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**The Evolution of Balneary Tourism in
Romania as an Integrated Part of Health Tourism**

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Abstract: The authors intend to analyze the evolution of the balneary tourism in Romania over the last 10 years. The retrospective analysis of the evolution of this type of tourism highlights the sinuous aspect of the development. Understanding the complexity of the balneary tourism involves studying the field in relation to several factors, such as: the relationship of the balneary tourism with other forms of tourism, the specificity of the domain and the market, the importance of the balneary tourism in shaping the society, the implications on the environment and its sustainability. The importance of the health status of the population represents an extremely sensitive indicator of the quality of life and the level of development of the society. At present, the sphere of health tourism has expanded greatly adapting to the current needs of the population. Increasing globalization has made its mark on this form of tourism. The quantification of health tourism is increasingly difficult to make, but the branch of the balneary tourism can be measured and followed in evolution much more clearly, at least in the case of Romania.

Keywords: Balneary tourism; health tourism; wellness; spa tourism

JEL Classification: L8; L83; Z3; Z32

Introduction

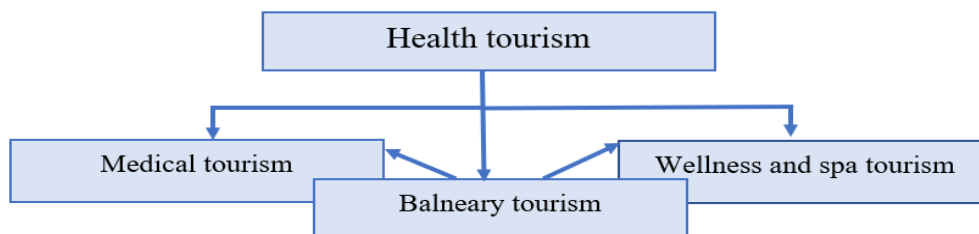
Balneary tourism presents itself as a complex form of holiday tourism and health care. The concern for health care has been around since ancient times. Natural healing factors have been discovered and used for centuries, historians talking about their use for therapeutic purposes since ancient times, by Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Geto-Dacians and other nations. In the early period, people, without medical knowledge, by their simple observing capacity, began to notice accidentally the therapeutic effects of the different natural healing factors. In the contemporary period, the balneotherapy benefits from the scientific researches of the natural factors of cure and the clinical observations, enjoying success due to the stressful living conditions that favor the diseases, so that more and more people in search of tranquility and rest, clean air and health get to be treated with the help of natural factors of treatment in different specialized centers in balneary resorts.

In defining the balneary tourism it must start from the etymology of the two terms from which it is made up the concept - thus tourism, with its current meaning, taken from English (tourism, tour, torn,

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tourian with the meaning of round trip) and balneary comes from the Latin language, in which the forms of singular balneum or balineum mean bath and have the meaning of bath or bathtub. In Romania the plural for bath is used to designate a balneary resort (Băile Herculane, Băile Felix, etc.)



In the specialized literature (World Tourism Organization, 1973), health tourism was defined as ‘the totality of the measures within the health facilities that use the natural resources of a country, especially the mineral waters and the climate’. Balneary tourism is that ‘specific form of (stay) tourism, practiced by people who travel to the balneary resorts for health care or the prevention of diseases’ (Stăncioiu, 1999).

At the moment, the balneary tourism is perceived and analyzed as part of the health tourism due to the health care motivation, it partially overlaps with the medical tourism (it uses part of the personnel, endowments, knowledge and specific sanitary procedures) and also with the tourism of health, wellness and spa.

The Current State of Balneary Tourism in Romania

The diversity of Romania’s natural balneary resources has determined that the vast majority of resorts can offer therapeutic solutions for a wide spectrum of conditions. In this regard, the latest hydrological researches have revealed impressive hydro-mineral resources - over 2,500 springs and wells, these representing the main attraction in the balneary tourism, but to them are successfully added the climate factors that complement the palette. The spread of natural factors of cure throughout the territory allows the practice of balneary tourism in mountainous areas, hills and plateaus, plains or coasts, at different altitudes, the conditions of climates adapted to the needs of tourists.

