

THE ROLE OF A HOTEL WELLNESS CENTER IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF ETHNO PHARMACOLOGICAL PRODUCTS

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Abstract: *The paper makes a correlation between producers in the ethno pharmacological sector, tourist accommodation structures with a wellness component and consumer. In the tourism industry, a consumer's behavior is determined by the quality of the services and the continuous improvement of the touristic products. In the context of new demands coming from the wellness consumer, it is foreshadowed the necessity of producers in the ethno pharmacological sector to shape the supply of products and services to the consumer, using the chain of distribution offered by hotel structures. The achievement of these necessities must be based on authenticity, local tradition and sustainable exploitation of natural potential.*

Keywords: *wellness tourism, hotel wellness center, producer in the ethno pharmacological sector, tourist.*

1. Introduction

Modern day lifestyle, influenced by over-industrialization and over-urbanization and where the food market is more global and people's diets have become unhealthy, doubled by a sedentary lifestyle and the spreading of smoking, led to the development of new behaviors in the day to day life of humans. These behaviors are leading to obesity, high blood pressure, high levels of glucose in the bloodstream and a high level of cholesterol. These things taken separately or combined are the major causes of modern day illnesses. The migration of people to urban areas leads to a more urban lifestyle which implies less time for physical activities and even less time for cooking healthy meals.

Modern day consumer suffers from the

pressure of modern day society: busy schedules, limited leisure time, the pressure of having an almost permanent contact with work, permanent communication through modern devices like e-mails, mobile phones, PDAs etc. These kinds of pressures not only amplify stress, but also contribute to unhealthy habits like having irregular meals, lack of sleep and exercise, ultimately leading to chronic diseases.

More and more people attempt to rid themselves of these habits by reorganizing their lives and planning their time in such a way that will bring joy to them once again. One of the ways to bring joy to life is represented by the wellness tourism sector, defined as being the phenomenon of traveling with the ultimate purpose of achieving various treatments which will lead to a state of wellbeing.

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The impact of the economic crisis at a global level, combined with a messy lifestyle and a hectic life in general and an increase in urbanization are just a few factors that contribute to the increase of wellness-spa tourism.

2. Wellness Tourism

Wellness-spa tourism is considered by specialists as a new form of tourism, but the roots of it can be traced deep into history. As a modern concept, wellness-spa tourism came to light in the 1950s.

Modern definitions of wellness usually focus on the holistic or health perspectives: preventing diseases, taking responsibility for one's health and the concept that spiritual, mental and physical aspects must coexist in full harmony³. These concepts are not new, their roots being traceable to ancient healing practices.

The wellness and health industry is facing an ascending trend at a global level, a claim supported by one of world's leading strategic researchers for the consumer market Euromonitor International. Thus, their analysis on the wellness market between 2007-2017 is reflected on the following graphic:

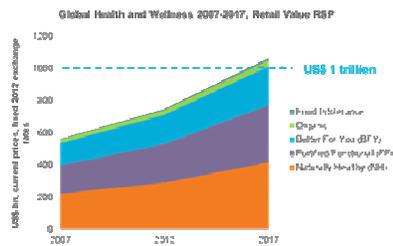


Fig. 1. *Global Wellness and Medical Tourism Industry revenue*⁴

The wellness-spa industry is often considered a niche market, but studies in this aspect foresee an increase in terms of revenue of up to one trillion dollars.

In order to identify the opportunities that led to the expansion of the wellness-spa industry, the institute for researches SRI International developed a model of group analysis (Cluster Analysis) for the wellness industry.

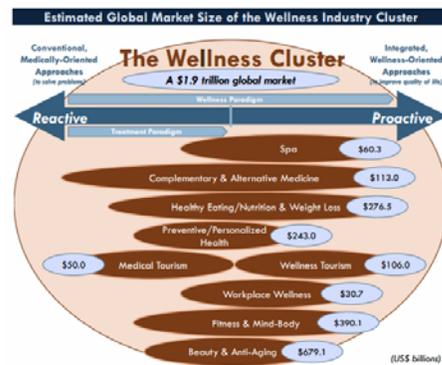


Fig. 2. *Wellness Industry Cluster*⁵

This model was designed as a continuum after the disease-wellness model developed by Dr. John W. Travis⁶ to come as an accessible understanding of how various sectors fit into the wellness cluster. In the left side of the continuum are the reactive approaches over wellness and health, more precise the mechanism used in treating illnesses. Conventional medicine fits in the left side of the model. The presentation of these problems and illness treatments brings a person in the middle or neutral area of the continuum. In the right side the proactive approaches over wellness and health can be found, more precise it is those procedures that help increase the

