

Sustainable Development of Spa Tourism in the Romanian West Development Region

Cipriana Sava¹

Abstract: Sustainable development of tourism includes itself in world development politics based on respect and care towards the surrounding environment. Spa tourism is one of the ancient types of tourism developed by mankind and it attracts presently more people than those who have health problems. Romania has numerous spa resorts at several levels such as local, regional, national or international ones, and they are all based on diverse tourism resources. Spa tourism is also present in the West Development Region and its revival can be attained by taking into consideration the principles of sustainable development.

Keywords: development region; sustainable development; spa tourism

JEL Classification: R110; Q01; L83

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the humans' activities that have known permanent development along time. The motivations of the potential tourists being multiple, the types and forms of tourism have evolved relatively at a fast pace. The great number of people spending their leisure time in different locations has led to the development of general and specific infrastructure.

Wanting to offer tourists more and more facilities, the environment, local population, safety and quality of services did not matter in many areas.

Pollution through tourism is a reality which, lately, has tried to be diminished or even eliminated. Thus, sustainable development is a concept accepted by specialists from several states of the world.

The idea of sustainable development was the answer to the pollution felt worldwide and was presented in 1972 during the UNO Conference on the Environment, which took place in Stockholm. It was only in 1983 that the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) was established.

¹ Associate Professor, PhD, Faculty of Tourism and Commercial Management Timisoara, Christian University "D. Cantemir" Romania, Address: 176 Splaiul Unirii, District 4, Bucharest, Romania, Tel.: +4 0213307900, Corresponding author: cipriana.sava@gmail.com.

The Brundtland Report, the Declaration of Rio and Agenda 21 state that this type of development means to protect the environment and to make present generations responsible for the future ones. The most usual definition of sustainable development belongs to the Brundtland Commission, being included in the 1987 report "Our Common Future", thus it is "the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (Constantin, 2000, p. 193)

For tourism, the environment is essential, that is why protecting it must be a permanent preoccupation. To that end, the World Tourism Organization considers that sustainable tourism is "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities". Meeting all economic, social, aesthetic needs of tourism "actors", by keeping the cultural, ecological integrity, the biological diversity and all life supporting systems is taken into consideration.¹

Putting into effect a sustainable activity in tourism supposes the respect for certain principles regarding responsibilities ("polluter pays"), caution, prevention, integration, cooperation.

2. General Aspects Regarding the Wellness Tourism

Among tourists' motivations we find the need to restore their health. Even though it is considered a present day phenomenon, the wellness tourism has been practiced since old times. According to the legends Heracles was the first to have used the properties of the Sulphur mineral waters in Termopile to regain his strength.

The development of this type of tourism and implicitly of the wellness resorts has always counted on the existence of natural wellness factors, that is:

- mineral and thermal-mineral waters;
- waters from the therapeutical lakes;
- mud and turves;
- mofette gases;
- salt mines.

Taking these things into consideration, the main features of wellness tourism are:

- it mostly addresses the ailing population;
- it is not affected by seasons, taking place all year long;
- it mostly attracts the population from the urban environment;

¹ WTO, WTTC, The Earth Council-Agenda 21 for the Travel a Tourism Industry: Towards Environmentally Sustainable Development, 1995.

- the average duration of the stay is medium, even long;
- it has big economic-social efficiency;
- the necessity of a specific infrastructure.

Currently, the wellness tourism development is influenced by specific factors such as:

- the alteration of the population's health due to the change in the lifestyle of people and pollution;
- the increase of the average life time;
- the appearance of the interest for health care and disease prevention, at individual level and at society level.

The concept of "spa" was rediscovered and implemented in order to maintain health. It existed during the Roman Empire as "Salute Per Aqua" or "Sanitas par aquam", but in Europe the curative benefits of water were recognized only in the 17th century, at the present moment being very appreciated mainly for different disease prevention. Some of these benefits are the insurance of good health and humor, high tonus and psychic, the increase of performances at work and the implementation of the concept "Wellness". This term was introduced in the alternative medicine by Dr. Halbert L. Dunn in order to define a state of equilibrium between body, mind and spirit. The main objective of wellness is the creation and maintenance of wellbeing without turning to medicine treatments.

Both the spa and the wellness are based on traditional, nature treatment and prevention of illnesses generated by the daily stress and pollution.

