

## **INNOVATIVE WAYS OF VALUING NATURAL SPA RESOURCES IN ROMANIA BY MEANS OF TOURIST SERVICES**

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This PhD thesis, entitled “**Innovative ways of valuing natural spa resources in Romania by means of tourist services**”, approaches health tourism as a possible solution to improve the health status of older people and for the prevention of the young segment of the population, applicable on Romania. Given the undoubted strengths of the country, such as: low rates, subsidizing services for certain categories, richness and diversity of natural resources, experience in the field, Roman heritage and last but not least, the possibility of treating several diseases at the same resort, we considered appropriate this research direction, bringing new aspects in the field.

Another reason for treating the subject in this direction starts from the literature review. Following the documentation, we concluded that health tourism research was not based on this approach, so we wanted to fill this gap in the literature. Especially in Romania, research is mainly based on heritage spa side, assessing the quality and the use of resources in treating diseases. In this situation, the economic component is ignored. Thus, in this context, we followed the emphasis on the economic, social and health segments.

The purpose of the thesis is **to position Romania as a spa destination resort on the European market characterized by an aging demography by proposing innovative ways of exploiting natural spa resource**. To achieve this goal, there were developed several qualitative and quantitative researches, which were designed to provide a detailed radiography of Romanian SPA tourism, from the local level to the national and international one.

Regarding the thesis structure, it comprises 6 chapters, including theoretical and applied aspects. Researches carried out followed three levels: the local, national and international ones. Thus, **Chapter 1** included elements of terminology, emphasizing on the need for a common glossary accepted by all countries with spa potential. There are detailed key terms that are used in the field, such as: wellness tourism, medical tourism, spa tourism, spas, thalassotherapy. It also covers the main approaches about this type of tourism by region or country, adding that authorities relate different according to the natural resources and subsidizing of spa treatments. Other components which were analyzed are demographic data, spa heritage and innovation in this field. It has also highlighted the existence of natural resources and their exploitation in European countries, including in the form of beauty products.

**Chapter 2** was focused on Romanian spa tourism, following a similar structure to the previous chapter with the applicability at national level. We wanted to demonstrate through literature review that Romania has experience in the field, the natural resources have a large diversity and the resorts have a rich history.

**Chapter 3** included research methodology, the scope of the paper, objectives and research hypotheses. The work is based on four major researches: 3 qualitative and one quantitative. Thereby, there were set six objectives: the conceptual approach of the main elements of literature, the analysis of spa tourism in Romania, the research of the current situation of health tourism in the country, tourists opinion about spa tourism, achieving a comparative analysis between Romania and another European country with natural spa resources (Spain), and proposing innovative ways of capitalizing the Romanian spa heritage.

**Chapter 4** included the researches which took place in Romania: the local qualitative research, the national qualitative study based on structured interview and the national quantitative research based on administered questionnaires. The results were presented and interpreted according to the research instrument which was used. We wanted in this way to consider Romanian health tourism starting from the local level, choosing a resort of local interest in Vrancea: Soveja that is representative of exploiting natural resources in a poor way and then, we analyzed it using Butler method and structured interviews. Thus, we conducted a description of the current status of the resort and we also detailed the causes in order to develop proposals for the resort recovery.

**Chapter 5** included a qualitative research about spa tourism in Spain. Through this study we wanted to achieve a detailed description of the field in this country based on research visits and interviews made in the treatment units to underlie the proposals made in the last part of the paper.

**Chapter 6** presents the personal contributions. Based on the results of the conducted researches and on the information found in the literature review, we mentioned the main innovative ways to exploit the spas resources in the country, comprising 5 main layers: promoting, segmentation, investors, establishments and spas and competent authorities