

TRANSITIONAL DEVELOPMENTS AND SPATIAL RE-ORGANIZATION OF SPA TOURISM IN GREECE

Marilena Papageorgiou
University of Thessaly

Marie-Noelle Duquenne
University of Thessaly

The present paper seeks to confirm that spa tourism is now in a period of transition following extensive, questionnaire-based fieldwork in Greece's prime spa destinations. The research sought primarily to profile the different types of spa visitors today, and secondarily to identify the visitor-type who will predominate in the years ahead. The paper's ultimate aim is to use its conclusions and the trends it uncovers to draw up general guidelines for contemporary spatial planning in spa tourism destinations in accordance with contemporary views and needs.

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JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

INTRODUCTION: SPA TOURISM IN TRANSITION

Spa tourism and the use of spa waters are not confined to the modern era. Rather, man has been well aware of the beneficial qualities of hot mineral springs since the dawn on history, and has made use of them systematically and even daily for millennia (Skarpia-Hoipel, 1996). Of course, this does not mean that the nature of the activity has always been the same; in fact, this has changed a number of times down the centuries, and has served the specific needs and goals of each era.

If one were to attempt to present a historical overview of these stages, one would note that hot mineral springs and their waters constituted a primary means of cleanliness and treating wounds for the peoples of early antiquity (Douglas, Douglas and Derrett, 2001). In contrast, during the



Classical era, the use of mineral waters was an important therapeutic medium and means of regaining physical health (Charitakis, 1935). During the Roman period, spas acquired a more social hue whose emphasis was more on caring for one's health in general (rejuvenation and well-being) than on cures (G.A.H.S.M.-G.T.A., 2006). However, this tradition came to an abrupt halt in the period that followed. The Middle Ages were the darkest period for spas, when the use of mineral waters was demonised and remained virtually forbidden for many centuries (M.E.S.P.P.W., 2000).

As spa use moved into the 19th century, it developed into a rapidly-growing form of tourism while, owing to continuous progress made in the field of Medicine, the hydrotherapy dimension of spa use would prevail once again in the early 20th century (FEDERTERME, 2004). There can be no doubt that for the past two centuries, at least, spa use has been inextricably linked with hydrotherapy and cure. However, the taxing conditions and intense rhythms of life around the world in the contemporary era have led to a re-adaptation once more, especially since the 1980s, as spa use has come to revolve around health in a broader sense, and the restoration of spiritual and physical health in particular (wellness). The hydrotherapy dimension of spa use has largely been supplanted as a result.

Within this framework, this paper will attempt to confirm the above statement by means of extensive empirical research conducted in Greece's main spa locations. It will aim to explore the profile of today's spa visitors and to categorize them on the basis of shared features and behaviours. In addition, the rationale underlying this categorization – i.e. the definition of different types of spa tourists in Greece today – was to identify the group whose profile and consumption habits are expected to predominate in the years to come. Finally, on the basis of the conclusions drawn from the new data and trends taking shape on the Greek spa scene, the paper will attempt to provide strategic guidelines (spatial, economic etc.) relating to the organization required for spa tourism destinations in the light of contemporary socio-economic developments and trends.

THEORETICAL APPROACH OF SPA TOURISM

As thermalism is an ancient activity, the bibliography on spa bathing and spa tourism (lately) is especially extensive as a result.

Perusing the bibliography in question, one realizes that it largely deals with the history of the phenomenon and its varying fortunes through different eras and conditions (e.g. Jaltet, 1985; Gerbod, 2004). In

addition, a significant part of the bibliography examines spa installations of the past (antiquity) and present from an architectural, historical or cultural perspective (e.g. Skarpia-Hoipel, 1996; Moldoveanu, Meade & Lafon, 1999). Similarly, there are a large number of tourist guides which deal with installations of this sort, published in all the countries with a spa tourism tradition.

