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# THE ROLE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ROMANIAN BALNEOTHERAPEUTIC TOURISM SERVICES

Theoretical  
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## Abstract

Successfully implementing and maintaining a quality management system in tourism facilities in which you can practice balneotherapeutic tourism can contribute to tourism development especially in the coastal and mountain area (but also in other areas that enjoy the presence of balneotherapeutic tourism establishments), thus creating the conditions for a Romanian tourism focused on providing quality services at international standards for the benefit of both foreign tourists and the Romanians.

One of the advantages of balneotherapeutic tourism refers to the fact that this form of tourism is characterized by a level of seasonality much lower other forms of tourism, as it is based on a potentially permanent, highly complex, which is practically inexhaustible and independent of weather conditions.

Through this study we tried to present the characteristics / features of Romanian balneotherapeutic tourism, the problems faced by this kind of tourism and, not least, the benefits of implementing quality systems in organizations providing such services.

### **Introducing**

In the present context where competition reigns and where we are witnessing the exacerbation of customer requirements in terms of quality, a management which will neglect quality will simply be condemned to disappear.

Organization's management bears the burden to create a structure suitable for using all types of tools for solving quality problems. It was confirmed that when the quality of processes and products improves both costs and delivery to the beneficiaries are lower.

Thus, is very important that organizations wishing to enter and / or remain on the market, regardless of the subject of activity, to have concerns regarding the implementation and certification of quality management system.

This is valid for spa tourism sector firms in Romania, the traditional domain of the Romanian economy, which resisted and, moreover, has made some progress (due to the introduction of modern technologies, guidance of the activity on achieving and maintaining quality to a certain level, required by the market), even in the difficult conditions of economic transition.

Investing in quality is one of the most effective investments that a spa tourism organization can do today; it provides means of reducing the cost price, increase the added value of products, to keep customers and gain new market segments.

Successful implementation and maintenance of a quality management system within the tourism facilities in which you can practice spa tourism can help the development of tourism in the area, thus creating the conditions of a Romanian tourism focused on providing quality services at international standards, benefiting both the Romanian and foreign tourists.

It should also be noted that if health tourism, the main motivation behind the formation of tourism demand is the

concern for health care in a holistic approach: body, mind, spirit.

### **Characteristics of Romanian spa tourism and Spas**

Often defined "as a set of activities intended to meet all basic needs of tourists during the period in which they travel and in connection with this", the tourism service must ensure not only the conditions for the restoration of working capacity, but also to ensure appropriate ways of spending leisure time in an enjoyable and instructive manner (Cruceanu and Bica, 2013).

Health tourism (balneary and spa) is a specific form of rest tourism, which involves the movement of people of different ages, professions, gender, in spa resorts or towns with natural healing factors for health care, rest or treatment with natural spa substances, with extracts or herbal medicines for prevention, maintenance or beauty or just for leisure (Tigu, 2003). For this reason, this form of tourism has a number of features which distinguish it from the other forms of tourism.

It can be said that in the last 10 years we are witnessing an accelerated development of spa and health tourism worldwide, mainly as a result of the action of several factors, including:

- Increase the effects and the impact of so-called "diseases of modern civilization";
- Increasing trend of combining holidays with the need for active rest and recovery of the body;
- Intensifying concerns of older persons to maintain health, prevent and combat aging;
- Focus efforts of people (especially women) to maintain their vitality and beauty.

Currently, in our country there are more than 150 spa resorts and towns holding mineral resources for cure, of which 24 being spa resorts of national significance (some of which also enjoy international

recognition), which also give an important role to the return at the Romanian spa tourism practiced since antiquity as a specific form of leisure tourism (Ivanescu, 2011).

The capitalizing appropriate and efficient use of the spa potential Romania at its disposal is only possible in conditions of appropriate arrangements of spaces the methods used becoming more complex and varied, in line with the technology involved.

The structure of the holidays, package is different for spa tourism; in addition to accommodation services, catering, entertainment there are additional treatment services and spa treatment. It can be said that these services take the role of the main performance and around them revolve all other tourist activities that must be adapted to help ensure their effectiveness. Therefore, the spa tourism offer can be marketed as "all inclusive" packages.

