

Networking of Spa Resorts

The Case Study of Serbian Central Region

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Abstract

Report on the development of Serbia in 2009 indicates that the main feature of the regional development is distinct territorial unevenness caused by numerous factors of economic, demographic and social character. Supported with the fact that Serbia lies on the lakes of mineral waters, the analysis also showed it has potential in natural resources, suitable for development of continental tourism. However, the Serbian tourism products are not adequately developed or commercialized on the international tourism market. Contemporary flows in world tourism industry define new profile of tourists, with a focus on visitors who belong to the leading development category of the population. Thus, users are representatives of the creative class. This implies instant holiday for the purpose of conferences, team building or just exchange of views in an informal setting. In accordance with that, this paper examines contents and activities that will have the power of attracting and networking them. In addition to that, the paper will examine new ways of treating and promoting spa tourism and possibilities of its improvement.

Keywords: networking, spa resorts, creative class, Serbian central region.

Introduction

The two basic social imperatives that marked the history of mineral spa tourism are religion and health. The places usually had religious connotation, where water as element of healing had a significant role. Over time, the accent was put on recreation and culture. Mineral spas became places of social exclusivity where the high class of society was relaxing during the whole summer. The health was constituent but not necessary part of this process. The promotion of these places was usually mouth-to-mouth among people in high class society.

The mineral spa tourism of Serbia also has a long tradition. Besides the fact that mineral spas were the image of our society, they represented our health and medical culture as well. It is considered that Serbia lies on the lakes of thermo-mineral waters, with over 1000 springs and 40 mineral spas. Each one of these mineral spas is specific for its geographic and climate conditions, springs, recreation centers, even its historical and cultural heritage. One of their biggest advantages is that they can be sojourned during the whole year because they have mild climate and represent ecologically clean environment. Along with the sports and recreation activities and so-called congress tourism, they could become the most profitable sector of our economy.

Relaxation tourism is a tourism product that has as its goal to respond to the needs of a contemporary man which include preserving the life energy, stress relief, but also gaining new experiences through visiting new localities with specific offer of natural, climate and cultural wealth. Besides, in accordance with contemporary way of life this type of tourism becomes more required in Europe as well as in our country.

The aim of this research is to point at potentials as well as limitations of the Serbian mineral spas by analyzing the present situation and referring to the character of regional development in Serbia, with the special focus on recreation activities as the basis for offer improvement and increasing the attractiveness of these places. The research consists of 4 parts: (1) the current situation in Serbia regarding regional

development, (2) the definition of term recreation center and their users, (3) the analysis of mineral spas of the central and western tourist cluster and the case studies, and (4) guidelines and recommendations that have as their aim to improve the offer in a long term and influence on the increasing competitiveness of tourist products and mineral spas of Serbia.

Regional (Un) Development – Serbia Case

Report on the development of Serbia in 2009 states that the main characteristic of regional development of Serbia is a distinct territorial disparity. This kind of imbalance is manifested through several levels: undeveloped territory, developed center and insufficiently developed periphery. The same source indicates that uneven development and regional differences are caused by numerous economic, demographic and social factors with the special emphasis on multi-decadal marginalization of the process of regional development strategic management. The consequence is the regional disproportion which is manifested in a high level of unemployment, reducing the scope of a total economic activity and a constant decline in population especially in undeveloped area (Republički zavod za razvoj, 2009). According to the researches of the Republic institute, the regional polarization of Serbia is multilayered and is evinced in interregional differences manifested in demographic movements in Serbia, regional educational structure of the population, interregional economic differences, infrastructural gap and poverty. Regional disproportions of the level of development in Serbia are the biggest in Europe and in time they grow even bigger.

