated. The approach serves both to understand the complex situation of tourism in general, as a phenomenon, and that of spa tourism in particular and it consists of a double observation, put together on a geographic fundament, one from a general perspective and the other from a local perspective: the well-shaped physical and geographical sub-unit, Vâlcea Subcarpathians.

The main findings of the paper were drawn upon the answers of 448 respondents who filled in a questionnaire that aimed to determine the tourist perception regarding the quality of the services provided by the accommodation units and the spa centres, but also to shape the spa tourist profile. The survey was conducted annually between 2011 and 2013 during four different periods: 15-30th of April, 15-30th of May, 1-15th of September and 1-15th of October, taking into consideration the social factor (part of the tourists come to get treatment with the help of trade unions, rest homes, physician referrals or vouchers that lower or even halve costs).

The questionnaire includes questions and is made up of two parts, addressing the issues analysed in the present study. The first part of the questionnaire refers to the demographics of the target group (age, sex, education and profession) and to their options and preferences regarding accommodation in the resorts.

The second part of the questionnaire highlights aspects that refer to the respondents' health condition, their main ailments, if they have a family doctor or not, why they need medical care and also how they chose the resort where they were interviewed, what type of treatment they were undergoing and especially how they perceived the quality of the services provided by the facilities in the region.

Furthermore, the methodology also included secondary sources of information, which were subject to analysis, such as: statistics provided by the National Statistics Institute, year books from the Regional Statistics Directorate of Vâlcea County, several governmental reports, and press releases, followed by a general mapping of the main indicators of spa tourism.

The limits of the research refer either to the lack of statistics at a local and regional level or to the refusal of the respondents to provide some information that was part of the questionnaire.

Development plans for Vâlcea Subcarpathians

The Subcarpathian region offers full accessibility for the development of the existing spa tourism, a possibility that should be exploited in its entirety by modernizing the roads as well as using basic tourism interpretation techniques

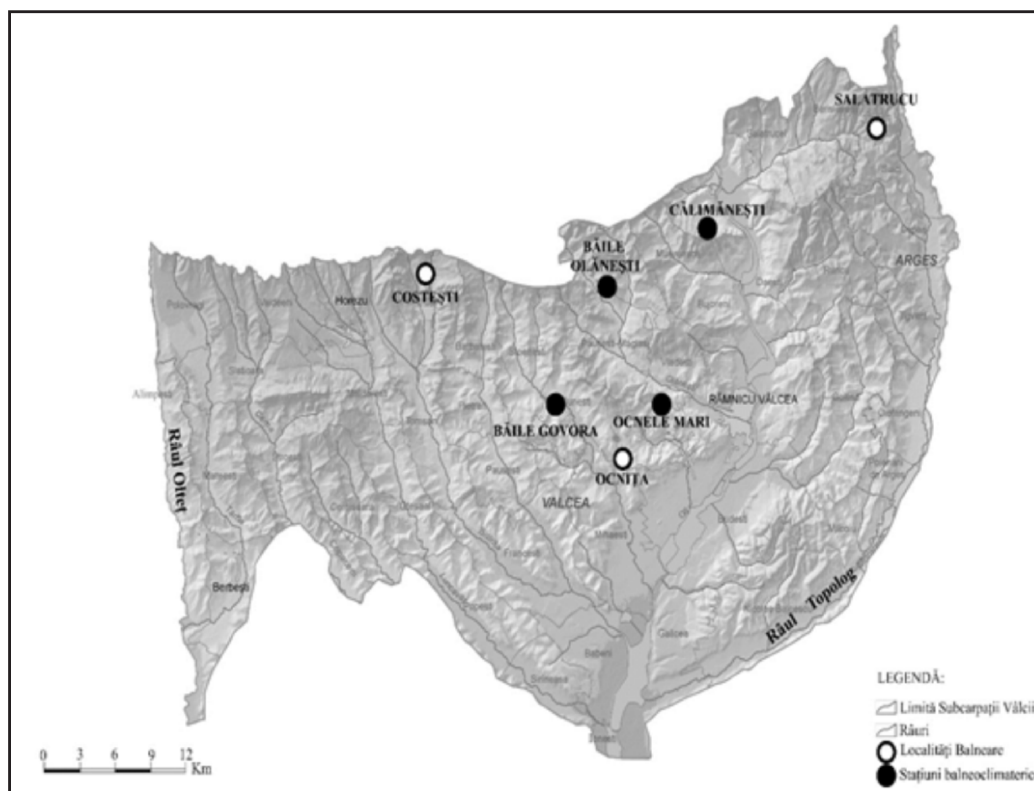


Figure 1. The distribution of spa resorts in Vâlcea Subcarpathians (Roanghes-Mureanu, 2012)