Romania has numerous natural resources that can sustain the development of the wellness tourism. There are 117 places in our country that have one or more therapeutical factors (mineral waters, gases, mud, etc.). In order to sustainably exploit the natural resources used in the wellness tourism, the National Institute for Recovery, Physical Medicine and Wellness Bucharest established certain norms of valorization of therapeutical mineral substances. They refer to internal treatments with spring mineral water, external treatments with mineral or thermal water, external treatments with mud, mofette bath and aerosol therapy with mineral water. For the external treatment with mineral or thermal water the bath tub, the wellness pool and the kinetotherapy pool are used. The external treatment with mud, known also as mud therapy, can be made using the bath tub for the bath with diluted mud or wrappings.

As we have mentioned before, in order to practice health care tourism certain arrangements are necessary. In order to situate a place under the category „tourist spa” several elements are required:

- exploitable mineral substances;

- necessary installations for the exploitation and use of mineral substances;
- specific infrastructure (accommodation units, public food, leisure, treatment);
- minimum arrangements and urban equipment.

Wellness resorts can be:

- of great tourist interest (international interest);
- of tourist interest (national or area interest);
- of reduced or limited tourist interest (area or local interest).

Their classification on categories (1st, 2nd, 3rd and spa) is made according to some criteria.

Table 1. Classification criteria for wellness resorts

No.	Criterion	Compulsory minimum points		
		Category I	Category II	Category III
1.	Quality and quantity of natural factors	20	18	15
2.	Comfort and functionality of the infrastructure	20	15	10
3.	Organization and equipment of the wellness medical assistance	20	15	10
4.	Quality of urban equipment and arrangements	20	10	5
5.	Organization and materialization of environmental and specialty protection	20	17	15
6.	Organization and equipment of wellness parks and leisure spaces	15	10	5
7.	Cultural, commercial and administrative organization and equipment	20	15	5
8.	Accessibility, transportation	15	10	5
Total		150	110	70

Source: FITEC, Minimum conditions of recognition of wellness resorts, 1978.

Unfortunately, in Romania the wellness tourism is in decline, and the spa is perceived as something too expensive, like a luxury product by many people.

3. West Development Region – Wellness Tourism

One of the eight development regions of Romania that formed in 1998 through a benevolent association of the neighbor counties, and that corresponds to the divisions of level NUTS II in the EU, is the West Development Region. This region includes the province Banat (counties Arad, Timis, Caraş-Severin) and a

county from Transylvania (Hunedoara). As its name tells, the region is situated in the western part of the country at the border with Hungary and Serbia.

Its total area is 32.034 km², each county having an area similar to the others. 33% of the area represents the field area, 11,5% the hilly area, 12,1% the depressions and 43,4% the mountain area.

In accordance with its geographic position and relief is the moderate continental climate with sub-Mediterranean and Mediterranean influences.

The hydrographic network is rich and varied being made up of the streams of flowing waters, natural lakes and depth thermal-mineral waters. A privilege of the region is the Danube, the biggest and most important hydrographic water flow of the country.

The tourist potential of the West Development Region comprises attractive and numerous natural and anthropic resources that can be valorized under different forms so as to draw a large number of tourists.

Among the types and forms of tourism practiced in the region we can mention cultural tourism, religious tourism, archaeological tourism, wellness – spa tourism, winter sports tourism, wine tourism, gastronomic and folklore tourism, ethnic tourism, industrial tourism, cruise tourism, equestrian tourism, scientific tourism, intercultural tourism, extreme sports tourism, speleotourism.

The wellness tourism is well outlined in this region, being found in all four component counties. Its development is based on the existence of mineral and thermal waters, some of them known since ancient times.

For a sustainable development people should:

- respect the general protection and exploitation of mineral waters principles;
- rationally exploit the resources so as not to exhaust them;
- carry on adequate water procuring works;
- not allow water losses at the distribution, heating and treatments;
- not evacuate waste mineral waters used in treatments, untreated chemically and biochemically as there is the danger to pollute the environment through their chemical, bacteriologic and temperature composition;
- not degrade the environment through non-systematized, intensive development of places, the overcharge with constructions, not respect the area's specificity.

In table 2 one can notice the resorts in the region.