The most illustrative review of this situation is the trend of evolution of demographic situation, a sort of logic response to the social-economic situation in the country. The migration¹ of population towards economically active centers is noted, all in order to ensure their own existence. This trend would lead to the forming of only one demographically vital territory, the one that would connect present regions of Belgrade and Novi Sad. Centralization is manifested in all levels, the state, the province as well as the level of municipality². Considering negative trend of regional development of Serbia but also strategic orientation to join the European Union, regionalization and more even development are set as a primary goal for solving this situation. Its purpose lies in setting the equalities, not literally but in the form of various opportunities and chances. Edvard Jakopin (2009) determines five reasons for which the regionalization is necessary: (1) Regionalization as the basic instrument of state in terms of economic, social and demographic development, (2) Development of each part of the state with geo-strategic character, (3) Economic and social homogeneity, (4) Dialog and tolerance and (5) Political relaxation. However, the current orientation to regionalization and equal development entails three crucial problems: deficiency of laws regulating restitution, denationalization, laws of public or municipality property, and deficiency of systematic decentralization as an expression of political will and the political appropriation of the system of regionalization (Stojkov, 2009).

In the period of time from 2003, after ratifying the *Law of planning and construction*, series of activities have been initiated and series of legal acts have been adopted which have as their goal to contribute to more equal regional development of Serbia. Among them stands out the *Spatial development strategy*, which is based on the fact that the cities (urban system and urban net) are in every way a pillar and regional catalyst of the economic development³. Zekovic (2009) states that the cause of recession in our cities is rapid decline in industry which led to the most powerful regional deindustrialization in Europe.

Common *SWOT* analysis of the spatial development of Serbia (Републичка агенција за просторно планирање, 2009) has marked relative wealth in natural recourses as a powerful potential for developing, above all, continental tourism (mineral spa, mountain, cultural). However, the analysis of tourism development in Serbia (Ekonomski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2006) indicates: insufficient valorization of tourism potentials in Serbia; limitations regarding the political and social-economics context; deficiency of diverse tourist products; low quality of service; structure of lodging capacities; present complementary local activities integrated with tourism; deficiency of essentially organized and functionally

¹ The facts of the migration without return from urban municipality centers to three large cities in Serbia: Belgrade, Novi Sad and Niš (Kovačević 2009)

² If you consider only the examples of the positive example such as the autonomous region of Vojvodina or the city of Belgrade, you will notice the enormous differences in development of the municipalities in Vojvodina between south and north Backa and, for example, municipalities on the east and southeast of Vojvodina, as well as in the city of Belgrade between Belgrade and Barajevo, Sopot etc. Therefore, the relationship between center and periphery appears dramatically on all levels (Stojkov, 2009).

³ Over 90%, and somewhere even over 95% of the total economic development happens in cities.

completed as well as regionally integrated offer of tourist destinations; insufficient following and application of international principles, methods and models of tourism development, etc.

While defining the development clusters and economic capacities that have a chance to succeed, tourism appears an inevitable complex where is noted the unused potential of growth. However, Serbia today has only comparative advantages⁴ necessary to transform in competitive advantages of tourism. The primary goal of tourism development process in Serbia represents creating a considerably larger ambit and higher quality coordinated with natural and cultural potentials and recourses of certain regional units, with greater participation of the local population and strengthening the cooperation between municipalities, regions and even beyond borders respecting the natural and cultural heritage as the capacity of the environment (Републичка агенција за просторно планирање, 2010).

One of the concepts of tourism development intended by *Development strategy of Serbia* is affirmation and development of the individual aspects of tourism: city, mineral spa, mountain, transit, nautical, countryside, hunting, monument and ecotourism. In accordance with the stated development concept, focus of this research project involves mineral spa tourism as an important aspect of tourism in Serbia. In a subsequent part of this text the new ways of treating and affirmation of mineral spa tourism will be indicated as well as the possibilities of its improvement.