such as placing indicators to guide Romanian tourists easier and especially foreigners that come to visit this region. However, there are four big drawbacks: the infrastructure, the marketing, the public-private partnership and the staff (since older employees are preferred to younger ones that are specialized according to new standards).

In the region that we analysed, there are two towns and four resorts that have hydromineral resources. Three of them are resorts of national interest, like Baile Olanești, Baile Govora and Calimanești-Caciulata, one of them of local interest, like Ocnele Mari – Ocnita, as well as the villages Costești and Salatrucu.

Baile Olanești, Baile Govora and Calimanești-Caciulata have evolved in a positive way during the communist period, because of the strategy to attract tourists, both Romanians and foreigners, in large numbers. This was accomplished by improving the infrastructure and also by creating tourist programmes.

Ocnele Mari, Ocnita and Costești, that have great potential, need to be revived. In this respect, the spa facilities have to be rebuilt and the resort have to be modernized. There is less information on the Northern part that is of local interest, Salatrucu, and it only refers to the existence of sulphurous waters. Currently, there are no facilities there, because the waters dried up many years ago. There used to be a sulfurous spring, 2 km away from the village Salatrucu de Sus, at Vadu Frumos (Figure 1).

In order to improve and develop spa tourism efficiently in Vâlcea, according to European standards, we must take into consideration the evaluation of the

existing circumstances and problems of the geographical area under study and also the influence that external factors have on this area.

The demand for spa tourism is generated by certain factors: tourists need facilities for self-tailored spa treatments as well as facilities for rest and leisure; local people need to grow a sense of local pride and to feel the economic benefits of the entire process.

When thinking about a development strategy the main reasons for developing this type of tourism need to be taken into consideration and used for efficient advertising campaigns. Some of them refer to: promoting the region through tourism, gaining economic progress of the region, growing the living standards (creating jobs, improving life conditions for local people, creating new leisure and recovery opportunities for tourists and local people, increasing the number of physicians, developing social balneotherapy).

In this respect, spa programmes (O săptămână de refacere, Hai la Bai, etc.) as well as festivities and spa-themed conferences, fairs and events (Bursa și Forumul de Turism Balnear) can contribute in a positive way to reaching the objectives. However, the strategy must also focus on authenticity (promoting the values and traditions of the region) as well as on being environmentally friendly. This means that the tourist products need to meet certain quality standards and all the stakeholders should focus on increasing the length of stay through offering diversity and developing various tourist attractions.

Tourism and balneotherapy in the resorts of the Vâlcea Subcarpathians

The tourist demand in Vâlcea Subcarpathians mostly focus on spa tourism and this is also underlined by the national statistics. The policies and the measures taken by the local authorities have been pretty subjective, as they preferred to promote 2-3 stars accommodation to Romanian and foreign tourists. The prices are accessible, compared to a foreigner's (and even a Romanian's) purchasing power and the staff is specialized and it provides quality services and medical care. These measures are meant to bring economic growth by improving and developing spa resorts but this also depends on the existence of an adequate institutional framework for the government, spa resorts and commercial companies.

Accommodation and treatment facilities play an extremely important role in the development of the resorts. They serve the purpose of attracting Romanian and foreign tourists that are eager to spend their vacation in a Romanian spa resort. Currently, there are over 11.000 available beds in the accommodations units in the region. Another favourable element is the expertise of people that are specialized in tourism and hospitality in the Romanian system of rural tourism and ecotourism.