Moreover, nowadays the spa tourism offer has a wide addressability (Tigu, 2003), it is intended both for people suffering from certain diseases (therapeutic and healing belts) and healthy and apparently healthy individuals prone to illness or seeking to maintain a state of health and physical and mental shape as good as possible (belts prophylactic release to shape and create a better overall).

This led to important changes in the structure of customers, so along with the older population, characterized by lower incomes and calls for traditional products (treatment and rehabilitation), which continues to hold the largest share, also appears a segment of increasingly important clientele which consists of young and healthy people in search of a physical and mental shape as good as possible with higher financial availabilities. Hence, the need arises development inside the spas of a diversified entertainment offer to meet the requirements this category of tourists (Cristea, 2014).

The typology of products offered by health tourism include the holidays with a mainly social character, subsidized (wholly or partially) by the health insurance funds, House of Pensions, unions or other bodies addressed to the categories of population with low and medium incomes to luxury goods (wellness, modern thalassotherapy, anti-aging cures, body shaping, etc..) that addresses high-income categories of tourists.

The vast typological diversity of spa products influences the length of stays in a spa; they can vary from 18 to 21 days (optimal duration of traditional / classic treatment stay) to 7 days (a stay of rest and treatment for getting back into shape) or 3-5 days (short weekend stays for busy people: businessmen and even employees). These latter programs are usually cures of physical and mental restoration and relaxation.

As a result also the prices for these products-services packages will be very different, according to their typology and the length of the stays.

To remember is the fact that by practicing spa tourism we insure both tourism and human resources capitalizing, as well as the specific local resources (natural healing factors specific to certain areas: thermal and mineral water, salt lakes, mud and therapeutic gases, salt, herbs etc. who otherwise could not be sold) (Tigu, 2003).

### **Aspects regarding the quality of spa tourism in Romania**

Currently, in our country, increasing the quality of tourism, whether it's housing, food, medical spa treatment, entertainment, etc., is one of the Romanian tourism strategies. This is seen practically in the growing number of tourist facilities that have implemented a quality management system.

The ISO 9000 series of standards (SR EN ISO 9000:2000 - Sistem de management al calitatii. Ghid pentru îmbunătățirea performanțelor) reveals two important

aspects of services (including tourism), namely:

- The first issue is closely linked to staff of the providing company, because the quality of services depends on the qualification and motivation;

- The second issue concerns the impossibility of assessment and verification of service quality, due to their immaterial nature.

As a direct consequence, it appears that there is no practical possibility to submit a service to a final test to determine whether they meet the desired quality standards before they reach the customer.

"The success of the business undertaken in the tourism industry is assured only if it is aware that the hospitality industry is made for the people, by the people, because the atmosphere created with a smile and a friendly hello, is causing the tourist to come back" (Ivanescu, 2011).

In the tourism industry, client satisfaction implies (Cristea, 2014):

- A correct, complete and true informing;
- A favourable first impression when meeting with staff in tourist services;
- Obtaining a result in line with expectations;
- A reasonable price, clear and accurate billing in line with what was consumed;
- The availability to the customer in all circumstances;
- Priority treatment to customer requirements;
- Tendency towards achieving the level of excellence.

And in the case of spa tourism, as in any other sector of tourism, the level of quality of the services is represented by ([http://www.apdrp.ro/uploads/Ordinul\\_M\\_DRT\\_nr\\_1051-03\\_03\\_2011\\_-Norme\\_metodologice.pdf](http://www.apdrp.ro/uploads/Ordinul_M_DRT_nr_1051-03_03_2011_-Norme_metodologice.pdf)):

- *Stars* (maximum number of stars is 5 units, but not all areas receive the maximum) - specific to all tourist accommodation establishments, hotels, villas, hostels, rooms for rent

and camping; they are marked with the number of stars, according to criteria established by classification certificates issued by the Office of Licensing and Control in Tourism.

- *Daisies* - attesting rural guest houses and are equivalents of stars.
- *Dolphins* - symbolizing the quality categories of the beaches following criteria: quality of sand, sand thickness, existence of showers, clothing exchange booths, restrooms facilities, the existence of groups of first aid facilities and recreational facilities.
- *Categories* ("luxury" category I and II) - are marks of quality for restaurants.
- *Brand Q* - is a brand specific to hotel units.