Relaxation Centers and their Users

In past two decades in the countries of developed West, regional development is based on the impulse of companies, firms and industry in form of financing and stimulations. From the perspective of politics, it means stimulating those firms that initiate regional innovations and development. Primarily, there is to be mentioned the so-called creative capital. It is based essentially on people: the ones referred in the contemporary literature as a creative class. Characteristic of this creative class is that its members are involved in business that creates innovative and important products. The core of this new class represents scientists and engineers, university professors, poets and writers, artists, analytics, actors, designers, architects as well as leading intellectuals of the modern society. Members of this class work on products or projects that have wide range of application and use and that can be strategically produced, sold or benefited (Florida, 2005). Above this, the creative class also involves creative professionals that act in wide range of knowledge – industry, high-tech sector, financial services, legal and medical profession, as well as business management. These people are engaged in solving problems in a creative way, relaying on a complexity of their knowledge in searching innovative solutions. This implies high level of formal education, therefore high level of human capital. Independent and creative thinking is usually requested of them. They apply and combine standard approaches in a unique way that corresponds to a certain situation. Therefore, it is auspicious that creative class is involved in crucial trends referred to:

- creative class is being alienated from the traditional communities and classic business centers in order to found places called creative centers;
- creative centers have a tendency to become economically cumulative clusters of the modern age. Not only they have high concentration of creative class people, they show as well high concentration of creative economic results in the form of innovations and development of high-tech industry;
- creative centers are not progressive in a classical economic way, as regarding the development of infrastructure etc. They are based on people as initiators of development. This type of centers provides integrated ecosystems or habitats where all forms of creativity, artistic and cultural, technological and economical, prevail and are welcome;
- creative people do not inhabit these places for traditional reasons. They search in these communities the abundance of high-quality experience, open-mindedness for diversity of every kind and above all possibility of confirming their own identity and being considered creative people (Florida, 2005).

Considering the theme of research, it can be said that creative people are target users, as they can contribute in networking and further development of spa resorts in Serbia. According to Attali, wellness industry will

⁴ Diversified structure of attractions, long history and common recognition, preserved natural recourses and relatively good communications as well as great human potential.

become the most important. Tourism will turn into a quest for peace and solitude, while everyone is trying to escape from the uncertainty and distance/protect from the present. It aims to: creating, attracting and retaining creative class. Urban, industrial and social aesthetics will be of fundamental importance.

In Serbia the biggest concentration of this group of people is still in urban areas, i.e. in large cities. The fact is considered a consequence of territorial inequality and powerful regional deindustrialization (as written in previous chapter). One of the possible solutions for founding creative centers is based on the tourist destinations' offer which in the current situation can respond to the needs of creative class. On the other side, it is implied that this type of creative centers in Serbia could influence the gradual regional growth and development. Among else, it implies modern trends in tourism that go beyond traditional journeys only for vacation. Therefore, they are visitors/active tourists that belong to the leading evolving category of society which is interested in gaining authentic experiences, interested in culture and natural recourse destinations. This project focuses on this particular type of users, and sees relaxation centers as creative centers, thus places that would respond to their needs. They are representatives of the creative class and businessmen who, because of the nature of their work, feel the need for relaxing aspects of tourism, especially in the form of instant vacation and for the necessity of encounters (conferences, meetings, team building) and exchange of opinion in informal environment.

Mineral Spa Tourist Centers and their Networking in Serbian Central Region

The accepted *Development strategy of Serbia* provides dividing of the territory in tourist zones/clusters which is performed according to the traditional physical-geographical and anthrop-geographical structuring (Figure 1). For the purpose of this project, we choose the division determined by *Spatial plan of the Republic of Serbia*, because it separates the characteristics of certain areas according to their complex and integral tourist offer and because it is concordant⁵ with the *Tourism development strategy of Serbia*.