³ Spas and the Global Wellness Market: *Synergies and Opportunities*, Global Spa Summit, 2010, pg. 3

⁴ <http://euromonitor.typepad.com/.a/6a01310f54565d970c017ee5af105a970d-pi>, 09.05.2013

⁵ http://www.sri.com/sites/default/files/publications/gss_sri_spasandwellnessreport_rev_82010.pdf, 10.05.2013

⁶ http://www.sri.com/sites/default/files/publications/gss_sri_spasandwellnessreport_rev_82010.pdf, 10.05.2013

quality of life, health and contribute to a general state of wellbeing.

The represented sectors reflect the high potential of the SPA industry having as a final goal the creation of wellness oriented businesses and the development of various partnerships in this direction.

The sectors of the wellness cluster are explained as follows⁷:

•**Spa**: includes all the SPA procedures, including a spa related education, spa products, spa branded products, spa consulting, associations and spa events, and also the invested capital in spa products. This sector is included in the right side of the continuum, mainly because it supplies proactive services that make people healthier and gives a general state of wellbeing. However, some spas (like medical spas) treat clients with various skin illnesses or other conditions where spa has a therapeutic role. Thus, the spas fit in the left side or the reactive side of the continuum.

•**Complementary and alternative medicine**: aligns various medical systems, both holistic and health related, that are not considered as being part of conventional medicine or public healthcare (homeopathy, traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurveda, meditation, natural remedies etc). Complementary and alternative medicine is being used as treatment but also as a preventive method in both sides of the continuum.

•**Personalized health schedule**: includes medical services that treat patients who are generally healthy by preventing illnesses or identifying risk factors (through routine medical examinations, diagnostic and screening etc). In particular, the personalized health schedule focuses on handling data and information related to

patients at an individual level (genetic screening, diagnostics, electronic recordings, monitoring etc)

•**Medical tourism**: it refers to people who travel to a different town or country in order to receive medical treatment or healthcare, including surgical or dental procedures, having as main motivation accessible costs and a high quality of the medical procedures. Medical tourism incorporates the suppliers of medical services for tourists who travel in medical purposes, like hospitals, clinics, doctors, accommodation facilities, public alimentation, shopping etc. Medical tourism fits in the reactive side of the continuum.

•**Wellness tourism**: is about healthy people who travel to a different country, town or region for holistic or preventive services based on a change in lifestyle in order to improve their health and wellbeing. Wellness tourism fits in the proactive side of the continuum.

•**Nutrition**: includes vitamins and nutritional supplements, functional foods, sanogenic foods, dietetic services and weight loss. Nutrition is generally a proactive approach, but taking into account the fact that many adjustments in diets come as a necessity in order to treat certain illnesses, it can also fit into the left side of the continuum.

•**Fitness**: includes gyms and health clubs, personal training, yoga, Pilates, tai-chi and other true-spirit practices. It also includes training gears. Just like nutrition fitness is mainly proactive, but it can also come as reactive in case it comes as a treatment to a certain physical affection.

•**Beauty and anti-aging**: includes beauty services, services and products for hair, skin and nails. Pharmaceutical prescriptions for skin care, anti-aging products and services. This sector fits into both sides of the continuum.

⁷http://www.sri.com/sites/default/files/publications/gss_sri_spasandwellnessreport_rev_82010.pdf, 10.05.2013

• **Workplace wellness:** includes programs offered by companies to improve the wellbeing and health of their employees, in order to improve performance and decrease costs. These programs offer educational information and highlight risk factors (lack of physical activities, bad food habits, obesity, smoking stress etc.), thus encouraging a healthier lifestyle.

We have identified Nutrition and Complementary and alternative medicine as part of the wellness cluster with high potential for investments and partnerships.

2. Wellness Tourism Consumer

The features of a wellness tourism consumer, related to the features of the touristic destination are highlighted by the answers to the following questions⁸:

1. Who is travelling? Answer: The healthy person.

2. What is a consumer's motivation for traveling? Answer: the proactive interest in maintaining or improving one's health and wellbeing; The access to diverse or authentic offers on their country of origin; the desire to have a certain lifestyle.

