

The Repercussions of Romania's Integration in the European Union over the Spa Tourism Potential

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Abstract: This paper is presenting the existing system of spas in Romania, the heritage of this area left by communism, the natural potential recoverable through the spa stations and also the changes occurring in the touristic activity based on these spas after 1989. A special attention was given to the spa tourism activities in the European Union coordinates; align EU requirements for the development of spa tourism and legislative framework in this field which has to be aligned with European requirements. This study brings a new element - a complex classification of the spa system in Romania and also a multidisciplinary analysis of the national framework spa tourism domain.

Keywords: spa natural heritage, natural factors with therapeutic indications, spa resorts of national and local tourist reception structures, investment and privatization, revitalization of health tourism.

1. Introduction

The changes in our country since 1989 have produced profound transformations in the spa system. Values have remained constant from the spa heritage: the diversity and richness of the natural therapeutic factors (some of them with exceptional qualities), the complex hotel structures, with personal bases of treatment (requiring modernization and adaptation to the new spa

market) and specialized personnel, both skilled in nursing and in the touristic activity domain.

Applying the strategy of socio-economic development of the country in 2000, regarding Romania's EU integration, over constant values of assets already included in the spa privatization and restructuring process has resulted in some beneficial impact of health tourism, including resizing of the natural factors with therapeutic indications, the

reorganization of the resorts network, modernization and renewal of heritage tourism spa built in line with the new concepts and international guidelines.

2. Resizing of natural spa factors

It is long known that Romania has a great wealth of natural spa factors generously spread on almost the entire area of the country and characterized by recognition of their therapeutic value beyond political borders

The natural spa heritage in the first part of this decade is subject to rigorous evaluations. By means of natural factors (as of August 31, 2000 nr.109 Ordinance, regarding the spas, climatic and balneoclimatic spa), all the physical/chemical therapeutic elements, are considered natural factors: therapeutic mineral waters, lakes and therapeutic mud, therapeutic gas, all physic-chemical/climatic of marine environment factors of the main types of bioclimates of Romania, including the ones inside caves and salt mines.

The National Institute of Rehabilitation, Physical Medicine and Balneoclimatology (INRMFB) has a number of main objectives of activity, some of them referring to the natural factors: organization, coordination, where appropriate, technical and methodological progress of the medical spa research, health protection and recovery therapy. Gathering the information from INRMFB research

on the spread of natural factors with therapeutic indications (mineral waters, therapeutic mud and salt mines) shows a decreasing process of their area, but still larger than the current network of stations (consisting of 86 in October 2009) approved by law (Fig. no. 1).

The main conclusions of the "National Tourism Development Master Plan 2007-2026" is the idea of the existence of 117 villages with different therapeutic factors (water, mud, gas, etc.), which represents the resources for 29 stations of national importance and 32 of local importance (probably corresponding situation of 2002 when they were declared legal in the first wave, about 60 stations). Mineral waters with therapeutic indications form the entire fund of therapeutic mineral substance due to the complex geological structure of Romania and their existence in relatively small areas with territorial different concentrations and chemical compositions and different temperatures, allows the simultaneous treatment, for the patient, of more associated diseases.

2.1.Reorganization of stations network

The HG. 1122 of October 10, 2002, gave the start of the changes for the conditions and procedures for certification of tourist resorts in order to improve the protection, conservation and exploitation framework of tourist resources. This decision was repealed by



Fig. 1. Geographic spread of natural therapeutic factors

the HD 14 nr.867/2006, approving rules and criteria for certification of tourist resorts and in 2008 with the entry into force of HG nr.852/2008, which was repealed and provisions HG nr.867/2006.

2.2. The current network of resorts

Since 2002 this network structure is changed by a set of laws that severely restrict the first wave, as mentioned in Annex 2 of the GD nr.1122/2002 a number of 65 national and local stations, will gradually expand (The Annex No.3 of GD. 867/2006, 82 stations of which 37 are of national and local interest 45) at 83 stations, declared by the Government Decision nr.852 Annex No.5 / 2008, of which 37 to interest national level (Fig.no. 2). Legislation is no longer establishing whether the nominated tourist resort falls to a certain category by natural factors as it was predominant proceeds after 1990 (when the resort classification dispel some doubts, the concerns of many with this) but by type interest; settlements and / or areas designated as spas, are bounded by urbanism planning and territorial arrangement, and the certification is done by the Ministry of Tourism along with local public administration authorities and approved by decision of the Government of Romania.