However, although spas are one of the most ancient forms of tourism, they have rarely been the focus of studies seeking to identify the particular features of the people who visit them. Even in Greece, where the practice of taking the spa waters originated (in the 5th c. BC), the majority of research has focused on chemical analyses of spa waters and their therapeutic qualities (e.g. Lekkas, 1938; G.A.H.S.M.-G.T.A., 2006). Research conducted in the late nineteen nineties and more recently (Tsartas, Manologlou & Markou, 2001 · Didascalou, Lagos & Nastos, 2009 · Vasileiou & Tsartas, 2009) may constitute the sole exceptions; however, these researches were not based on extensive questionnaire-based fieldwork, thus they provide mostly general estimations on spa tourism in Greece.

By the same token, a detailed examination of the spatial element of this form of tourism is also absent from the international bibliography, with the possible exception of a publication (Glaus, 1975) which, apart from being quite old, deals almost exclusively with trends in the design of spa tourism installations. There are also a number of publications which deal with the geographical dimension of spa tourism (e.g. Jamot, 1988; Boyer, 2005), though these, too, fail to draw conclusions on the preferred spatial planning for tourist attractions of this sort.

In this context, this article breaks new ground in attempting, through extensive empirical research, not only to record the profile of the spa tourists in Greece today, but also—and more importantly—to use suitable statistical analysis to explore the profile of the new generation of spa visitors who are expected to dominate in the near future.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

Field research

The field research carried out included the completion of 700 questionnaires in three of Greece's main spa destinations (Figure 1) which together account for over 40% of the spa tourism in the country (Spathi, 2000).

The 300 questionnaires were completed at 8 of the 24 spa installations in Loutra Aedipsou, 250 in the two operational facilities in Kamena Vourla, and 150 in Loutra Hipatis' sole working spa. The sampling was differentiated in this way in order to maintain the relative ratio between the three in relation to their annual spa visitors.

The field research took place between June 2007 and May 2008, since some of the installations in the three spa locations (mainly those offering modern spa services) operate year-round.

Figure 1 Places of field research



Data processing: core considerations and hypothesis

The data was collected using a questionnaire consisting mainly of closed questions, to facilitate its completion: in practical terms, since it was known that most of the users of spa installations in Greece are elderly (over 65), it was thought that the use of closed questions would contribute

significantly to the validity of the responses by avoiding comprehension problems (Duquenne, 2005).

The type of questions addressed to the 700 people can be divided into three categories: those focused on the spa users' socio-economic profile (gender, age, annual income and place of permanent residence); questions relating to their accommodation / spa service use; and a third group of questions seeking an evaluation of the installations and services offered.

The statistical processing thus involves methods for analysing and monitoring quantitative variables. In a few cases, it was deemed necessary to group the respondents into a limited (in relation to the wording of the questionnaire) number of categories. The process sought to avoid issues of statistical significance arising during the monitoring of sequential relationships between the variables under examination. The variable 'age' is a good example: when it emerged that only 7% of the spa visitors were under 40, it was thought best to group everyone under 50 into a single category, while keeping the next two categories (50-64 and over 65) as they were. Although the proposed grouping made it impossible to pinpoint the behavioural singularities of very young visitors, it did allow a satisfactory differentiation of visitors on the basis of the important criterion of age.

One of the most fundamental analytical considerations was the need to differentiate the spa visitors' behaviour on the basis of age. Specifically, we were interested in the degree to which the demand for contemporary services and an upgraded environment was more prevalent among younger age-groups, since we believed this would permit us to determine whether spa tourism in Greece really was in a period of transition towards contemporary spa services focused on health, rejuvenation and well-being.

A second hypothesis relates to the tourists' income level and living standards. If income reflects the living standards of the respondents to a significant degree, then their place of permanent residence could, at least indirectly, define their living standards. Thus, their declared places of residence were categorized in accordance with their degree of urbanization, with four residence categories defined: major urban centres (Athens and Thessaloniki plus cities abroad), regional urban centres (like Patras, Herakleion etc), small to medium-sized urban centres, towns and agricultural centres.

The tourists' profiles were analysed using the K-means classification method whereby individuals are grouped around mobile centres using a repeated process, with the number of desired classes having been defined beforehand: the process is complete when the classes stabilize, revealing

the final population distribution (Mavromatis, 1999). To apply the method, the tourists' key socio-economic features were used as variables (gender, age, income and place of residence). The choice of alternative numbers of groups (from 3 to 6) ultimately led us to divide the population into three discrete groups, given that with this number the iteration process came to an end after only five reiterations (the other alternatives required longer reiteration procedures).