Table 2 Resorts of the West Development Region

No.	County	Name of resort
1.	Arad	Băile Lipova Moneasa
2.	Caraș- Severin	Băile Herculane
3.	Hunedoara	Băile Geoagiu Călan Vața de Jos
4.	Timiș	Buziaș Calacea

Băile Lipova is situated at 30 km distance from Arad, 2,5 km from Lipova, in Lunca Mureșului, at an altitude of 138 m. GPS coordinates: 46°3'50"N, 21°42'22"E.

Carbonated, bi-carbonated, ferruginous, sodium-rich, magnesium-rich and hypotonic mineral waters with a mineralization of 1,4-1,8 g/liter were discovered in 1818, and the resort was established in 1892. During the interwar period the Royal House used the water from this location.

In the resort the tourists benefit from baths with heated mineral water, hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, internal treatment with mineral water, but also from three outdoor pools. The accommodation possibilities are modest: bungalows, hotel-type rooms and lodges, even though they were rebuilt and equipped according to the criteria stipulated in the field legislation.

Moneasa is a wellness resort situated at 97 km distance from Arad and 19 km from Sebiș (the nearest town) in a beautiful area of the Codru-Moma Mountains, having the following GPS coordinates: 46°35'N, 22°18'E.

The archaeological discoveries showed that Romans used the waters here. Since 1886 Moneasa has been declared a resort and acknowledged in the whole country.

These thermal waters are mesothermal (24 – 33°C), bi-carbonated, calcium-rich, magnesium-rich, sodium-rich having the total mineralization between 234 and 256 mg/litre and a flow that varies between 0,4 and 4 litres/second. Following the measurements on water radioactivity from 1976, there resulted values between 0,69-1,0 nCi, that is much under 20 nCi, value starting with which waters are considered radioactive. Tourists can enjoy different therapeutical procedures like hydrotherapy, thermotherapy, phototherapy, massage, kinetotherapy, electro and magnetotherapy. The hotels, villas and pensions in the resort provide accommodation to all those in need.

Băile Herculane resort, well-known for its miraculous waters ever since 153 AD, is situated on the Cernei Valley between the Mehedinți and Cernei Mountains, in the Cernei-Domogled Valley National Park, 41 km distance from Drobeta Turnu-Severin, 80 km from Caransebeș and 170 km from Timisoara.

The place is situated at an altitude of 168 m, presents an ionization specific for an altitude of 3000 meters and has the following GPS coordinates: 44°52'N, 23°30'E.

The waters are thermal, their temperature varying between 20 and 67°C, slightly radioactive, and their composition groups them into:

- chlorine-sodium, bi-carbonated, slightly sulphurous waters with a total mineralization of 500 – 2600mg/ liter;
- chlorine-sodium, bi-carbonated, calcium-rich, magnesium-rich waters with a total mineralization between 600 and 3500mg/ liter;
- chlorine-sodium, bromine iodide, slightly sulphurous waters with a total mineralization of 2800mg/ liter;
- chlorine-sodium, bromine iodide, sulphurous waters with a high mineralization between 3870 and 7938 mg/ litre.

The procedures that tourists can benefit from are sulphurous or chlorine-sodium thermal baths, kinetotherapy, electro and hydrotherapy, inhalations, pump rooms, massage, sauna, medical gymnastics, leisure in the outdoor pool. There are numerous accommodation places, some older (hotels, villas) and others newer (pensions) that can accommodate a great number of tourists. Unfortunately, the hotels and the villas are run down and need big and rapid investments (some rehabilitation works have already started).

Băile Geoagiu are situated at an altitude of 350 m on the south-east side of the Apuseni Mountains, more precisely at the bottom of the Metaliferi Mountains, 19 km distance from Orăștie and 46 km from Deva, GPS coordinates being: 45°56'8"N, 23°9'44"E.

Also here, Romans used the mineral waters for therapeutical purposes. This is demonstrated by the archaeological discoveries, and in 1885 it was stated in documents that the baths were visited by locals and foreigners. The waters here are bi-carbonated, calcium-rich, magnesium-rich, slightly radioactive, hypotonic, mesothermal (29-33°C) waters which have a total mineralization of 1,1 – 1.4g/litre. The tourists can have warm baths with mineral water, electro and hydrotherapy, aeroheliotherapy, medical gymnastics, massage, internal treatments at pump rooms. Băile Geoagiu offer accommodation to potential tourists in hotels, pensions and a 1 star camping site.