3. Where is the consumer traveling to? In his country of origin; in a different country

4. What places does the consumer visit? Answer: spa, wellness center, hydrothermal resorts, mineral or thermal baths, cruises.

5. What activities, experiences or services are being consumed? Answer: wellness treatments, health-improvement treatments, fitness and physical exercises, meditation, yoga and other body-mind practices.

At a global level it can be observed that the tendency of consumers is to focus on

authenticity, offered mainly by local traditions, ingredients and crafts.

From the perspective of a wellness consumer we can conclude the following:

- Wellness-spa tourism involves people traveling to a different place in order to get involved in various activities with the sole purpose of improving their health and wellbeing whilst living unique experiences that cannot be found in their country of origin.

- The tourist follows integrated programs of wellness and preventive approaches in order to improve their health and life quality.

3. The ethno pharmacology producer - wellness tourism-consumer relationship in Romania

The description of the relationship between the ethno pharmacological producer, the wellness tourism sector and consumer takes into consideration the following aspects:

- The status analysis of the niche market represented by the wellness tourism sector related to ethno pharmacological products;

- Identifying trends and anticipation of change;

- Identifying consumer features and adapting the supply to the consuming demand.

The Romanian wellness tourism market is in an emergent state, having a great potential. Currently, the wellness sector in Romania is linked to spa centers.

Making a comparative analysis on the Romanian wellness hotels sector, having in mind the Wellness Industry Cluster, it can be determined that Complementary and alternative medicine and nutrition, especially from the ethno pharmacological perspective, are sectors that are missing almost entirely. The main available sectors are: Fitness, Beauty and anti-aging.

⁸ Adapted Johnson K. and others, *Research report: Global SPA Summit Wellness Tourism and Medical Tourism: Where Do Spas Fit?*, 2011, pg. 17

Extending the analysis over the Beauty and anti-aging sectors on the countries of origin of the cosmetics producers used in the wellness hotels sector in Romania, we acknowledge the major presence of imported products in the detriment of local products, as presented in the following graphic:

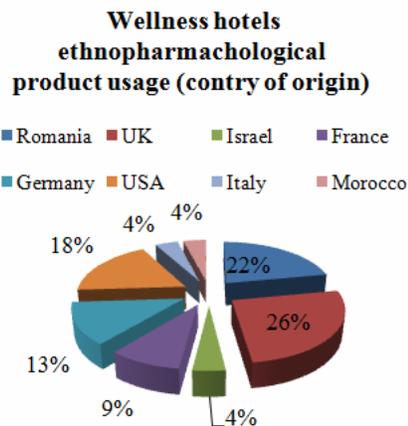


Fig. 3. *Beauty products used in the wellness hotel sector in Romania by country of origin*

Bottom line, the ethno pharmacological products can't be found adequate in the services offer within the Romanian wellness hotel sector.

In this aspect, the wellness tourism offer in Romania requires a series of improvements, from the perspective of supplied services, specialized personal, all in order for the services to correspond with the demand of the consumer.

The contemporary consumer of wellness follows integrated programs and preventive approaches with the ultimate goal of improving his health and quality of life.

Taken as an integrated part within the producer in the ethno pharmacological sector-consumer relationship, the hotel wellness centers can have an important role in the promotion and selling of ethno

pharmacological products and in the innovation and bettering of these products, through the exploitation of the consumer's demands.

4. Conclusions

Contemporary hectic lifestyle and the impact of the economic crisis at a global level are factors that stand behind the growth of demand in the wellness-spa services.

The Wellness tourism consumer is interested in programs and preventive approaches that help maintain a high level of health and wellbeing.

In Romania, ethno pharmacological products can't be found in an adequate manner in the services supply of wellness hotels.

Having in mind the satisfaction of wellness consumers, a few things need to be improved in the wellness sector in Romania, like the supplied services, a high level of skill for the employed personal and also an improved quality of the products used.

In the current situation where the Romanian wellness market is emerging, having a huge potential, distributing ethno pharmacological products through wellness spa centers and hotels is a great opportunity for businesses.

In the current context of new features that can be found in modern day consumers, suppliers of services in the Romanian wellness spa market need to adapt their services in order for them to be authentic, traditional, and sustainable with regards to the environment and in correlation with the distribution chain offered by hotel structures.

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