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY: DISCERNING NEW TRENDS AND BEHAVIOURS

Dominant spa tourist groups

Applying the above statistical method, the sample of 700 individuals was divided into three discrete groups/categories of spa tourists, with Group A containing 158 tourists, Group B 202 and Group C 340.

As far as gender was concerned, the results revealed no significant differences between the groups, despite the frequency of the male population being relatively higher in Group A (Table 1). Given that spa tourism in Greece is generally a 'female affair', it did not come as a surprise that gender proved not to be a significant factor in the formation of the different tourist profiles.

Table 1 Gender by spa tourist group

	Male		Female		Total
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	
Group A	69	43.7%	89	56.3%	158
Group B	80	39.6%	122	60.4%	202
Group C	122	35.9%	218	64.1%	340
Total	271	38.7%	429	61.3%	700

Table 2 Age-profile by tourist group

	<50		50-64		65+		Total
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	
Group A	48	30.4%	55	34.8%	55	34.8%	158
Group B	7	3.5%	39	19.3%	156	77.2%	202
Group C	35	10.3%	63	18.5%	242	71.2%	340
Total	90	12.9%	157	22.4%	453	64.7%	700

However, significant differences were evident in relation to the age of the tourists, with Group A clearly including younger individuals than the other two groups (Table 2). Specifically, while Group A includes tourists from every age-group, with young tourists (up to 49) accounting for 30.4% of the group, over 75% of the tourists in groups B and C are over 65.

With regard to place of residence, it emerges that there are significant differences between all three groups (Table 3). Thus, Group B consists of spa tourists who are almost exclusively from rural areas, while groups A and C are extremely urban in nature, with 91.8% of Group A and 100% of Group C living in Athens, Thessaloniki or a regional urban centre of Greece.

Table 3 Place of residence by spa tourist group

	Main urban centre		Regional urban centre		Medium/s mall town		Rural areas		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
Group A	119	75.3	26	16.5	10	6.3	3	1.9	158
Group B	-	-	-	-	107	53.0	95	47.0	202
Group C	258	75.9	82	24.1	-	-	-	-	340
Total	377	53.9	108	15.4	117	16.7	98	14.0	700

Table 4 Declared annual income by group

	Not declared		< €10,000		€10,000-€15,000		€15,000-€20,000		> €20,000		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
Group A	-	-	-	-	-	-	58	36.7	100	63.3	158
Group B	13	6.4	131	64.9	48	23.8	10	5.0	-	-	202
Group C	39	11.5	192	56.5	109	32.1	-	-	-	-	340
Total	52	7.4	323	46.1	157	22.4	68	9.7	100	14.3	700

Finally, turning to income levels (based on the annual income declared by the respondents), the research indicates that there were significant differences here, too, between the three groups (Table 4), with the tourists in Group A having a higher standard of living compared to the

other two groups. Specifically, the 100% of Group's A members declared an income in excess of €15,000 per year, and 63.3% over 20,000 per year. Groups B and C – both of which generally consists of elderly tourists – mainly include people with a low declared annual income of between €10,000 and €15,000. It should be noted too, that Group B in particular included large numbers of tourists in the lowest income category (less than €10,000 per annum). These findings in relation to groups B and C thus confirm that the majority of the tourists in them are pensioners who, according to data from the Hellenic Ministry of Economy and Finance General Secretariat for Information Systems (2003), declare an average annual income of €10,750 as opposed to an average of €14,000 declared by salaried employees and €13,000 for the country as a whole.

Summarizing, the application of the described statistical methodology generated three main discrete categories of spa tourists: Group A, which consists of generally younger spa tourists (though older categories are not absent from it), most of whom come from the country's main urban centres and have a high annual income; Group B, which, with very few exceptions, is made up of elderly tourists who largely live in towns and medium-sized cities and whose annual income is in the lowest category; and Group C, which displays a number of similarities with Group B (older, low income), but actually constitutes a discrete category of spa tourists whose members, all of whom are from large cities, reveal entirely urban incomes and modes of consumption.

