

OMTh and SITH Congress  
19th October 2013 - Levico Terme - Italy

THERMAL AND SPA ACTIVITIES IN ROMANIA AND OTHER EASTERN  
EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Laviniu Munteanu, MD, Prof.Nicolae Teleki, MD

**1). New trends in Spa Tourism in the Third Millennium**

As a European Union member state, Romania has to adjust its economic and social developmental goals to meet the needs and expectations of its own people, as well as the European bodies directives and recommendations.

**IMAGE [1]**

Existence of several natural resources in Romania, such as: mineral waters, therapeutic mud lakes and various types of climate that vary from Carpathian subalpine and forested areas to Black Sea coast, allowed development of a great number of climatic and touristic spas and resorts, many of them enjoying the European level of recognition.

As a member of the European Union, Romania has intensified the development and capitalization of spa and tourist health resorts in our country.

Lately, expansion of international tourism in many European countries has led to new forms of "spa tourism" with a lot of aspects interweaving with spa specific medical activities.

According to the important directions of the European Union regarding tourism development and medical care beyond borders, including the spa treatment, publication of a comprehensive monograph is an existing requirement for many central European countries.

In 2007 the European Parliament worked out a resolution in terms of the new European policy in the field of tourism, emphasizing that: "*...the spa tourism would be the main priority of promotion*". It was also mentioned: "*...the necessity of spa development in countries rich in therapeutic natural valuable factors*."

As you know, on 9th March 2011, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the Council of Ministers adopted the "Directive on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare" (Directive 2011/24/EU). The Directive, that became law, is to be considered and adapted to national legislation of EU member countries and will come into force on October 2013.

The initiatives and steps taken by international specialized bodies in balneology and spa tourism, such as International Association of Hydrothermal Technique - SITH, World Organization of Thermalism - OMTh and European Organization of Spas - ESPA, greatly contributed to the drawing up and agreement of the important directions for tourism spa promotion in EU countries, considering the documents discussed at the Levico Terme Convention in Italy, in 2005 and 2009 and at Cuntis, in Spain, in 2008.

It is worth mentioning the special attention local population pays to hotel units boasting their own treatment facilities structures in Romanian spas, providing proper accommodation and cures for the tourists in private structures (68%) and social support for the trade union members (22%), as well as for pensioners (10%).

## **2). The Therapeutic Natural Factors in Romanian Spas**

### **IMAGE [2] - photo 244 - 245 and 246**

The use of *therapeutic natural factors* (thermal water, mineral water with a variety of physical and chemical concentrations, carbonated water and mofette, mineral water lakes and mud) started during *ancient times*, even before the Romans conquered the Dacians' land. After the Roman conquest, they built many "thermae" in Baile Herculane spa ("**Ad aquas Herculi sacras**", "**Herculi's sacred baths**"), Geoagiu (Thermae Dodone, in the Germisara camp), Mangalia (Callatis). The Romans, "who had not known a treatment different than the thermal baths for 600 years", as Pliny (*Plinius*) stated, brought the ways of balneary treatment rational use into Dacia.

In the 19th century, together with the development of balneology in many European countries as well as in Romania, they continued the research and capitalization of the natural factors resources, by developing many balneary resorts, on account of some mineral waters systematic studies and classifications (worked out in many monographs and scientific papers).

During 1948 - 1970 the spas were organized by the Ministry of Health as medical sanatorial units, financed from the state budget, including accommodation, catering and medical assistance coordinated by balneal medical services.

**IMAGE [2] - 2 maps Romania pag 10, 245**

The development of the spa tourism in Romania had favorable results during the years that followed when the number of those who benefited annually from spa treatment amounted to one million, while the number of foreign tourists reached almost 100,000. This phenomenon was not only in Romania but also in most European balneal countries, practically in all east European socialist countries.

This phenomenon was noted also by the European Committee of the World Health Organization (WHO) which appointed a commission of experts in balneology, from five countries, Romania included, to make recommendations with regard to the conditions for the acknowledgement of the international spas.

The explosive development of balneology and medical rehabilitation required great efforts on the part of specialized staff to train physicians who increased from approximately 300 in the '70s to 700 in the '80s. Concomitantly, technical staff specialized in kinetherapy was prepared with the help of the Institute, through courses organized in Bucharest and in the spas.

The 3rd millennium made its debut with an effort to upgrade and restore the hotels and treatment structures, to build new, more comfortable hotels, equipped with state-of-the-art devices, in the major spas: Baile Felix, Eforie Nord, Mangalia, Neptun, Saturn, Baile Herculane, Bazna, Calimanesti-Caciulata, Covasna, etc.