Tourist resorts of national interest are included as

a priority in the annual programs of tourism promotion, in the ones for the development of touristic products and in the ones of the general infrastructure development.

The variety and richness of curative agents, particularly the natural ones, explains the differences among the Romanian national interest and local resorts in terms of health guidance, through the work of INRMFB of the evaluation of the natural factors and of the constitution of each resorts natural factors and therapeutic indications, the predominant type of natural factors causing a resort specificity and health profile. Gradually the resorts, through what they have -natural treatment factors, treatment facilities equipped, qualified medical personnel, etc.- will provide the perfect setting for treatment and prevention of a number of conditions, including those which are specific for the present civilizations, such as " hyperkinetic syndrome "(caused by the lack of exercise in work, transport and home life)," inadaptability syndrome" (with the reduction of thermoregulatory functions in conditions such as lack of nature), unbalanced diet, the effects of pollution air, water, etc.. Romanian tourism in this way will connect the concepts and guidelines for modern international resorts which will offer a new dimension, a departure from traditional medical courses and a proximity to a

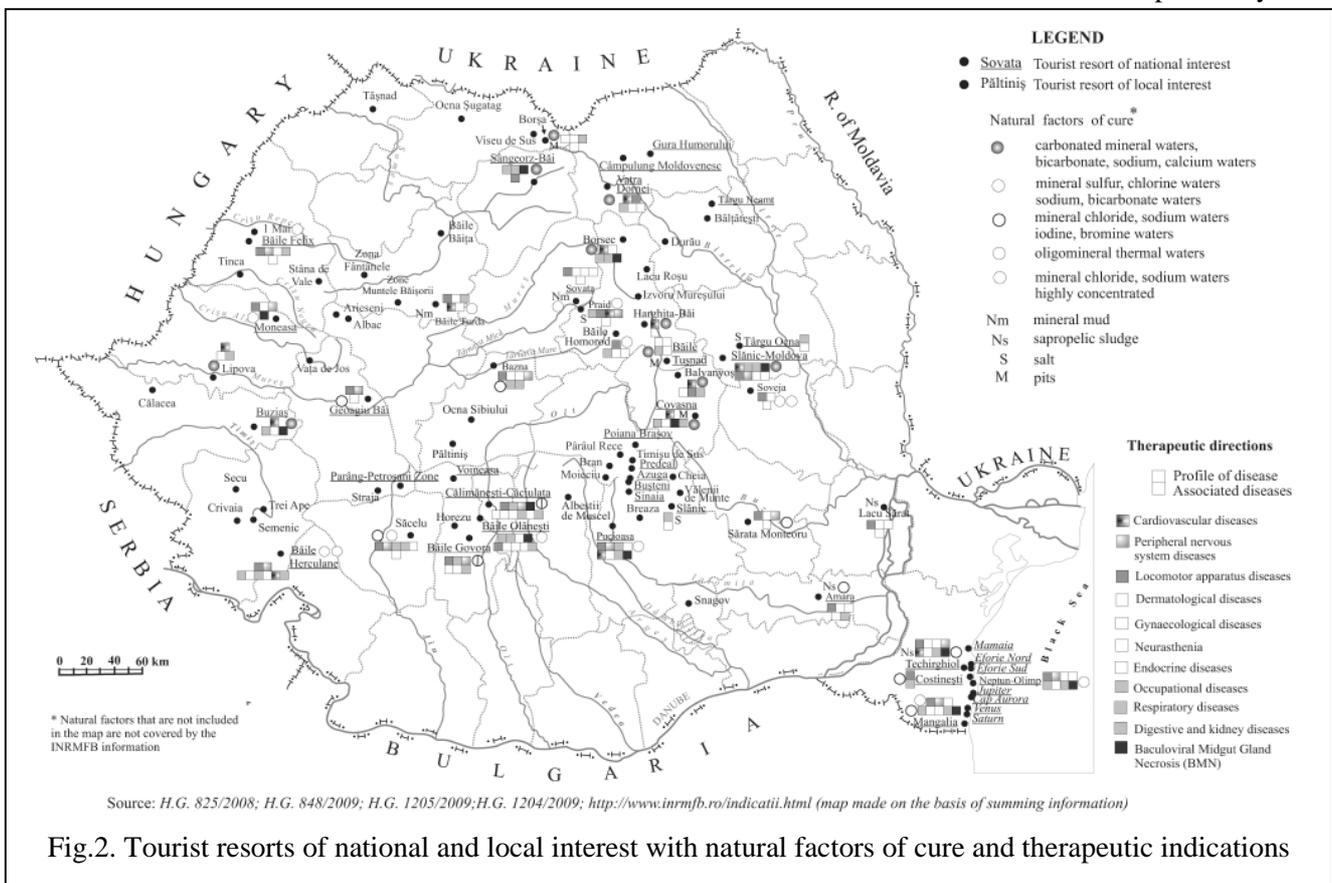


Fig.2. Tourist resorts of national and local interest with natural factors of cure and therapeutic indications

good physical and mental condition; the integration of the resorts in the healthcare system as in the concept of Dr. H. Pratzel, president of the International Society of Balneology and Climatology, which suggests that rehabilitation of the chronically ill treatment are carried out predominantly in resorts, while to the hospitals should return patients with acute illness, mainly because of the economical and methodological opportunities; adaptation of tourist receiving structures to ensure at the same time, several types of activities: prevention courses for healthy young people and adults, recovery courses for people of all ages with functional deficits.

2.3. Restructuring of tourist receiving structures

2.3.1. Completing the privatization process