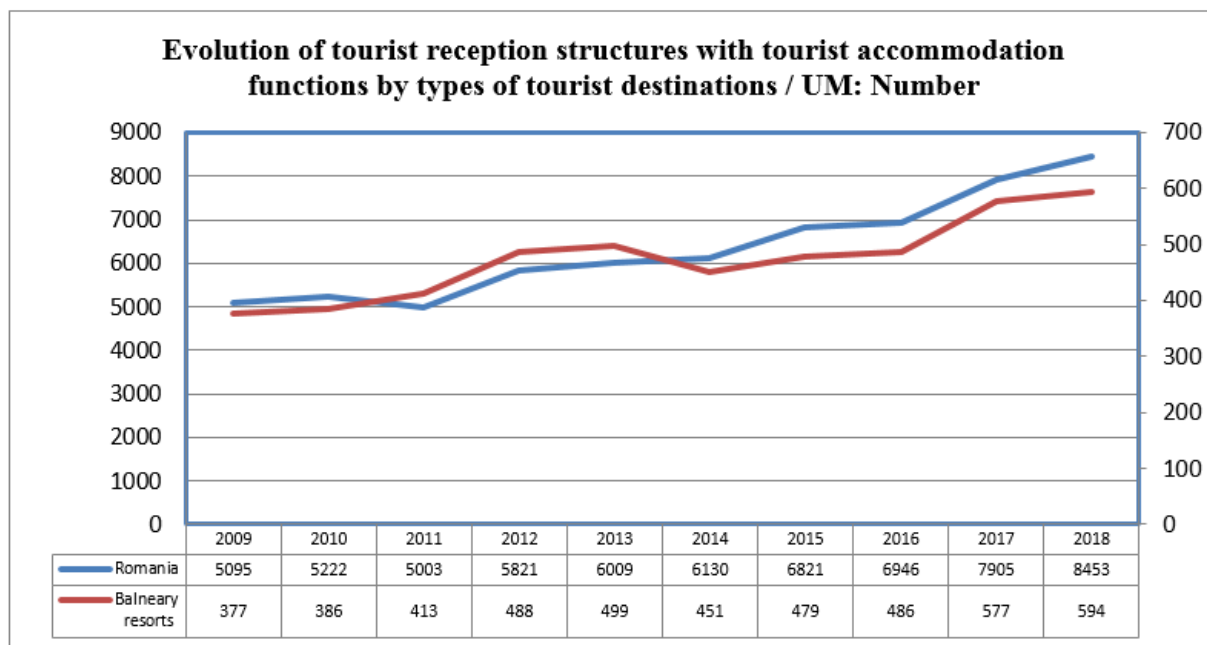
Tabel 1. Tourist Circulation in the Balneary Resorts of Romania between 2009 and 2018

The year	Structures/UM number	Arrivals/thousands of tourists	Overnight stays/number thousands	Average length of stay/number of days
2009	377	639.7	4624.7	7.22
2010	386	568.3	3910.3	6.88
2011	413	689.2	4342.2	6.3
2012	488	696.2	4268.5	6.13
2013	499	678.5	4138.0	6.09
2014	451	655.6	3577.4	5.45
2015	479	779.3	3917.4	5.09
2016	486	851.0	4193.0	4.92

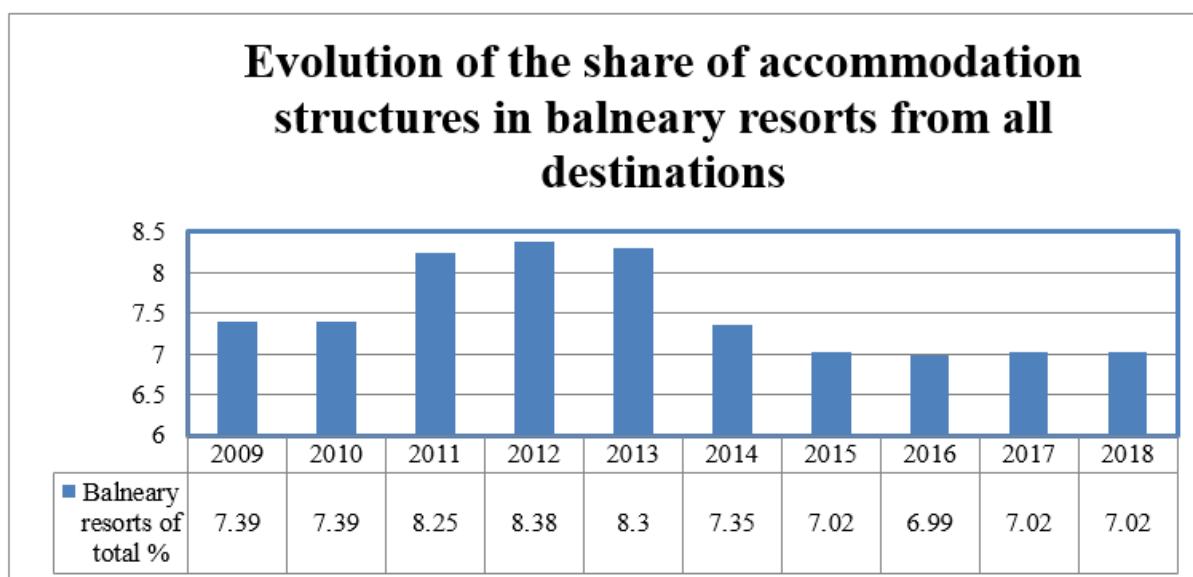
2017	577	945.3	4204.9	4.44
2018	594	1018.7	4405.7	4.32