By analysing the tourism data in the resorts in Vâlcea, a continuous growth of the tourist flow can be noticed over the last years. After the year 2000, there was a dramatic decrease in domestic tourism, due to the falling living standards of Romanians, the deterioration of the infrastructure and facilities and the poor quality of services. The tourist demand can be analysed according to the type of

accommodation unit (eg.: hotel, hostel, motel, villas, boarding house, bed and breakfast etc.).

In order to determine the tourist flow in the analysed region, the variables from each resort were taken into consideration. As expected, Baile Olanesti, Calimanesti-Caciulata and Baile Govora reached the highest values compared to Ocnele Mari and Costesti. The year 2002 reveals the following numbers: between 0 and 793,5 tourists/100 inhabitants, the year 2008: between 5,4 and 1012 tourists/100 inhabitants, and the year 2012: between 24,2 and 1050,9 tourists/100 inhabitants.

The percentage of the existing accommodation capacity (no. of units) of the resorts in Vâlcea Subcarpathians out of the total summed up by the Romanian spa tourism, witnessed a significant growth from 8,5% in the year 2000 to 22,5 % in the year 2008. This phenomenon could have as main cause the implementation and the development of new accommodation facilities in Vâlcea resorts while the rest of Romania was subject to a slight decrease in this field. On the top of the hierarchy there is Calimanesti-Caciulata, which hosted 40.000 tourists, Baile Olanesti with 30.000 and Baile Govora with 15.000 tourists. Last but not least, there are Ocnele Mari and Costesti with inconclusive data. If we take into consideration the number of beds in the accommodation units in the spa resorts from Vâlcea compared to the same indicator at a national level, a slight increase can be noticed (from 16,1% in 2000, to 18,4% in 2008). Other important indicators of tourist demand are the number of arrivals and nights spent at the resort, as well as the average length of stay. With respect to the number of tourists that arrive at the spa resorts in the Vâlcea Subcarpathians, in relation to the total number of tourists that visit Romania, it has been trending upwards between 2000 and 2008, when it held values such as 14,6 %, and 20,1 % in 2008. There was a decrease in 2012, to 18,9%. The analysis performed in 2012 for each spa resort in Vâlcea reveals a large number of arrivals in Calimanesti-Caciulata (80.101 tourists), Baile Olanesti and Baile Govora (37.425, 12.258 tourists respectively). On the other hand, there are Ocnele Mari and Costesti, that attracted 1015 and 785 tourists respectively.

The number of nights spent in spa resorts (in 2012) is also an important indicator for Vâlcea Subcarpathians and reveals a hierarchy that is similar to that of the arrivals. The first place goes to Calimanesti-Caciulata that has 483.191 tourist nights, followed closely by Baile Olanesti, with 397.334 tourist nights. Next comes Baile Govora, with 158.091 tourist nights and last but not least, the other two resorts: Ocnele Mari (2528 tourist nights) and Costesti (868 tourist nights).

The average length of stay in 2008 saw a different evolution for each resort. The largest average number of nights spent at a resort was in Baile Govora (9,5 days), in comparison to Baile Olanesti (8,2 days) or Calimanesti-Caciulata (6,1 days). Tourists that came to Costesti and Ocnele Mari-Ocna had the shortest stays: 4,4 days and 1,9 days respectively. When it comes to the type of accommodation they chose, they mostly preferred hotels when they had longer stays. The other types of accommodation have shorter stays, in comparison with hotels. There is no statistical information from the Regional Statistics Directorate of Vâlcea County about how many tourists stayed with friends or relatives.

The analysis of the quality of spa treatment services

There are several factors that determine the therapeutic profile of a spa resort. In this situation, the warm climate, along with an average annual temperature of + 90C, relatively high humidity of max. 87% (from November to December) and min. 68% (from July to August), together with the mineral springs found along two important rivers (Olănești and its tributary, Tisa), are useful in treating diseases such as respiratory diseases, cardiovascular, digestive diseases, endocrine diseases, ENT, gynaecologic, dermatological diseases, degenerative diseases, convalescence after acute and chronic infectious diseases (in Baile Olănești) or digestive diseases, liver, kidney and bladder dysfunction, nutritional diseases, respiratory and locomotive diseases (in Calimănești-Căciulata) (Figure 2).