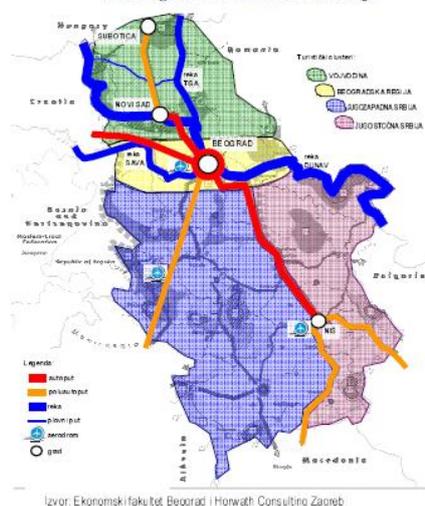


Figure 1. Proposal of tourist clusters of Serbia (Ekonomski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2006).

SWOT analysis of the *Spatial development of Serbia* recognized the relief as the **Strength (Potential)** which is suitable for the tourism development, protected natural goods, tourist tradition, ethno-cultural-historical and religious heritage and remarkable tourist recourses and motives. As the **Weakness (Limitation)** the analysis noted, however, insufficient capacities of the tourist lodging, occurrence of unplanned construction, incomplete and uncoordinated planning regulation of tourist destinations, insufficient infrastructural equipment and offer of public services, deficiency of professionally designed tourist products for international commercialization, deficiency of the national tourist brand and notion of Serbia as a destination on the international market. Within the **Possibilities (Chances)** the development of high-quality-all-year-long tourism is recognized as well as accompanying activities; the multipurpose use of thermal waters for improving the mineral spa tourism; the great potential of using cultural heritage as a generator of numerous

⁵ *Spatial plan of the Republic of Serbia* suggests dividing the territory in tourist clusters: the autonomous region of Vojvodina, Belgrade, southeast Serbia, central and west Serbia and the autonomous region of Kosovo and Metohija. *The tourism development strategy of Serbia* implies the division of the territory in four zones: Vojvodina, Belgrade, West and East Serbia.

cultural, tourist and economic activities; as well as tourist regionalization of the territory of Serbia along with establishing tourist destinations and ranking them by the priorities of improvement. As **Threats** are noted the devastation and loosing of certain tourist development spaces due to endangering nature and environment, insufficient regional integration of tourist offer, etc.

The *Spatial plan of Serbia* determines mineral spa tourist centers as destinations with full all-year offer. According to this plan, the largest number of mineral spas belongs to a territory of the middle and western zone/cluster (13 in total): Bogutovačka Banja, Palanački kiseljak, Selters, Ribarska, Vrnjačka Banja, Mataruška, Jošanička, Ovčar, Gornja Trepča, Banja Vrujci, Bukovička Banja, Banja Koviljača and Pribojska Banja. Four of these 13 mineral spas belong to a category of mineral spa tourist places of national and promising international importance, 2 belong to places of national importance regarding the development perspective, and the rest are in a group of national mineral spa tourist places.

According to Dželebdžić and Bazik, based on the new interpretation of territorial cohesion and vision of the interaction and interdependence, the basis for an integrated planner approach to regional development expands, and consequently the region as a tourist destination. The analysis of spatial structure, function and organization of space enables setting up the appropriate analytical framework in terms of territorial networking. Spatial relations, flows and interactions should be observed in the multidimensional and dynamic environment of physical, functional and organizational networks (ESPON, 2006). Besides requirements for networking which clearly connect local offer of spa tourism with regional and global markets, this approach enables full research of the key issues of spatial development: territorial cohesion, competitiveness and sustainable tourism development. In fact, the development and strengthening of networks requires 3 groups of strategies (Table 1):

- _ physical networks are important for the development of roads and corridors, grouping economic activities and location of other objects in a given space, as well as the availability of locations for new development;
- _ functional networks are linking local services and products of spa tourism (in terms of health, wellness and cultural tourism) with global markets; it implies innovative strategies, promotional activities, segmentation of offer towards targeted groups, in order to arouse interest of tourists and organizations;
- _ organizational networks are needed for realization of the new initiatives, monitoring implementation of policies and setting up future directions of tourism development; here are particularly important local initiatives, created and supported by various social groups and actors in the provision of tourism services, most of which depend on the feasibility of new ideas about tourism products, events, etc.