Source: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>

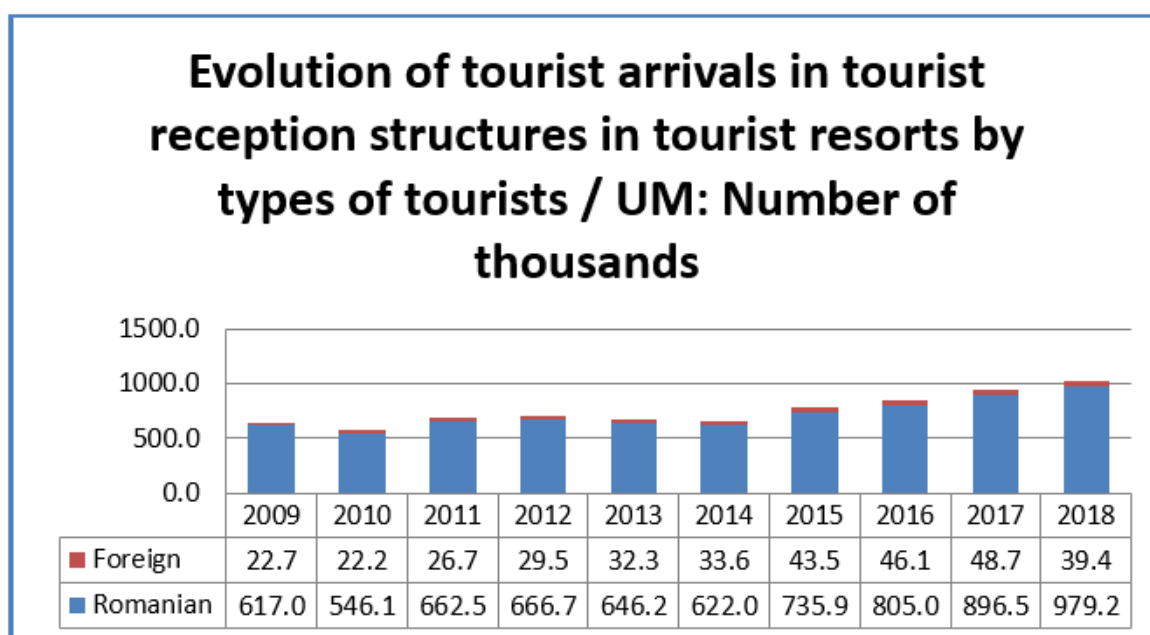
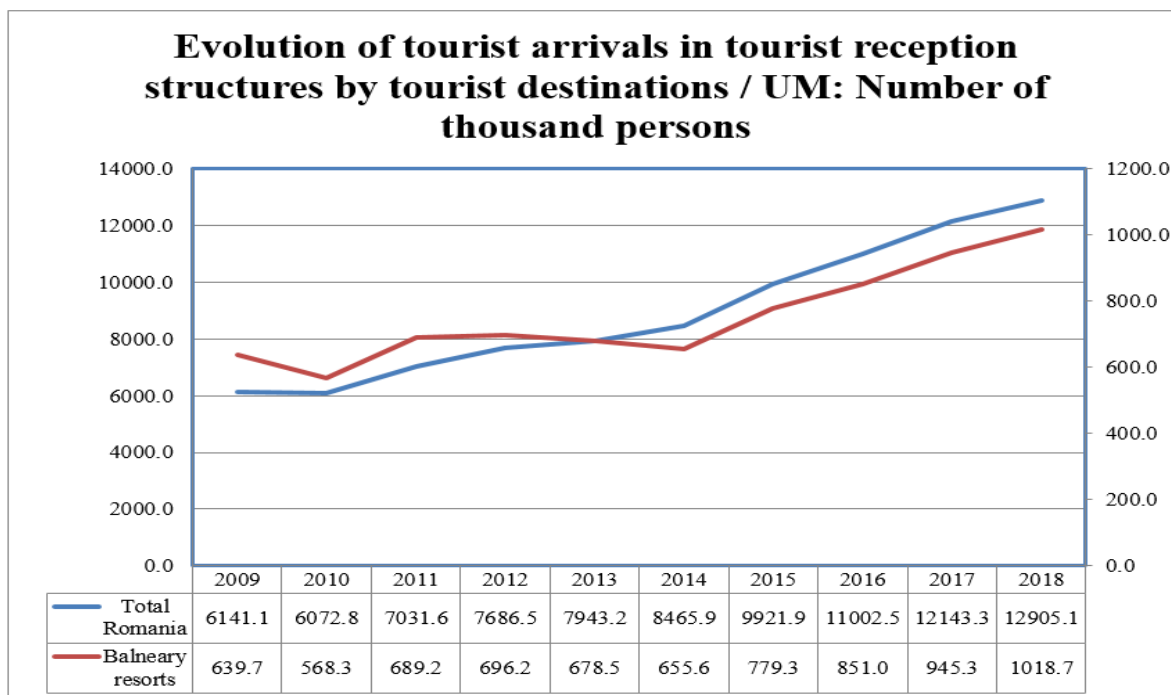
According to table 1, a set of data were taken for analysis for a period of 10 years from 2009 to 2018. The analysis showed an increasing trend for the mentioned tourist traffic indicators except for the average length of stay.