The mineral waters and the sapropelic mud from Ocnele Mari are used for degenerative diseases, rheumatism, post-traumatic ailments, gynaecologic diseases, cardiovascular diseases (varicosity) and mineral waters from Govora are used externally for locomotive diseases, endocrine diseases, gynaecologic diseases, peripheral and central neurological diseases (paresis, post-polio syndrome), peripheral circulatory problems, ganglionic afflictions, mercury, arsenic or bismuth poisoning, ENT diseases (sinusitis, tonsillitis), respiratory diseases (chronic bronchitis, trachea bronchitis, bronchial asthma).

The sulphurous waters cover smaller surfaces and are distributed alongside a wide variety of landforms. They can be found in sedimentary deposits of different ages. Mineral waters in Baile Olănești are accumulated in Eocene (most springs and drills) and Oligocen conglomerates (the springs in Cheii Valley). In the beginning, there were only one hotel and one hydrotherapy facility. After 1989, both accommodation and treatment facilities started developing. Most hotels have their own spas (eg. Olănești Hotel, Parâng Hotel, Select Hotel and Central Hotel).

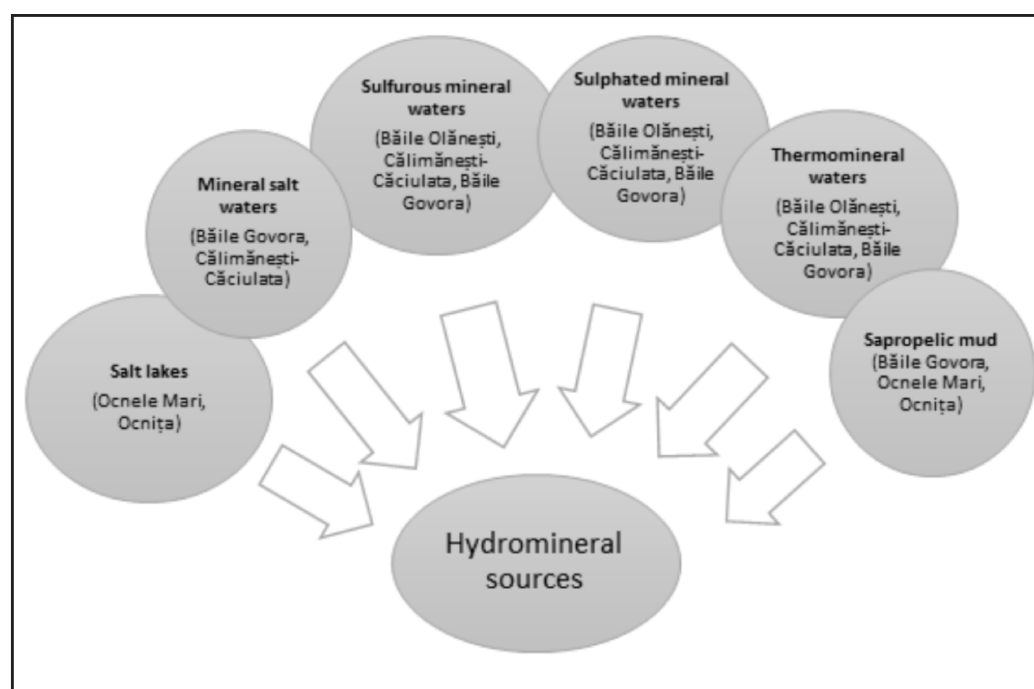


Figure 2. Hydromineral sources in Vâlcea Subcarpathians

There is also a notable health centre at Livadia Hotel that holds high quality equipment. The diseases that can be treated are digestive, respiratory, ENT, locomotive etc. There is a wide range of treatments that use thermotherapy, magneto therapy, kinetic therapy, electrotherapy, galvanotherapy and so on. In the past, spa resorts were seen as resorts either for internal or external cure, depending on the existing mineral waters. After 1948, the number of drills multiplied, in order to help those that already existed. These drills offered facilities the possibility to get supplies under better circumstances, since initially they were overcharged.