**IMAGE [3] - pag 39, 49, 125, 128, 129, 130, 131, 133, 247, 258, 260, 262, 272, 279, 378**

The Organization of Employers in Spa Tourism of Romania was set up in 1989, which presently comprises 58 of the private companies in spa tourism. In 2004, this organization published a balneal medical guide "Balneal Romania", distributed free of charge to family doctors and specialized physicians.

The most important goal underlined in the recent times was that spas should meet the World Health organization (WHO) views with regard to *health, treatment cures, primary and secondary prophylaxis, quality of life, etc.*

The new directions are based on the "positive" concept of health, a definition provided by the WHO: "*health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*". This new definition brings about new, positive concept of wellbeing, thus supplementing the negative view of the absence of sickness and disability.

### **3). Categories of Spa Clients**

*The spas of the third millennium* should adjust the structures and functionality to meet the new realities they have been facing for several decades:

a).-tourist clientele will be of two distinct types: healthy people (considering their general state) and sick people who will use the facilities offered by natural climatic and balneal therapeutic factors to improve their health or recover from illness;

b).-in spas, several types of activities have to be offered simultaneously: healthy cures for the healthy youngsters and adults, secondary and therapeutic prophylactic cures for those with various conditions, and rehabilitation cures for sick people of all ages with functional deficiencies and disabilities;

c).-modern spas, aiming at the health global quality, should combine the old type of balneal cure - exclusively based on the medical component, that is the methodology of intensive cure with natural, physical and kinetic therapeutic factors - with other activities leading to the psycho-physical balance of all the spa tourists: entertainment and relaxation, beauty centers, etc.

### **IMAGE [4] - Medical devices and therapeutic procedures**

During the first ten years of the new millennium, several types of spa have been planned and developed. The most complex model of a modern spa could be applicable in "balneal towns" spas or in separate resorts. Conceived as an **integrated polyvalent center**, such a model will involve the following activities:

1).-a health center, with multisided vocations to health cures;

2).-a rehabilitation center, with medical and health vocations to secondary, therapeutic prophylactic cures and medical rehabilitation;

3).-a wellness and beauty center;

4).-a reception, entertainment and cultural center, adjacent to the other three centers, with reception and information activities, leisure, bar, restaurant, boutiques (with balneal and cosmetic products), health education and medical scientific activities.

Such projects have already been partially experienced in Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Switzerland.

*The spas and the climatic resorts* developed in time to capitalize the natural therapeutic factors are a particular tourist attraction; most of them are situated in unpolluted natural areas, with a sedative and restful bioclimate. The development of modern road infrastructure provide access to attractive supply for tourists from northern and western Europe, mainly in those resorts situated in subcarpathian area and on Transylvania plateau. The resorts with carbonated water and moffete are competitive at international level and have great chances to be of interest for the European tourism.

After 1989 the patrimony of the Ministry of Tourism consisting of balneo-climatic resorts was privatized, while the cure hotels (80%) holding treatment establishments remained in the trade and the rest of 20% belong to cooperative union structures, and were taken over by the Ministry of Labour. At present, both tourist and balneary coordination and promotion are subject to the Ministry of Tourism. The total number of beds used in Romanian Spa network is 52,000.

*Spa tourism* is actually a term which was used when the Ministry of Tourism took over the coordination of the spas and resorts patrimony and their complex medical services, to provide the thermal cures, with all the prophylaxis, therapeutic and rehabilitation operations, as well as the specific tourist activities for holidays and week-end leisure time, not related to the balneary cure profile.

"Health cures" changed the image of spas, associated either with "old times luxury" with luxurious hotels, casinos and rich clientele, or with the "social" services for pensioners. Spas became complex centers for both patients, with medical therapeutic and rehabilitation recommendations, and for broader categories of people, of all ages,

that could spend their holidays for rest, revitalization, invigoration, correction of unhealthy habits (smoking, obesity, sedentariness, etc.), to increase effort capacity, adapt the body to various environmental aggressions.

These last trends, similar to those of the *health tourism*, ensure prospects for the development, modernization and utilization of the extraordinary potential of the Romanian spas, which are enormously rich in natural cure factors, through an ever more efficient cooperation between spa tourism and balneal medical services.

#### **4).The Spa Tourism Social and Economic Efficiency**

The evaluation of the social and economic effects of the health, prophylaxis, therapeutic and rehabilitation spa and resorts cures is hard to achieve, as their effects are mainly indirect.