Table 1. Elements of spatial networks for a balanced spa tourist destination.

physical networks	functional networks	organizational networks
1 clustering of spa activities	6 positioning	11 legislation
2 location of tourist facilities	7 branding, image	12 destination management
3 transport infrastructure	8 marketing, marketing network	13 quality of life
4 tourist infrastructure	9 segmentation, profile	14 safety and security
5 IT and communications infrastructure	10 terms/modes of use	15 participation, partnership

Source: Dželebdžić and Bazik, 2010.

Spa Quadrant of Central Serbia: Opportunities and Limitations

The term *wellness* means a condition which corresponds to good physical and mental health⁶. In medical dictionary this is emphasized with how to actively work to achieve it (appropriate diet, exercise and habits).⁷ There are several types/dimensions of wellness: social, occupational, spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, environmental, financial, mental and medical.⁸ It is important to specify true meaning of the term, because in many cases it is superficially understood, and in accordance with that interpretation - apply.

⁶ Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition. Harper Collins Publishers.

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/wellness> (accessed: September 15, 2011).

⁷ Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary. Merriam-Webster, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/wellness> (accessed: September 15, 2011).

⁸ Dimensions of wellness, <http://www.definitionofwellness.com/images/dimesions-of-wellness.jpg>, (accessed: September 15, 2011).

Particularly in Serbia, wellness and spa centers appeared few years ago, mainly located in cities and used for short-term relaxation.

On the other hand, Serbia qualify as a country rich in mineral springs and spa resorts, which in addition to its healing properties, should promote the offer in the way of prevention, i.e. wellness. In accordance with these dimensions of wellness, a comparative analysis of the four spa resorts will be shown, in order to present their strengths both at individual sites and at the level of this isolated area.

The analysis of content which characterize a spa as a relaxation center showed that only 8 spas offer some kind of wellness programs. This offer usually comes down to massage and warm baths, located in hotels or rehabilitation centers of spa resorts. By its attractiveness it can be singled out programs that offer Koviljača Spa (IAUS Beograd, 2005), such as *Program of vital energy renewal*, *Royal treatment*, *Floating in the clouds*, and so on. This research has also shown that the offer of relaxation activities and contents in the central part of Serbia is on a very low level and mostly limited to the health facilities supplemented by sport and recreation. Accordingly, this site does not meet the expectations of the population characterized as a creative class, and therefore has limited development potential. In addition, this is contrary to current development of the *European spa industry* offer, which includes spa visits, health tourism, wellness, fitness and beatifying, regenerative and relaxing visits, as a kind of response to the increasing demand of individual tourists and tour operators.

In accordance with the goals of this paper, the subject is detailed research of contents and activities' offer in spas. Spas of Central Serbia are analyzed, and the emphasis is placed on the example of *Serbian spa quadrant* that includes Vrnjačka, Mataruška, Bogutovačka and Jošanička spa.

Case Studies: Vrnjačka, Mataruška, Bogutovačka and Jošanička Spa

Area of the Serbian spa quadrant gravitates around the city Kraljevo, which is about 190 km away from Belgrade. It includes four spa villages: (1) Vrnjačka Spa (22.7 km) - tourist site of international importance, (2) Mataruška Spa (8.6 km) - the national tourist destination, with perspective for international importance, (3) Bogutovačka spa (12.3 km) - the national tourist destination and (4) Jošanička spa (74 km) - tourist site of the national interest (Republička agencija za prostorno planiranje, 2010).

