



Clustering wellness tourists in spa environment



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ABSTRACT

Spas meet the requirements of both medical and wellness tourists. The former are requiring treatments for specific medical reasons while the latter seek to preserve health. The differences between the two groups are therefore primarily one of the motives even while both may use a number of common resources. This study reports findings from a sample of 165 wellness tourists using the services at Vrnjaska Banja Spa, Serbia. Their motives are classified as 'rejuvenation', 'socialization', 'hedonism', 'obsession with health and beauty', 'relaxation' and 'escape from routine'. The study also examines the role of socio-demographic variables as determinants of being a 'wellness tourist'.

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1. Introduction

The human need for places that offer healing and rehabilitation through natural, thermal and mineral springs has been present for a long time, and its tradition is particularly established in Europe. Spa services in Europe are mostly related to health and healing, while spa tourism in the US is more oriented towards the affirmation of a healthy lifestyle. Tourism offers products and services designed to improve the life quality through satisfying the needs related to health (Chen, Prebensen, & Huan, 2008). The recent increase in health awareness has led to a more proactive approach to the use of natural thermal springs.

Nowadays, spas are not only seen as a way to improve health and appearance and to eliminate stress, but also a way to meet other people and make new friends, so they can be observed as a place for socialization. Therefore, the term *spa* has expanded to include relaxation, treatment, satisfaction, rehabilitation and socialization (Koh, Yoo, & Boger, 2010). Mind and body care is related to disease prevention, the elimination of daily stress, the improvement of mental and psychological balance, and hedonism, especially through wellness services (Loureiro, Almeida, & Rita, 2013). This growing interest in health and fitness has a negative impact on spas based on traditional medical treatment since there are many competing forms of spas today such as club spas, destination spas, resort/hotel spas, etc. (Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2009).

Spas have a long tradition in most parts of the Central and Eastern Europe. The countries with the most dynamic and advanced spa sector

in this region are Hungary and Slovenia (Snoj & Mumel, 2002). They have been continually attracting a large number of foreign guests. Spa tourism in Serbia is mostly based on traditional centers for healing, even though, during the last few years, the trend of enriching traditional medical contents with wellness services and rejuvenation packages is evident (Kosic, Pivac, Romelic, Lazic, & Stojanovic, 2011). The combination of rich cultural diversity and heritage, in combination with affirmed and affordable health facilities and services, may enable Serbia to become one of the leading countries in the development of spa tourism in Europe (Kosic et al., 2011).

This paper focuses on the motives of wellness tourists, as users of the wellness services of spa facilities, in order to determine which motives are predominant and which target groups of tourist can be profiled according to these motives. The objective is to fill in the existing gap in the current literature on the motivation for wellness services in spas. The paper can help to identify the traits of wellness tourists who visit spas and, consequently, reveal the target groups that tailor-made marketing campaign should aim at. Also, the paper sets the foundation for the subsequent theoretical and empirical research on the relation wellness versus spa tourism.

2. The concept of medical and wellness tourism

The definitions of wellness and health tourism are inconsistent and they vary significantly, which implies that the concepts are differently understood. Terms such as wellness tourism (Nahrstedt, 2004; Smith & Kelly, 2006; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006), health tourism (Douglas, 2001; Hall, 2003) and spa tourism (Puczko & Bacharov, 2006) are sometimes used interchangeably, even though they often describe different concepts.

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The term 'health tourism' is often used without taking into consideration its diversity of services and demands. However, many authors do recognize that there are different types of health tourism and in order to differentiate between them they rely on the theoretical difference between the concepts of a cure and a disease and wellness (Nahrstedt, 2004). Namely, medical tourists, on one hand, strive to treat certain medical conditions while wellness tourists, on the other, strive to preserve their health and prevent potential diseases (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). It is interesting that spa institutions can accommodate wellness and medical tourists together, offering to them similar services and infrastructure.

The processes of commodification, privatization and globalization of health care are the main factors in shaping the development of modern international travel for health and medical purposes (Connell, 2013). Globalization has enabled the introduction of alternative treatment to conventional medicine, so people have become more health-conscious and interested in how to lead a healthy lifestyle (Pollock & Williams, 2000). An important factor which affects the demand for wellness tourism is the pressure to conform to images of body perfection and eternal youth (Henderson, 2003; Smith & Puczko, 2008). Thus, the broad social desire to live a simpler and happier life is an additional factor that drives wellness tourism (Smith & Puczko, 2008).

The concept of wellness was developed by American physician Dunn (1959), who described wellness as the particular health condition which includes general well-being of body, mind and spirit, depending on its environment. Wellness tourism involves the efforts of individuals to preserve their healthy state through activities provided by health institutions (Mair, 2005). Wellness practices and research should focus on identifying the causes of wellness, rather than the causes of disease (Ren, Xing, & Fu, 2007).

Many tourists still do not understand the full meaning of spas and they do not find themselves in spa tourism (King, 2002). They are focused on health, disease prevention and health preservation, but still they do not realize the connection between spas and wellness. Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) believe that spa services are a branch of wellness tourism.