A comparative presentation of the profiles of the predominant spa tourist groups

Having distinguished and described the three main groups of spa tourists in Greece, now will follow the presentation of the main findings of the research as a prelude to tracing emerging trends.

Starting with the type of services the tourists opt for (Table 5), wellness services (which denotes the use of new types of services with an emphasis on rejuvenation and well-being) seems to lag somewhat behind, since the majority – especially the tourists in groups B and C – apparently opt for hydrotherapy (cure) services.

Of course, this result should not be misconstrued: given that modern wellness services are a new phenomenon in Greece, where they have only featured on the tourist scene since 2000, a careful reading of the results in Table 5 actually reveals that modern spa wellness services have experienced rapid growth, successfully attracting almost half the people (44.3%) in Group A – who are generally younger, urban and with high

incomes, as well as slowly catching on with older age-groups and elderly urbanites (Group C), in particular.

Table 5 Type of services opted for by spa tourists group

	Hydrotherapy		Wellness		Total
Group A	88	55.7%	70	44.3%	158
Group B	196	97.0%	6	3.0%	202
Group C	307	90.3%	33	9.7%	340
Total	591	84.4%	109	15.6%	700

The fact that wellness spa services are attracting an ever growing number of spa tourists in Greece is also evident from the results in Table 6 which reveal that, while spa tourists traditionally choose to visit spas to partake of hydrotherapy, wellness and rejuvenation services are constantly gaining ground. Thus, 37.3% of the individuals in Group A already opt for spa services aimed exclusively at rejuvenation and relaxation, while in the other groups – which include largely elderly spa visitors – rejuvenation/relaxation is an ever more popular reason for partaking of spa waters, especially in Group C, whose members are largely from urban centres.

Table 6 Expectations of spa services

	Exclusively rejuvenation / relaxation		Rejuvenation / relaxation and hydrotherapy		Exclusively hydrotherapy		Total
Group A	59	37.3%	20	12.7%	79	50.0%	158
Group B	19	9.4%	30	14.9%	153	75.7%	202
Group C	59	17.4%	30	8.8%	251	73.8%	340
Total	137	19.6%	80	11.4%	483	69.0%	700

$(\chi^2 = 52.1 \text{ sig} = 0.000)$

Turning to the time that spa tourists spend in the spa towns, Tables 7 and 8 reveal that the average stay is quite long, with Group A tending to restrict their stay to fewer than 13 nights, as opposed to 16 and 17 nights for groups B and C respectively.

Thus, Table 8 shows that Group A, which displays a preference for modern wellness spa services, tends to restrict its stays to fewer than 7 nights, while groups B and C, which consist of more elderly visitors who chiefly choose hydrotherapy services, opt to stay for an average of 2 to 3 weeks.

Table 7 Average stay (duration in days)

	Average stay (in days)	95% Interval of confidence	Anova Test
Group A	12.9	11.2 – 14.7	F= 12.969 (sig = 0.000)
Group B	16.3	15.9 – 17.0	
Group C	16.9	16.0 – 17.8	

Table 8 Duration of stay (in days)

	Up to 1 week		From 1 to 2 weeks		More than 2 weeks		Total
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	
Group A	56	35.4%	56	35.4%	46	29.1%	158
Group B	4	2.0%	105	52.0%	93	46.0%	202
Group C	33	9.7%	134	39.4%	173	50.9%	340
Total	93	13.3%	295	42.1%	312	44.6%	700

Linked to stay duration, the data on the type of accommodation chosen by the visitors (Table 9) reveals that this correlates directly with their income level. Thus, Group A, the group that makes the shortest stays in the spa towns, is more likely to opt for accommodation which provides spa services on site, while the groups associated with longer stays (B and C) are more likely to opt for more economical accommodation. Thus, 50% of the individuals in Group A – who are better off financially and usually opt for wellness services – stay in hotels which provide these facilities on site, while 90.1% and 87.6% respectively of groups B and C opt for independent accommodation – meaning hotels or rooms a short distance away from the spa facilities – to reduce the expense of their longer stays.