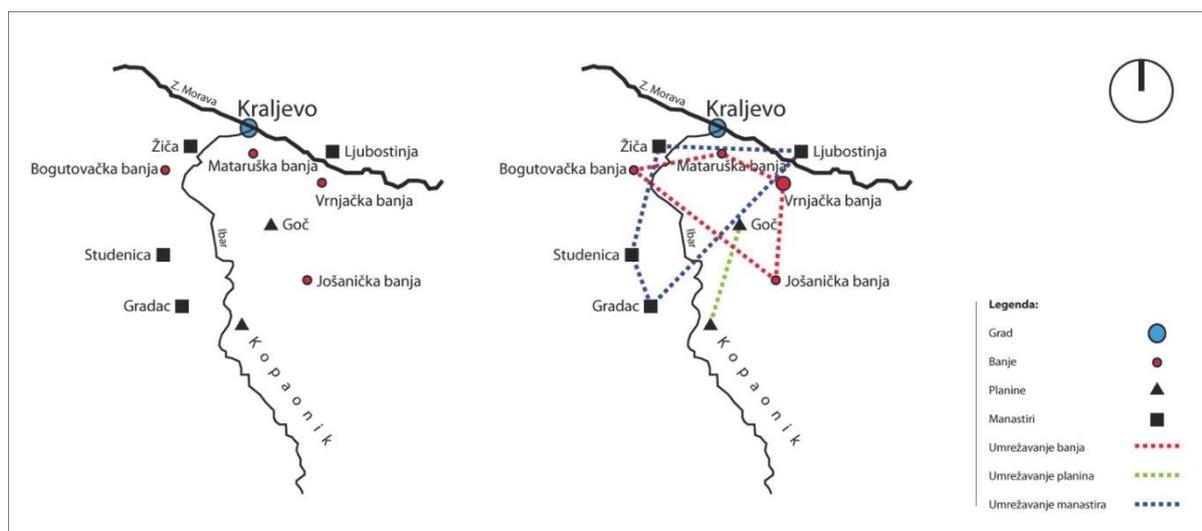


Figure 1. Area of the Serbian spa quadrant.

This area is rich in international and national architectural heritage, such as large numbers of monasteries (Ljubostinja, Studenica, Žiča, Gradac). Apart from these, in the immediate vicinity are spread Kopaonik and Goč mountain (Figure 2). According to these data and in line with the idea of forming the network of relaxation centers, this area has great potential, which will be further represented by individual analysis of spa resorts in relation to: the dominant character of the spa, contents, attractiveness of the settlement area, the attractiveness of the environment, events, springs and their characteristics. These elements are basis for determining the dimensions of wellness that can be achieved in this area (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparative review of characteristics of chosen spa case studies.