The only objective criteria used by the health companies in many European balneary countries ever since the prosperous economic time after the second world war - when the social balneary tourism (including international tourism) was widely a common practice - were:

- the dynamics of the work disablement indexes (yearly days of medical leave), after annual balneary cures, subsidized for certain conditions;

- the dynamics of the medication annual consumption, after a subsidized balneary cure.

Research carried out in Germany, France, Austria, former Czechoslovakia, Sweden, etc., which analyzed the indexes evolution, reported a considerable decrease of the work disablement (37% of cases in a research on 700 patients from Germany and 37.9% of patients from Sweden who had taken cures in European balneary countries), as well as a significantly diminished need of medication (in Sweden, the patients had suffered from rheumatic and asthma conditions).

## 5). Spa Tourism Advantages

- a).-A whole year tourist activity, the seasons influence and fluctuation are more limited than in other tourism forms.
- b).-Relatively constant and longer average stays (12-21 days) than in other tourism forms.
- c).-A stable, permanent clientele, taking annual balneary cures successively.
- d).-high operation level of tourist accommodation units: hotels, treatment establishments, restoration, catering, etc.
- e).-high average incomes from the specific, complex, qualified medical care arrangements for therapeutic and rehabilitation cures, as well as from accommodation, catering, tourist and entertainment services.

Given the latest directives of the Council of Europe with a view to cross-border healthcare which includes the therapeutic and rehabilitation cures, Romania can be one of the spa tourism competitive countries in Europe, due to its spas and resorts boasting extremely rich natural therapeutic factors and quality balneary medical care provided by experienced medical and technical staff.

In Romania, besides the significant number of spa resorts, of general and local interest, which use their natural cure factors, other springs of mineral and thermal waters have been catalogued and analyzed (drilled by FORADEX\* - map), saline lakes (some with muds), that have not been turned to good account and are an inestimable reserve for the development of spa tourism. A good example in this context are the **geothermal water springs** surrounding the capital city - Bucharest,

### **IMAGE [5] - photo FORADEX map (pag 64)**

particularly those in the northern part as they have some advantages: it is a green, ecological area, which includes parks and forests, lakes and the Snagov resort, the Otopeni Geriatrics Clinic (part of "Ana Aslan" National Institute of Gerontology and Geriatrics), modern hotels, the Baneasa and Otopeni (Henri Coanda) airports. The respective waters have mainly temperatures ranging from 40°C to 85°C, are sulphurous (around 15 mg of H<sub>2</sub>S/l), were captured by means of drillings, were analyzed regarding their physical-chemical and clinic-therapeutic characteristics and have therapeutic

indications similar to those of the mineral waters at Baile Herculane, Mangalia, Calimanesti. This is a great opportunity to develop a spa tourist zone in the northern part of Bucharest which can considerably improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the capital and of surrounding areas.

FORADEX\* - SA drilled after 1960s more than 240 deep wells in various regions of Romania, bringing to surface thermomineral waters with temperatures between 35°C and 105°C, with flow rates ranging from 7 to 30l/sec, most of them belonging to the group of oligothermal waters, especially in western Romania and sulphurous thermal waters in the Valea Oltului area, Bucharest, Ilfov and Braila districts.

## **6). The Thermalism and Spa Activity in Eastern European Countries**

As far as the evolution of the thermalism or spa movement in the Eastern European countries, most of them have followed a similar way of development as my country, Romania paying full attention to the privatization of the spa structures, increasing continuously the tourist comfort as well as the medical technologies and equipment.

Special attention and encouraging activities has been paid especially to the following activities in the spa networks located in East European countries:

1. Prophylactic cures recommended to the younger active population and to healthy tourists, offering a lot of possibilities in the wellness centers, especially in countries as Hungary, Croatia, Czech Republic.

2. The use, in parallel with spa treatment, some other activities as cosmetology and esthetic surgery, acupuncture, slimming cure, rejuvenation cure, including Ana Aslan Gerovital Therapy, a wide range of fitness and kinetotherapy, anti-stress cure (Hungary, Romania, Czech Republic).

3. To set up special buildings and to prepare suitable programmes for older people based on long-term stay and a healthier and optimistic way of life using educational programme, group activities, collective games.

4. Aqua parks, especially in the regions rich in thermal waters (Hungary, Romania) or on the seacoast or lake areas (Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Hungary and Russia).

It is a real difficulty for me to give you more details about our neighboring countries because they did not make available yet public information about the thermalism in their countries in a foreign language, accessible for other European countries.

At the end of my presentation, I can say that I am happy that, as promised four years ago in Levico Terme, Romania succeeded to offer to European Union and to OMTh and SITH members a detailed and comprehensive book, published in Romanian and English language, about the thermalism in my country.

**IMAGE [6] - Cover of the book**