It had two main goals: an economic one (removal of the monopoly of the state) and an administrative one (completing the decentralization). This ended traits (the monopoly and the centralization) of a communist economy and laid the foundation of a market economy. Privatization was the expedient exit from the deep crisis of the spa industry with the removal of communism and the return of the country in the European democracy. In the tourism industry the process had a more difficult beginning, accelerated in millennium III by the exercising of influence and adopting of some measures which drove to tourism development in general.

In 2002 tourism was privatized as a percentage of 92% and in terms of registered capital, the private sector held 88%. In 2003, however, remained in the state (in number of 14 or 16, depending on the source of information) important parts of heritage in centralized structure: spa hotels totaling approximately 11,000 beds managed by SIND ROMANIA (tour operator existing in the touristic world for over 30 years) and under 6,000 beds distributed in spa hotels managed by National House of Pensions as well as a number of hospitals of health recovery structure. SIND Romania currently operates a total of 15,000 beds in their receiving structures represented by 24 hotels and 25 villas in 17 resorts in the country and are visited by over 100,000 tourists annually.

From the privatization process have benefited of development resort considered pilot – centers – Covasna, Slănic Moldova, Olanesti, Sovata, Baile Felix, Mangalia, Baile Herculane etc..; this places have received financial support from local administration and have attracted a number of foreign investors.

2.3.2. Reduction of the spa accommodation fund

Following *the tourist accommodation capacity situation* since 1994 (when they take seriously the process of privatization and restructuring) on tourist destinations (resorts, Seaside resorts, excluding Constanta city, mountains resorts, the Danube Delta area, including Tulcea, Bucharest and cities that are county capitals, excluding Tulcea, other locations and tourist routes) established by the National Institute of Statistics Bucharest stands up the graduated decrease of the accommodation for spa resorts, more evident after 2002, placing the destination in 2008 on the 4th place (from 17.26% in 1994 to 15.68% in 2002 and 13.46% of all destinations in 2008) among others, to 2nd place in 1994 (Fig.no. 3a).