Băile Călan are situated at 2 km distance from the town of Călan, on the banks of the river Strei, at an altitude of 230 m, its GPS coordinates being: 45°45'11"N, 23°0'9"E.

Legends say that in these waters Decebal himself would comfort his pains and fatigue amassed during the wars. The rock carved pool with a length of 14,2m, a

breadth of 7,5m and a depth of 4m stands witness for the use of the mineral waters in Călan by the Romans.

The waters have a temperature between 27 – 29⁰C, and are bi-carbonated, chloride-rich, calcium-rich, sodium-rich, magnesium-rich and ferruginous (the presence of iron gives the waters the yellowish pinkish colour).

They are made available to those arriving in the area in the special pools. The resort presents a local interest. For the time being, the accommodation possibilities are modest since there are only 14 lodges.

Vața de Jos resort is located in the Zarandului Depression, in the Crișul Alb valley at an altitude of 233m, at 19 km distance from Brad and 55km from Deva. Its GPS coordinates are: 46°17'68"N, 22°59'83"E.

The mineral waters were appreciated by King Carol IInd of Romania. They are sulphurous, chloride-sodium rich, calcium- rich and thermal (35 – 38⁰C). The guests can use installations and equipment for warm baths with mineral water, subaquatic showers, aerosols, sauna, electrotherapy, infrared, ultraviolet, electro sounds, laser therapy, magnetotherapy, aeroheliotherapy, and cold baths in the outdoor pool. At the same time, they can stay at the hotels and pensions. This resort is of area interest and is set up as a spa and wellness resort.

Buziaș resort is situated in the Banat Plain at an altitude of 128 m, a distance of 34 km south-west from Timisoara and 23 km south-west from Lugoj, its GPS coordinates being: 45°5."65 N, 21°21".6 E.

It has been considered a resort since 1819, having a national interest. Its waters are mineral carbonated, bi-carbonated, chlorine-rich, sodium-rich, calcium-rich, magnesium-rich, hypotonic with a total mineralization of 2 – 6,6 g/l. Tourists can benefit from warm baths with carbonated water, mofettes, aerosols, inhalations, electro and hydrotherapy, medical gymnastics, fitness room, massage, internal treatments. The accommodation is provided by hotels, pensions and villas.

Calacea is situated in the Banat Plain at an altitude of 117m, 25 km distance from Timisoara and 30 km from Arad. Its GPS coordinates are: 45°91"16 N, 21°1."01E. The waters with 38-39⁰C temperatures were discovered in 1880, and they are known to be bi-carbonated, sodium-rich, chlorine-rich and hypotonic. Those who come here can benefit from procedures like baths, hydrotherapy, kinetotherapy, laser therapy, wax wrappings, solux, ultraviolets, acupuncture, aerosols, massage and baths in the open. The accommodation is provided by a sanatorium type unit, and the interest is merely local.

As one can notice there are resources for the sustainable development of health care tourism in the West Development Region.

4. Conclusions

Currently, in Romania and abroad, there is an interest for health care. At a region level, as we have shown, the existent resorts do not meet the present standards because of old infrastructure and equipment. The quality of the waters, climate and other natural resources from the respective places could support the future development of the wellness sustainable tourism. Poor involvement from the authorities could lead to pollution and the destruction of resources.

An overcharge of the territory and a degradation of the anthropic resources have already been noticed in Băile Herculane, that is why the acceleration of preservation measures and the stagnation of issuing construction certificates for new accommodation units is required.

The defective exploitation of the springs in Buziaş and Lipova has led to the decrease in the quantity of CO₂, but luckily, since the deposit is very well fed the degradation phenomenon has been stopped.

The spa and wellness activities are perceived by the majority of the population as luxury activities and thus they are not very much solicited.

The wellness tourism known since ancient times has a future, and in the West Development Region it can develop taking into consideration the sustainability principles.

5. References

- Baciu, Petru; Vălean, P. & Geoagiu, I. (2007). *Monographic benchmarks*. Deva: EMIA Publishing House.
- Constantin, Daniela Luminița (2000). *Regional economy*. Bucharest: Oscar Print.
- Sava, Cipriana (2010). *Tourism within the frame of sustainable regional development*. Timisoara: Eurostampa.
- ***(2011). Wellness resorts guide. www.mdrt.ro.
- ***www.adrvest.ro.