In the period 2009 - 2018, the number of tourist reception structures in Romania increased from 5095 to 8453, which represents a significant increase of over 60%. The number of structures in balneary resorts increased from 377 units in 2009 to 597 units in 2018, representing an increase of over 63%.

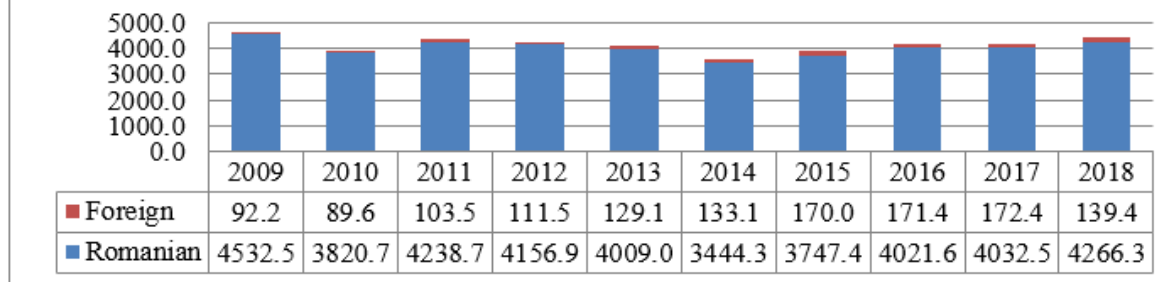


Regarding the proportion of balneary structures, this was variable, registering a maximum of 8.38% in 2012 and a minimum in 2016 of 6.99%.