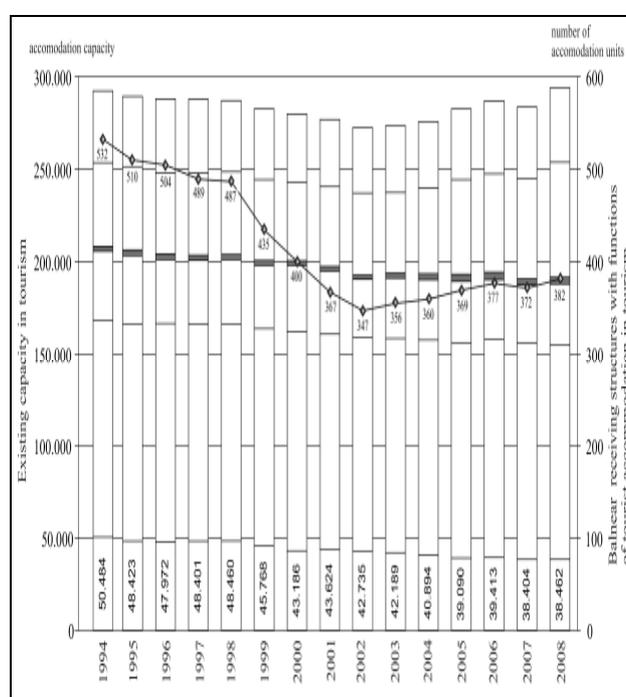


Fig. 3a. Actual tourist accommodation capacity (by tourist destinations) and number of existing tourism accommodation units, in the 1994 to 2008 period

According to statistical data and *the number of accommodation units* for "touristic resorts" has suffered, falling by about one third of the total in 2008 compared to 1994 (Fig.no. 3a), but remains the top destination in *the index of the utilization capacity of the functioning accommodation* with 51% in 2008 (Seaside area resorts, excluding Constanta city - 46.74%, Bucharest and county capitals, excluding Tulcea - 32.61%, the Danube Delta area, including Tulcea - 31.46%, resorts of the mountain area - 24.03%, other cities and tourist routes - 23.43%), the 1994 index of the utilization of

the capacity of accommodation in service was 48.6%.

Surprisingly, the fund of accommodation establishments (most of 2 and 3 stars) is decreasing after the Revolution of December 1989, although it had a visible rejuvenation, accelerated in the last 10 years, by incorporating smaller capacity (typically less than 80 seats accommodation), normally located in the extension of existing resort to or rarely built on vacant sites or by substitution of old buildings located in a high degree of degradation. A number of units built before 1989 have undergone the selection criteria and continuously upgrading standards and requirements imposed by the tourist market. The other part of the old stock is in an advanced state of decay, contrasting with the new and modern, leaving a permanent impression to any tourist or foreign visitor that they are in between the end of a stage of the resorts and the beginning of another one.

2.3.3. Modernization and the improvement of comfort

Annual all resorts enjoyed investment, but with different percentages, depending on the specific conjectural factors, money and interest, which are signs that announce a possible revival of spa tourism. They were generally targeted to both the renovation and upgrading of tourist accommodation (most hotels), with features catering, functions of treatment and to build new hotel units with treatment facilities or other accommodation units on modern principles of the imposed European standards.

Following the tourist accommodation capacity in operation (no. spaces / day) by comfort categories for the destination "spa resorts" from 2001 to 2008 it involves:

- Introduction of a higher comfort category in the same type of accommodation, from 2004 being recorded camping of two and three stars and four stars urban hostels and from 2006 5-star urban hostels etc.

- Increasing the number of places / day from the upper categories and lower the ones from the lower categories of the same type of accommodation; spectacular growth in 2008 compared to 2001 showed the following types of accommodation: about seven times the hotel in comfort category of 4 stars (highest category of comfort for this purpose) 212 060 number of seats / day in 2008 from 31 390 seats / day in 2001;

- Maintenance and expression of a certain preference, probably related to the living standard of Romania, by a category of population, forming a

high mass of tourists, for the hotels and villas in category of 2-star comfort, suggested by the high values maintained during the eight years (about six million places / day / year - hotels, approximately 500,000 sites / day / year - villas).

2.3.4. The slight increase in the number of tourists under the harsh conditions of compliance with membership criteria of Romania's EU integration

Statistics announces a slight increase in the number of tourist's spas destinations from 2000 to 2008, in 2008 having almost the last place of six tourist destinations (Fig. no. 3b). Romania has practiced since 2000, providing tourist services, an aggressive presentation of touristic products.