	Vrnjačka spa	Mataruška spa	Bogutovačka spa	Jošanička spa
dominant character	Treatment with the tendency of development of contents that will transform this place into a center for relaxation	Treatment and development of tourist facilities using the outdated approach. Facilities for relaxation not presented.	Treatment and development of tourist facilities using the outdated approach. Facilities for relaxation not presented.	Treatment, with additional programs for prevention and rehabilitation. Facilities for relaxation not represented.
contents	Sport and recreational centers, sports halls, open soccer fields, basketball and handball, swimming pools, aqua, wellness and fitness centers and gyms, table tennis, billiards hall, tennis courts, bicycle rental, fishing, hunting, walking promenade.	Sports facilities, recreational facilities, congresses and symposia, conferences and seminars, student tours, recreational education, prom, workers' sports games, sports training, hunting, fishing and kayaking.	Services in the field of spa tourism: recreation workers, sports training, excursions, recreational classes, other entertainment and tourist services.	Dominant facilities are primarily intended for medical and recreational purposes (passive recreation). Trails for hiking.
attractiveness of the settlement area	The resort seems regulated, especially in the central zone, which includes main pedestrian artery, parallel to the river and park. There are number of attractive facilities that enable social interaction and moderate recreation.	The resort has a semi / urban character in the central zone dominated by the park area. The facilities are in deteriorated condition and therefore unattractive appearance.	The settlement does not emphasize the urban character, but his appeal in this case comes down to dominate the natural environment with landscaped areas for walking, solitude and meditation.	The settlement does not emphasize the urban character, but his appeal in this case comes down to dominate the natural environment with landscaped areas for walking, solitude and meditation.
attractiveness of the environment	Based on a short distance of significant natural resources such as mountain Goč and Zapadna Morava river and architectural heritage which include monasteries Studenica, Žiča, Ljubostinja, Gradac, Đurđevi stupovi and the remains of Ras fortress, Maglič, Brvenik and Koznik.	Based on a short distance of significant natural resources such as river Ibar, the mountain Stolovi, Triglav, Čemerno and architectural heritage which include monasteries Studenica, Žiča, Gradac, Đurđevi stupovi, Sopoćani.	Spas offer is complemented by "Path of Health", the picturesque environment surrounded by wooded hills of the mountains, river Lopatnica and rich cultural and historical heritage (Maglič fortress, monasteries Žiča and Studenica).	Nearby are a national park and the mountain resort of Kopaonik, with walking paths and hiking. In addition, there are monuments of architectural heritage (monasteries Studenica, Stari Ras, Sopoćani and Đurđevi stupovi).
events	"Vrnjačke cultural festivities", "Festival of Film Screenplay", "Elegant festivities", "Book Festival", "Spa Market", "Vrnjački Carnival" and others.	Lilac Days, Cultural, Art Colony Studenica, Days of Transformation, Happy descent, Daffodils revisited.	Lilac Days, Cultural, Art Colony Studenica, Days of Transformation, Happy descent, Daffodils revisited.	No data.
springs	5 springs are used for balneological therapy, and two springs are bottling as mineral water.	Several.	Several.	5 springs (having the character of the warmest in Europe)
spring characteristics	temp: 14 to 36.60 °C Cold to hypothermal. Mineral characteristics: hydrocarbon sodium, calcium, magnesium hydrocarbon, hydrocarbon potassium, cold.	temp: 42 - 51 °C Hyperthermal water. Mineral characteristics: sodium, magnesium, hydrocarbon, chlorine, and a sulphurous hyperthermia.	temp: 24 - 27 °C Hyperthermal water. Mineral characteristics: calcium, magnesium, sodium hydrocarbons, hydrogen / sulfides.	temp: 36 - 77 °C Hyperthermal water. Mineral characteristics: sodium, potassium, calcium, hydrocarbons, sulfate and fluoride.

The realization of individual wellness dimensions is viewed separately in relation to current and future offer of spa resorts and their near and far environment.

Table 3. Individual wellness dimensions which is possible to develop.

Wellness dimension	Vrnjačka banja	Mataruška banja	Bogutovačka banja	Jošanička banja
SOCIAL	+	+	-	-
SPIRITUAL	+	+	+	+
PHYSICAL	+	+	+	+
INTELLECTUAL	+	-	-	-
ENVIRONMENTAL	+	+	+	+
MENTAL	+	+	+	+
MEDICAL	+	+	+	+

The analysis also showed that, except Vrnjačka spa, other spas in this area haven't developed relaxation facilities although they have great potential. If these spas are considered as a single, general conclusions are:
 _ Vrnjačka spa should complement its offer with major focus on wellness facilities. This would be achieved by expanding the offer of products and their creation, which would favor a passive type of recreation including natural sites (coast of Zapadna Morava and mountain Goč).

_ Mataruška spa should modernize and rebuild its tourist offer, especially by designing tourist products that have relaxation character. This could be achieved with greater insistence on the potential of the site and offer

that includes the prevention of health in specific domains. In addition, it should improve the look of old accommodation facilities, increase their capacity and develop qualitative open public spaces. Also, the offer should be extended with various types of facilities in the immediate environment.

_ Bogutovačka and Jošanička spa have the potential to develop into a center for meditation and solitude, i.e. areas for the accumulation and compensation of life energy. Both of these settlements should modernize its tourism products by favoring higher wellness products, primarily in prevention of certain diseases.