Classification of hotels according to the number of stars is based only on certain physical attributes (space, facilities and amenities, and hotel rooms, etc.) and less on quality characteristics and codes of practice based on quality standards (hospitality, availability, welfare travel services, quality basic and supplementary etc.).

The introduction of the mark Q in the hotel sector is to improve the quality of services, increase customer satisfaction and to ensure that customers will benefit in any of the evaluated and certified hotel units, by a high level of quality service, regardless of the category of the respective hotel unit (Rondelli and Cojocaru, 2004).

- EuropeSpa-med quality logo - for all hotels and health clinics in the resorts and at other hotels that provide wellness care (<http://www.spamagazin.ro/consultanta/sigla-calitatii-din-partea-asociatiei-europene-spa.htm>).
- EuropeSpa wellness quality logo - for hotels with spa facilities and wellness.

Owning EuropeSpa Quality logo certifies the fulfilment of the requirements ESPA (European Spas Association) regarding the

overall infrastructure of therapies, hygiene and security of tourists.

This logo was introduced with the aim that accredited health resorts are distinguished from other competitors by international recognition of the high quality services to tourist patients. In order to be accredited with EuropeSpa-med there should be achieved and respected an estimated 1000 criteria in the following areas: system management and compliance, procurement and supply of therapeutic factors, achievement of therapeutic procedures and wellness, accommodation and food service activities.

The more than 1300 criteria used in the EuropeSpa wellness certification include aspects such as safety, hygiene, wellness and quality infrastructure.

Logo EuropeSpa-med enjoys appreciation of health insurance companies and major tour operators in Europe, considering that it is the definite reference to a high international quality of the tourist and spa services. In our country, in 2013 it was registered as accredited ESPA only the Baile Felix International Hotel spa resort, this year will be subject to accreditation several other hotel establishments resorts Vatra Dornei, Baile Felix, Saturn, Ocna Sibi, Geoagiu Bai.

In the Government Ordinance no. 21/1992 are listed nine factors that determine the criteria for assessing the quality of services (Cruceru and Bica, 2013):

- Accessibility to service;
- Communication;
- The competence of staff;
- Hospitality;
- The credibility to the bidding firm;
- Ability to grant relief.
- Services must be consistent, rendered accurately and thoroughly to gain customer confidence;
- Responsibility of personnel;
- Security;
- Understanding and knowledge of consumption manifestations.

When we talk of tourism services, especially spa tourism service, we talk also

about food security; it is crucial that the management of the organizations working in this sector of the economy also focus on the implementation of food safety management standards (ISO 22000 and HACCP) together with quality management standards ISO 9000. The level of service quality will be much higher, customer requirements will be met in a much larger percentage, and the unit will enjoy a better visibility on the national and international market.

### Conclusions

Regarding the tourism development, the great advantage for our country is offered by the presence of natural and cultural resources of great diversity and harmoniously distributed in the territory, which give the possibility to practice the full range of forms of tourism.

Within the tourism, spa and health tourism has been occupying over the last 10 years a priority position determined by several factors, including: increasing the effects and the impact of the so-called "diseases of modern civilization"; increasing trend of combining holidays with the need for active rest and recovery of vital body capabilities, increasing concerns of older persons to maintain health, prevent and combat aging; focusing efforts on maintaining vitality and beauty. This form of tourism is characterized by a much lower level of seasonality than other forms of tourism as it is based on a permanent, highly complex potential, which is virtually inexhaustible and independent of weather conditions.

For the development of spa tourism in our country we need concrete actions to pursue permanent supply and demand trends manifested on the international spa tourism market, tracking the increase of product quality in Romanian tourism, aspects can be translated into strategies on short, medium and long term.

Thus, managers of tourism operators, responsible for quality assurance in these units must consider: the upgrading of

hotels and restaurants to raise the comfort level and moving to a higher category classification; growth and continuous improvement of tourism services; diversifying products and services, attracting a large number of tourists, especially foreigners; appropriate tariff policy by offering an optimum quality-price ratio; measures aimed at staff and promotional activities of the company, etc..

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