Today, aside from natural therapeutic factors, the resorts in Vâlcea have a wide range of physiotherapeutic procedures, by using complex methods for treatment, in facilities with equipment for balneotherapy, crenotherapy, climatotherapy, hydrotherapy and thermotherapy, depending on each resort. Moreover, they have modern equipment that is handled by specialized staff, supervised by specialized medical staff. This is used to provide treatment for ailments for which patients need assistance, and physical therapy, depending on the stage of their disease. At the same time, the demand for spas, fitness and beautification treatments is increasing, and this will lead to a growth of the number of people who choose prevention treatment over the next years, in comparison to those who used to come to get classic spa treatment.

Another important segment of the demand for spa tourism are children. They come to resorts to treat respiratory diseases, rhino pharyngitis that relapses, repeated otitis (which calls for mineral sulphurous waters or aerosols used in salt mines). There is an increasing demand from athletes; the reason behind it is the fact that thermal medicine, combined with sports medicine, has a well-known positive effect. Baile Olanesti, Calimanești-Caciulata and Baile Govora are famous resorts that host a significant number of athletes every year that go into training camps. They have at their disposal gyms, swimming pools, saunas and specialized healthcare. In order to determine the motivation and the profile of the spa tourist from Vâlcea Subcarpathians resorts an investigation was conducted. Moreover, one of the objectives of the research was to assess the quality of the services performed inside the treatment units, as well as the variety and quality of the treatment provided by the medical staff.

These questionnaires were applied in 2011-2013, in spa resorts in Vâlcea Subcarpathians, on a significant sample. Furthermore, the data was collected between 15-30th of April, 15-30th of May, 01-15th of September and 01-15th of October, when there is the highest tourist flow, according to the Statistics Directorate of Vâlcea County. Hence, the ways the tourists chose treatment tickets were very varied, beginning with recommendations from friends and relatives (32,6%), from travel agencies (4,7%), catalogues, guides (2,3%) and even ads in newspapers, on TV, on the internet (2,3%). Most tourists pick a spa resort based on the information they receive at Health Centres or County Houses of Pensions (40,7%).

Among the respondents there are 90,7% that have a family doctor, which proves how important it is for the population to be under medical care. However, a percentage of 9,3% of respondents do not have a family doctor, which should determine authorities to create awareness campaigns regarding its importance.

There is a tendency when it comes to spa tourism which refers to why people choose a certain resort. 51,2% of respondents come for treatment, 27,9% to relax and 20,9% for unknown reasons. When it comes to resorts, the most visited are Ocnele Mari-Ocniaa (62,5%), followed by Baile Olanesti and Calimanești-Caciulata with 52,9% and 45,8% respectively. Baile Govora has a slightly lower percentage, 45,5%, and the respondents that came to Costești provided the smallest values, since none had come for treatment. At the same time, regarding the quality of the services in treatment units, 51,2% of the respondents are satisfied with the spa treatment they received and only 3,5% are not satisfied. 16% of them claim that there is no facility where they can get treatment in the resort where they are accommodated, which makes them hold their opinions to themselves. When it comes to the price they paid for a ticket, 58 % of the respondents paid between 501-1000 lei, 17,4% less than 501 lei, 18,6% between 1001-1500 lei and only 5,8% paid more than 1504 lei.

Although there are some deficiencies, the region analysed is characterized by modern accommodation and efficient personnel. There are small issues that travel agents and local authorities must deal with. Given the fact that in the near future spa resorts will play a more and more important role in people's lives it is a priority to improve and develop the infrastructure in order to meet the needs of the new tourist who, "by pampering himself, or undertaking a holiday to escape the pressures of everyday life, is able to experience feelings of rejuvenation, relaxation and wellbeing" .

Conclusions

Spa tourism is an old tradition, especially because the resorts in Vâlcea Subcarpathians are rich in hydromineral resources, which are beneficial for a wide range of treatments. There are many advantages of developing this tourism field, from economic advantages (spa tourism generates new jobs and can determine economic growth in the region), to curative advantages.

The research conducted led to the conclusion that due to the new trends in health tourism and due to the preferences of the contemporary tourist it is a priority to create a coherent development strategy for spa tourism in Romania and particularly in Vâlcea Subcarpathians.

Regionally, the resorts should focus on developing treatment facilities, as this is the main motivator for tourists. High quality equipment, the use of a wide range of procedures and specialised staff are only a few elements that must be taken into consideration while creating new directions for spa tourism.

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