Table 9 Type of accommodation selected

	Hotel with on site spa facilities		Normal hotel		Rented room / private home		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Group A	79	50.0%	35	22.2%	44	27.8%	158
Group B	20	9.9%	90	44.6%	92	45.5%	202
Group C	42	12.4%	174	51.5%	122	36.1%	338
Total	141	20.2%	299	42.8%	258	37.0%	698

Turning now to the frequency with which the tourists visit the spa towns of their choice, a glance at Table 10 will reveal few significant differences between the behaviour of the three groups.

Table 10 Frequency of spa visits

	Once		2-5 times		6-10 times		> 10 times		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Group A	30	19.0	58	36.7	18	11.4	52	32.9	158
Group B	36	17.8	66	32.7	52	25.7	48	23.8	202
Group C	60	17.6	107	31.5	64	18.8	109	32.1	340
Total	126	18.0	231	33.0	134	19.1	209	29.9	700

However, combining visit frequency with the type of services provided (hydrotherapy and/or wellness services) clearly reveals that, ultimately, the provision of wellness spa services plays a significant role in attracting new spa visitors (Table 11). Thus, one in three spa visitors who opt for modern wellness services were visiting the spa for the first time, a figure twice that for traditional spa visitors who usually opted for hydrotherapy services, while three in four spa visitors visiting a spa for the first time (the 36 individuals in Table 11) were young (between 20 and 50).

Rendering the above analysis still more specific by correlating visit frequency with how 'faithful' visitors are to one specific spa location (Table 12), we can see that visitor preferences differ significantly between groups. Although Group A appears relatively regular in its spa visits, it also displays the greatest degree of differentiation in its preferences with regard to the spas it visits. Specifically, almost half (45.6%) of Group A

have visited other spa towns in Greece and abroad, compared with the members of groups B and C, who are generally both frequent visitors to the spa town of their choice and completely faithful to that town, declaring it the only option they consider with regard to spa tourism.

Table 11 Frequency of spa visits by service selected

	Once		2-5 times		6-10 times		> 10 times		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
Wellness	36	33.0	29	26.6	14	12.8	30	27.5	109
Hydrotherapy	90	15.2	202	34.2	120	20.3	179	30.3	591
Total	126	18.0	231	33.0	134	19.1	209	29.9	700

$(X^2 = 20.7 \text{ sig} = 0.000)$

Table 12 Visits to other spa towns or locations

	Yes		No		Total
Group A	72	45.6%	86	54.4%	158
Group B	72	35.6%	130	64.4%	202
Group C	122	35.9%	218	64.1%	340
Total	266	38.0%	432	62.0%	700

$(X^2 = 4.97 \text{ sig} = 0.080)$

Now, turning to the extent to which spa visitors would like to engage in other (non-spa) activities during their stay, what emerges from Table 13 is a general lack of considerable interest in such activities. Thus, only Group A (approximately 68%) appears keen on engaging in other activities during their short stays in a spa town, contrasting with half or fewer of the visitors in groups B and C (50% and 44.7% respectively), for whom visiting the spa installations seems to constitute their sole activity despite their lengthy stays in the spa town. These results are entirely logical, however, when one considers that Group A consists of relatively young – and hence considerably more active – individuals than groups B and C, which consist of elderly individuals whose spa visits are motivated almost exclusively by the hydrotherapy they receive there, rather than by the search for new experiences.

Table 13 Choice of other (non-spa) activities

	Yes		No		Total
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	
Group A	107	67.7%	51	32.3%	158
Group B	101	50.0%	101	50.0%	202
Group C	188	55.3%	152	44.7%	340
Total	396	56.6%	304	43.4%	700

Turning to those spa tourists who engage in additional non-spa activities, Table 14 reveals their most popular choices to have been: for Group A, sightseeing and seaside tourism; for groups B and C, sightseeing and pilgrimage / religious tourism. It can be therefore noted a general interest of all groups in activities which depart considerably, in spatial terms, from the bounds of the spa environment.

