The Concept of Wellness Tourism in the National Tourism Policies: a Critical Review and Call for Further Research and Activity to Integrate More Ecosystem Services: the case of Bulgaria

September 4, 2013

Wageningen
Wellness / SPA / Balneo tourism – where is the Wellness?

- Bulgaria – a tourism destination
- 10-14% of GDP
- Sea, Winter (ski), Culture, SPA/Balneo/Wellness
- Investments in Infrastructure /Superstructure
- National policy is to become a whole year destination
Strategic matrix – SPA/ balneo tourism for the people who practice it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance of the Brand/Product/Destination</th>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Strong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong></td>
<td>Tourism practiced by many people</td>
<td>Appropriate for people of all ages</td>
<td>There are very good conditions to practice it in Bulgaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>Appropriate for families with children</td>
<td>Good to combine with other types of tourism</td>
<td>Offers the sense of a special experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>P</strong></td>
<td>It is a cheap type of tourism</td>
<td>It can be practiced in all seasons</td>
<td>It is a luxury for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>O</strong></td>
<td>I would choose another destination for that type of tourism (instead of Bulgaria)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>R</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MEET

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Importance of attributes for forming SPA balneotourism preferences

- It is a luxury for me
- Good to combine with other type of tourism
- Can be practiced all season
- Offer special experience
- Appropriate for people in all ages
- Tourism practiced by many people
- Conditions to practice in Bulgaria

Source: MEET, base: tourists practicing SPA/ balneotourism, N=2393
The perception for SPA/ Balneo Tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>&quot;Relax&quot; vacation</th>
<th>&quot;Anti-stress&quot; vacation</th>
<th>Adventure vacation</th>
<th>Party vacation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All (n=9020)</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural tourism (n=3155)</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPA/balneotourism (n=2393)</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco tourism (n=2389)</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural tourism (n=2220)</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MEET
Wellness tourism in process of Development

- Wellness tourism is a quite new industry on the Bulgarian market & in a process of development
- Gaining strong development
- The benefits from nature in the mountains, the landscapes, the pure food are rated in recent marketing studies as main motivation factors for local and foreign tourists to visit the destination for wellness
- At the same time the understanding of wellness for the local suppliers are linked closely with the mineral waters in a designed wellness center.
Local understanding of wellness tourism

Etymology

- **Wellness** – no translation - уелнес
- **Wellbeing** – health, mental
  (very often perception for luxury / depend on the financial resources /178/)

- **Both SPA & Wellness** - naturally linked with the water (one of the elements of the ecosystem services)
- **Wellness Tourism** – in process of understanding & Development
Development of the local concept for wellness

• The perception for wellness is always linked to the mineral water as a natural resource for wellness
• 800 hot springs
• 142 resorts (58 balneology, 56 mountain health и 28 sea resorts;
• The climate is healthy with healing effect in some areas
• Historical & Cultural places /The Rhodope – the Mountain of Orpheus
Historically traditional element of Bulgaria as a tourism destination

- The tradition to use the healing capacity of the mineral waters and the natural resources is dated from the Thracians times.
- The first ever national regulation for conservation of the mineral waters dates from 1891 and is perceived as regulation for the mineral hot springs.
- The most SPA-Balneo-Wellness Centres – located around historical & cultural places.
Current features of the perception

- Great number of research studies and marketing surveys
- Increasing role of balneo tourism as forms of the health tourism because of the aging population and the aging population become and increasing tourist segment for this product
National Strategic Policy

- National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development 2007-2013 - much more focused on the infrastructure development for SPA, wellness and balneo tourism and their promotion, than on the product itself
- New national tourism act adopted in 2013 **for the first time** gives a special attention to the wellness activities
- The first ever emphasis on the wellness tourism is a result of the evolution of the concept for wellness tourism in the country and the intention of the national policies to provide conditions for wellbeing
New Regulation in Tourism

Art. 138  Act for Tourism
• Medical SPA
• SPA/ Wellness services to be delivered in Wellness Center
• Certificate for delivering services
• Special requirements for the employee competences
Ecosystem services – Priorities for Bulgaria

Upon the Millennium Evaluation Assessment and TEEB philosophy, the European Union prioritised the forests, the waters and the agricultures for ecosystem services evaluation in Bulgaria.

Many projects started under this agenda and it is expected to provide core data to be explored for further development of the relations between wellness and ecosystem services.
Recommendations

• Develop a more integrated wellness tourism services, i.e. combination of the traditional mineral waters with “forest/Balkan therapy”, the Bulgarian rose philosophy, healthier gastronomy, outdoor yoga, meditation etc.

• For this achievement a new research projects should be undertaken both on national and international level (for example to gain experience from Nordic sense of wellbeing)
Wellness – SPA – Balneo – Where is the Wellness?
Topics for Further Research

• Further research on ecosystems services and wellbeing could change the perception for wellness tourism services
• A “road map” for more close activities between the public health organisations and the national authorities, private business and non-governmental agencies is the field of tourism and environment should be created to improve the wellbeing of the people
• Need for responsible communication and business services is soaring
Offer: SPA, Balneo, wellness

Bansko
- Ski resort
- Abundant with mineral waters, turns the resort into an attractive SPA destination.
- Most of the large hotels have swimming pools and contemporary SPA centers, which offer a large number of wellness procedures.

Pomorie
- One of the oldest balneo, SPA and wellness resorts on the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast (Today the medicinal mud is used for treatment of skin diseases and musculoskeletal disorders, but also for applications in cosmetics and beauty procedures)

Sofia
- 10 SPA centers for peace and relax, along with therapeutic and beauty treatments.
- The hot springs at Bankya, a nearby resort offer wonderful facilities for rest, recreation, and wellness.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION
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