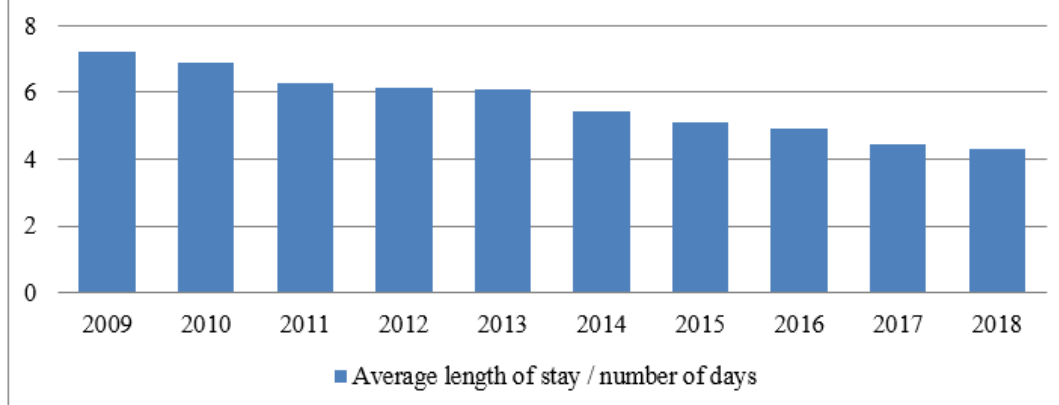
Although the number of tourists arriving in tourist accommodation structures both at the level of all destinations and in balneary structures has been increasing, there are years when there is a decrease or stagnation (2010 and 2014).

The evolution of overnight stays in tourist accommodation structures in balneary resorts by types of tourists / UM: Number thousands



In the press release no. 26 of February 3, 2020, it is stated in connection with the overnight stays registered in the tourist reception structures in Romania during 1.01-31.12.2019 that they amounted to 29870.4 thousand, an increase of 5.0% compared to those from the period 1.01-31.12.2018. During the period 1.01-31.12.2019, out of the total number of overnight stays, the overnight stays of Romanian tourists in the tourist reception structures with accommodation functions represented 82.4%, while the overnight stays of foreign tourists accounted for 17.6%. Regarding the overnight stays of foreign tourists in tourist reception structures, the largest share was held by those in Europe (72.1% of total foreign tourists), and of these 83.8% were from countries belonging to the European Union. Overnight stays in balneary tourism registered a maximum in 2009 during the analyzed period.

Evolution of the average length of stay in the balneary resorts / UM number of days



The average length of stay is an important indicator, the indicator shows the average time of stay (days) of tourists in accommodation and thus reflects the ability of the destination to retain tourists in a certain area. Although the values of this indicator are constantly declining, it is located in the spa area well above the national average (2-2.3 days). The average duration of tourists' stays at national level between 1.01-31.12.2019 was 2.3 days for Romanian tourists and 2.0 days for foreign tourists.

What are the Opportunities for Romania?

Romania's marketing strategy is the only detailed quantitative research of customer demand and perception that allows the selection of those products in the health and spa sector that correspond to international demand. Romania's tourism marketing strategy can state the general context of competitiveness of Romanian tourism, both on the internal and external market, in terms of balneary products, wellness and spas poorly-medicalized. Romania's master plan for balneary tourism in Romania has several directions in mind:

- A green balneary tourism in accordance with the general positioning of the destination Romania;
- Focus on green balneary products: "the forest bathing";
- Focus on the valorization of homeopathic products;
- Proactive offer: anti-aging treatments;
- Benchmark, anti-aging treatment in France and Europe;
- Creating a BMD of health tourism at national level;
- Focus on innovation through clusters;

Conclusions

Between 2009 and 2018, the growth of the balneary tourism sector, which includes a wide range of services from medical to wellness & spa tourism, has become very rapid, both in Europe and in the world, amid profound phenomena and lasting. This trend is also observed in the case of balneary tourism in Romania.

The balneary tourism sector is a complex sector in which many actors are involved. Even though the social balneary tourism system is in decline and the generally deficient social security systems are trying to disengage, the average budget allocated by European households for health and disease prevention treatments continues to increase, which translates into others, by developing free short cures (cures lasting between 3 and 10 days and unsubsidized). At the same time, the level of expectations of the people who follow thermal water treatments continue to grow and the spa sector is going through a period of profound change. Under these conditions, the offer of health tourism must be enriched by adding the wellness and spa component.

The crisis generated by the coronavirus pandemic has severely affected the activity of hotels and balneary treatment centers across the country.

All the actors in the tourism industry and especially in the balneary industry hope that the Romanian balneary resorts, which are true oases of health, will be used immediately after the coronavirus passes. People will need to recharge their batteries, strengthen their immune system and, at the same time, regain their well-being with the help of natural healing factors and balneary treatments.

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