There is an increasing number of wellness destinations on tourist market and those that belong to wider spa tourism offers have better chances to succeed. The reason why wellness is becoming a fashionable tourist product is the fact that the working population from middle and upper classes has an increased awareness of health prevention and is constantly forced to cope with stress at work (Dwyer, Edwards, Mistilis, Roman, & Scott, 2009; Heung & Kucukusta, 2013).

3. Wellness tourist's motivations for visiting spas

Tourists differ significantly in terms of their desires so they tend to have different desires and demands for the same service (Crompton and McKay, 1997). Cockerell (1996) has noted that the spa sector in Europe consists of two segments: those who visit spas and health resorts primarily for medical reasons and those whose motives for visits are more compatible with the motivations of traditional tourists.

The modern society is changing the paradigm in which spas are no longer seen only as places which represent healing but also as places which stand for wellness and wellbeing. Wellness guests require a comprehensive package of services which includes taking care of physical fitness and beauty, healthy nutrition, relaxation, mental activity and education (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001) and very often luxury (Konu & Laukkanen, 2010). Many spas have met a serious challenge of trying to keep up with these changes and meet the demands of the increasing wellness tourism market without losing their traditional medical clients. Wellness tourism is a very dynamic concept and thus it is necessary to conduct more research with the objective of predicting the desires and expectations of tourists. There are only few studies focusing on the motivations for wellness tourism. The conceptual structure of wellness tourism was developed by Sheldon and Bushell (2009) and it

includes the connections between different types of the experience which tourists have had with wellness, their motivations and the factors which influence their choices. The motives of wellness tourist who visit spas are extremely diverse, which has been proved in previous research conducted in this field (Chen & Prebensen, 2009; Chen et al., 2008; Lee, Ou, & Huang, 2009; Magdalini & Paris, 2009; Mak et al., 2009; Sheldon & Bushell, 2009). Typical wellness visitors are high income visitors, older people, motivated by a desire for rest, relaxation, health, rejuvenation or escapism (Smith and Puczko, 2009). Understanding of lifestyle factors of seniors is important for policy makers (Simpson & Siguaw, 2013). Female visitors are currently more active in spa tourism, especially the married ones who are over 50 years old (Koh et al., 2010; Mcneil & Ragins, 2005; Smith & Puczko, 2009), but recent reports indicate that there is an increasing number of males demanding wellness services. In response to a higher interest of men, some spas have started to prepare services especially designed for male customers. Also, it is important to keep in mind that the number of younger population visiting spas for wellness treatments has been on an increase. The younger visitors are aware of health issues and they require services which can prevent the consequences and conditions caused by everyday stress (Mcneil & Ragins, 2005). Spa visitors do not only expect health treatments but also an opportunity to socialize, exchange their experience with friends, relatives and partners. Attention is more placed on eternal balance and wellbeing, rather than on physical appearance. According to Pesonen, Laukkanen, and Komppula (2011), wellbeing tourism can be seen as a form of wellness tourism which is more oriented towards emotional motivation instead of using luxurious spas and wellness centers.

This research, in addition to focusing on the motivations of wellness tourists (Chen & Prebensen, 2009; Chen et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2009; Magdalini & Paris, 2009; Mak et al., 2009), also tries to find the links between their motives and sociodemographic characteristics, like age and gender (Deng, 2007; Lee et al., 2009; Magdalini & Paris, 2009; Mak et al., 2009; Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001), marital status (Mak et al., 2009), education level (Deng, 2007; Lee et al., 2009; Magdalini & Paris, 2009; Mak et al., 2009) and the length of stay (Suresh, Ravichandran, & Ganesan, 2011; Pesonen et al., 2011).

4. Methodology

The study was conducted on a convenience sample of 165 respondents, wellness tourists who have visited Vrnjacka Banja from the beginning of January 2013 until the end of January 2014. Vrnjacka Banja is most popular and most frequently visited spa in Serbia and the region. Sample size was adjusted to correspond to statistical techniques that are suitable for tourist's segmentation (cluster analysis). During the cluster analysis we were following Formann (1984) and Qiu and Joe (2009) methodology for cluster analysis sample size determination. As we used the approach referred as 'factor-cluster segmentation', our set of variables, was reduced from initial 21 items to resulting six delineated variables representing factors (motivations), later on used in clustering process.

During their visitation, the tourists were interviewed by surveyors, the employees of Vrnjacka Banja DMO. Respondents were approached by surveyor in spa hotels who offer wellness services, at entrance/exit of wellness facilities. All the tourists using these facilities were approached as there was a dilemma of whether they were wellness tourists or medical tourists. The information was collected during different days of the week, combining Mondays (with less tourists attendance) and Fridays and Saturdays (plenty of tourists) and during different hours, mornings and afternoons.

As Vrnjacka Banja is generally famous as medical tourism destination, response rate was one to three in favor to medical tourists, or 33%. So, we interviewed approximately about 500 respondents, in order to obtain our final data of 165 respondents who declared themselves as wellness tourists. To eliminate any possible misunderstanding

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