Table 14 Activities opted for by spa tourists who chose other, non-spa activities during their spa stay

	Percentage of spa visitors who engaged in other activities (by group)	Type of activities (as a % of the spa visitors who opted for other activities)				
		Sightseeing	Religious tourism	Seaside tourism	Cultural tourism	Other activities *
Group A	68%	67%	33%	48%	9%	9%
Group B	50%	63%	60%	25%	5%	5%
Group C	55%	66%	52%	30%	2%	3%
Total	57%	66%	50%	33%	5%	5%

* *gastronomic tourism, ecotourism, walking/rambling, fishing etc.*

However, the fact that the range of activities generally chosen by the spa tourists usually take place in the adjacent hinterland is explicable in the light of a further consideration: specifically, as Tables 15 and 16 reveal, spa tourists have little choice but to turn to the surrounding area for any additional activities they may care to engage in, since a large proportion of them appear to be barely or only moderately satisfied with both the natural and built environment of the spa town, and with the leisure services and facilities available there.

Thus, according to Tables 15 and 16, one in four (24.5%) of the visitors in Group A – the most active group – declare themselves to be dissatisfied or only mildly satisfied with the spa town’s natural and built environment, while one in two visitors (46.5%) declare themselves dissatisfied or only mildly satisfied with the available leisure services and facilities. Indeed, some 36% of the visitors in Group A refused to evaluate the spa town in this case, which can be interpreted as a comment on Greek spa towns’ inability to provide satisfactory and suitable leisure services to this group of (younger) visitors.

Table 15 Level of satisfactory with the spa town’s natural and built environment

	Dissatisfied		Fairly satisfied		Reasonably satisfied		Very satisfied		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Group A	5	3.2	34	21.5	69	43.7	50	31.6	158
Group B	1	1.0	15	7.5	102	50.7	82	40.8	201
Group C	14	4.1	42	12.4	143	42.2	140	41.3	339
Total	21	3.0	91	13.0	314	45.0	272	39.0	698

Table 16 Level of satisfactory with leisure services and facilities

	Dissatisfied		Fairly satisfied		Reasonably satisfied		Very satisfied		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Group A	11	10.9	36	35.6	37	36.6	17	16.8	101
Group B	5	5.0	23	23.0	46	46.0	26	26.0	100
Group C	10	5.5	47	26.0	82	45.3	42	23.2	181
Total	26	6.8	106	27.7	165	43.2	85	22.3	382

Turning to groups B and C, while they declare themselves considerably more satisfied than Group A, this is often due to their being suspicious about research and elderly people’s fear of expressing their real opinions. Moreover, elderly spa visitors are less likely to require anything more sophisticated –from a leisure point of view– than the requisite quality of the spa’s hydrotherapy services. However, there are two possible explanations for the degree of satisfaction they express with

the leisure services on offer and for the fact that one in two elderly spa visitors (48%) did not answer the relevant question: i) that, unlike their younger counterparts, the elderly are not yet at ease with the combining of recreational activities with the purely therapeutic nature of their stay, or ii) that there is a lack of recreational services and facilities in the spa towns adapted to the needs of the elderly and of low-income visitors.

Summarizing the above analysis, it emerges that Group A has the most potential for future growth for two main reasons: firstly, because, more than any other group, it represents young people who inevitably respond more rapidly to new trends in spa tourism, and secondly because one of the remaining two groups, both of which are representative of elderly people – specifically Group C, which consists of elderly urbanites – has begun to adopt behaviours and features predominant among Group A. It would thus seem reasonable to predict that the profiles and behaviours set to dominate Greek spa tourism in the years to come will largely be those currently associated with Group A.

Given that, one can conclude the following with regard to future trends in spa tourism:

- Spa tourism for therapy reasons will gradually lose ground to wellness spa services, though it will not disappear in the immediate future.
- Spa visitors will become less faithful to a specific spa town, while the search for new spa destinations will become a core feature of spa market demand.
- Average spa stays will grow gradually shorter.
- The steady fall in the average duration of spa visits, combined with a rise in the need for wellness services, will encourage spa visitors to choose spa towns as a year-round tourist destination. At the same time, it will lead them to choose hotel accommodation with on site spa services or one which is at least adjacent to spa facilities.
- The steady decline in the average duration of spa visits, combined with the search for new spas, will lead to even greater competition between spa destinations.
- Finally, change in spa visitors' requirements (from hydrotherapy to wellness services) means that the provision of reliable spa services will be no longer sufficient in itself, and will have to be combined with suitable alternative services and leisure activities.