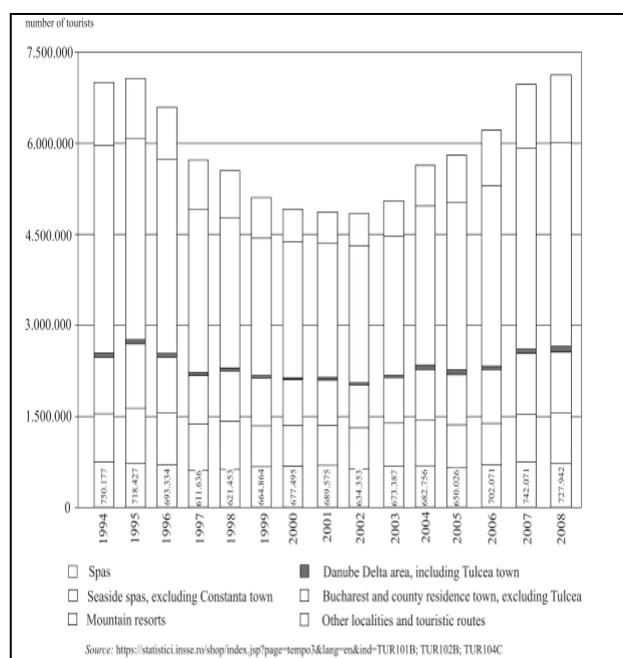


Fig. 3b. Arrivals of tourists at structures with functions of tourist accommodation, after tourist destinations, in the period 1994-2008

Only in 2002-2003, has participated at 60 international fairs and yearly exhibitions (including 55 in Europe, two in the Middle East, two in North America and one in Japan) occasions in which 250 touristic Romanian companies were present, they exposed and negotiated international tourism contracts, and over 3.5 million visitors went to Romania's stand. The aggressive tourism promotion campaign appears to have had a positive effect on the destination "spa resorts", because each year of the period 2000 - 2004 was characterized by a surplus from foreign tourists from the previous year, from 25,512 people in 2000 to 45,080 people in 2004, the last value being the highest and

unparalleled to date. Not incidentally, the "Study on the foundation of tourism development strategy in Romania after EU accession, Phase I - Tourism in Romania - analyzing the current situation, Bucharest, September, 2005" shows that in 2004 of all tourist destinations, the spa resorts highly concentrated the flow of foreign tourists, the main issuing countries of tourists to Romania had 74.93% of the market, a percentage much higher than the country average. So, for Romania the first issuing market was the Hungarian one with a share of 26.98%, traditional country issuing this area, the second being the German market with 19.96%, third Israel, with 18.82%, the fourth market, surprisingly, Austria, 5.13%, country which was not yet on top; Italy's market the fifth with a share of 4.03%.

Conclusion:

Spa tourism will make gradual and fully contribute to economic and social development of Romania. The onset of positive effects in revitalizing spa tourism will occur as a result of the implementation of Romania's development strategy, of the alignment with EU rules. The finality of spa tourism development strategy and its implementation, and achieving successfully the target set by the "National Tourism Development Master Plan 2007-2026", through the efforts of the Romanian state institutions and national organizations in cooperation with the European ones, are a guarantee for sustainable development of spa tourism, and of tourism in general. The growth of the future developing opportunities, in order to satisfy Romanian and foreign tourists, has its foundation through the richness and diversity of the natural spa factors. In this way, Romania will become internationally competitive and will certainly regain the fame that it used to have as a country of spa resort. Romania has a vast potential in this area, being one of the few former communist countries that can shift the economy for emphasizing this area. Unfortunately, the investment in this area is still far from the satisfaction. Also, investments in infrastructure services, including access to the resorts leave much to be desired. A revival in this area is more than necessary. Hope for the future is based on a total alignment to European standards, the integration of such travel in all European tourist phenomena that can bring extra tourists and business can solve, even partially, the problems that troubled contemporary Romanian tourism.

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