The whole area is rich with different thermal and mineral properties. It should be emphasized more, because these are precisely the attributes on which can be built the image of these places. This refers to the reconstruction and rehabilitation centers, aqua centers, specific characters that can form a range of products based on the characteristics of water springs. In this manner, this region viewed as a whole, could be profiled and linked in accordance with their potentials and resources. Seen in this way, program networking of the site would get a hybrid product that encompass almost all forms of tourism: a health spa (the primary), followed by sports and recreation, cultural manifestations, transit, hunting, etc.



Figure 3. Spas as they exist today: a/ Vrnjačka Spa, b/ Mataruška Spa, c/ Bogutovačka and d/ Jošanička Spa.

Conclusion

Program guidelines for activating relaxation centers in central and western tourist cluster of Serbia have as their goal to implement the offer of high-quality tourist products that could satisfy the needs of different markets and tourists for relaxation, renewal of vital energy, inspiring and creative contents and to indicate

peculiarity and attractiveness of this locality and individual places. In accordance, this is to be pursued combining the traditional offer of mineral spa with modern tourist programs that have larger demand.

Successful and high-quality development of the mineral spa tourism should be pointed at forming the integral tourist product that should include its organizing on the level of entire tourist destination. This, among other things, includes association and connection of multiple stakeholders that together could contribute to the forming of tourist sensation of a certain locality. Besides stated, the primary task is to create the competitive tourist product – destination - that rests on the claim that sensation and experience that tourists acquire are the fundamental product of tourism (Milićević, 2010). This means that it is necessary to use all comparative advantages in order to form the unique identity of destination that would be pointed out regarding the competition and that will at the same time represent the basics for growth and development on the competitive market.

The primary program recommendation for development of mineral spas as competitive tourist destinations regards the development and investments in the following contents: (1) relaxation contents, (2) health contents, (3) sports and recreation contents, (4) business contents (congress and business tourism) and (5) cultural-entertainment contents.

The development of relaxation contents is put in the first place to which is to be paid special attention, with the goal of their long term realization as leading products of destination. It is necessary to place them as an independent product as well as supplementary product to other contents. The reasons for this lie in the increasing need and awareness of healthy way of life and reduce of every day stress which relaxation tourism imposes as the primary tourist product. In this domain wellness⁹ and spa¹⁰ contents are being distinguished. These contents are very much present on the international market, but not enough on domestic one. And apart from the fact that they appear in offer of some our destinations, it is necessary to increase the investments in a larger amount of new, more modern and higher-quality products of the kind.

The needs of a modern man are more and more reduced to the needs for movement, healthy food, healthy nature, quiet, silence, analyzing the proper personality etc. The mineral spas of Serbia have great chances to develop products that satisfy the mentioned needs because they could include in their offer natural as well as anthropogenic values from the environment (for example: healthy food that is produced in an unpolluted mineral spa environment, monasteries and other monuments of culture, natural wealth such as forests, waterfalls, lakes, mountains, rivers etc.). Along with modernization of the mineral spa offer, it is necessary to place that offer adequately which is an important precondition for increasing the interest in this destination.

In order to modernize the mineral spa offer and to grow them into attractive relaxation centers on a long term, the following steps should be taken:

- establish the new programs and adjust them to the expectations of new tourists,
- raise the attractiveness of the place through implementing modern programs,
- emphasize the natural and authentic recourses through treatments,
- change the image by treating the guests as visitors not as patients,
- understand mineral spa as a new type of mineral spa business,
- provide the accessibility on international level activating local airports,
- form the complex mineral spa offer by merging with the offer of environment¹¹,
- develop a powerful brand.

⁹ WELLNESS = well – being (to feel good) + fit – ness (be in shape)

¹⁰ SPA = salus per aquam (through water to health)

¹¹ high-quality and ecologically healthy food, easy approach to natural beauties by walking and riding a bicycle, including cultural aspect (concerts, galleries, festivals), reaching piece and quiet, preserving attractive localities in the surroundings natural as well as anthropogenic, preserving parks, gardens, creating new floral areas, fountains, mineral spa architecture and of course high-quality shopping.

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