CONCLUSIONS: NEW TRENDS IN SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING OF SPA TOURISM

Spa tourism is an activity with a long tradition which continues – and will continue – to attract a sizeable proportion of the population intent on benefiting from the beneficial properties of hot mineral springs.

Although spa tourism was oriented towards the provision of hydrotherapy services for prolonged periods in the past, this has changed in recent years. Spa tourism has expanded considerably to encompass more generally health-related services; in other words, tourists are now demanding different things from spa tourism destinations. This means, in terms of attractiveness, that a spa destination will have to adapt to the new developments and modify the planning of spa towns in order to cater for the needs and demands of both traditional older spa users and their younger visitors.

Given the above, if a spa is to keep up with these new developments and trends in spa tourism, its economic/business planning will need to focus on:

- the provision of facilities whose architectural creates an environment ideally suited to rejuvenation and well-being, which is to say an environment which keeps up with the contemporary wellness spa facilities which are constantly gaining ground as spas move away from the hospital-like aura which has dominated thus far;
- the provision of reliable spa tourism services and facilities oriented towards the provision of both hydrotherapy and wellness services which are in line with the new trends prominent in the sector and primarily geared towards the needs of the female spa visitors who will continue to dominate into the immediate future;
- expanding spa tourism's target group to include broader groups and categories of spa visitors, mostly younger individuals in the middle income bracket who will contribute even more vigorously to the local economy and to the development of the spa town and its surrounding area;
- on extending the spa season (year-round opening) to allow even more social, economic and age-groups to benefit from spa tourism all the year round, but also to keep the destination lively in every season.

At the same time, if a spa destination is to remain attractive and capable of responding to the needs of today', the spatial planning will also have to be adapted, focusing on:

- upgrading the built environment of the spa town and its surroundings by means of regeneration (Galdini 2007), pedestrianization, the imposition of building regulations etc., thereby allowing each spa destination both to retain its identity and individual attraction, and to allow it to compete with other similar destinations;
- the provision of high quality recreational services and facilities, but also leisure activities, to help the spa town remain competitive and thus both ensure greater numbers both of spa tourists and of repeat visitors;
- the provision of upgraded tourist services and facilities encompassing additional forms of tourism and alternative activities, thereby satisfying current visitors while simultaneously broadening the spa's target group as far as possible;
- the provision of adequate infrastructure and public service networks (e.g. rubbish collection, water supply etc.) to further upgrade the spa town's environment;
- dealing with traffic (one-way streets, pedestrianization, bicycle lanes etc.) combined with the provision of adequate parking spaces for motor vehicles, thus helping the destination to remain attractive, even during high season when visitor numbers are at their highest;
- highlighting cultural sights and sites in the vicinity (e.g. archaeological sites, monuments etc.), thereby helping to provide adequate alternative activities;
- facilitating access to the destination both through transportation and road networks.

In conclusion, what needs to be pinpointed is that a tourist activity – and especially a special form of tourism – can only remain attractive and competitive as a tourist product if its providers listen carefully to what their visitors want now and in the future and translate this knowledge into suitable spatial planning. In the case of Greece's spa towns, the planning for spa areas must aim to address a broader range of potential visitor profiles, and to increase the quantity and quality of the services and facilities it offers, as well as offering them over a longer season which may even extend to all four seasons. At the same time, spatial planning

should help draw attention to the destination's unique identity, to cater for the demands of visitors and, finally, to ensure the sustainability of the spa space and its waters, thereby keeping it attractive and allowing future generations to benefit from this unique form of tourism, as so many generations have done down the centuries.

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Marilena Papageorgiou (marpapageo@prd.uth.gr) is an Adjunct Lecturer at University of Thessaly, Department of Planning and Regional Development, Pedion Areos, P.C. 38221, Volos, Greece.

Marie-Noelle Duquenne (mdyken@prd.uth.gr) is an Assistant Professor of Statistical and Econometric Methods for Spatial Analysis at University of Thessaly, Department of Planning and Regional Development, Pedion Areos, P.C. 38221, Volos, Greece.