

SATISFACTION DEGREE RATING OF TOURIST SERVICES IN BUZIAȘ SPA, TIMIȘ COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract: Due to its features, Buziaș spa, from Timis County, mainly addresses curative tourism based on the physical and mental recovery of tourists. Given the services it provides and the specific tourist product, the largest share of tourists is made up of pensioners, therefore the current study aims to monitor the retirees' satisfaction degree who benefited of treatment procedures. The used method was that of sociologic survey based on a questionnaire, as well as the quantitative, primary and secondary data collection and analysis methods.

Key words: satisfaction degree, tourist services, spa tourism

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INTRODUCTION

The origin of spa tourism stems back to thousands of years, the first spa being attributed to Queen Cleopatra of Egypt who has established the first spa on the shores of the Dead Sea in about 25 BC, but the Romans, in their territorial expansion towards Europe, the Middle East and North Africa left behind a wide variety of facilities built across more centuries from 54 BC to 450 AD (Cooper & Cooper, 2009).

In Romania's case the sea water of "Callatis" and "Tomis" was used for treatment as well as the sulphurous spring and thermal waters since the Roman expansion period. Natural cure factors, in particular mineral water, have been in human attention since ancient times, a fact proven by the numerous archaeological findings that have revealed parts of the old Roman baths facilities in spas such: Geoagiu (known since the time of the Dacians under the name "Germisara" and in Roman times "Dodonae Termæ"), Herculane, Călan, Săcelu - Gorj, Ocna Sibiului, Moneasa, Buziaș, Călimănești (Pricăjan, 1985).

The paper focuses on the spa of Buziaș from western Romania (Figure 1), frequented by patients who suffer of cardiovascular diseases. On Romania's territory

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there are also such treatment resorts in Balványos, Băile Tuşnad, Borsec, Buziaş, Covasna, Lipova, Vatra Dornei and Vâlcele (Neacşu & Băltăreţu, 2006).

The focus of the current paper is to make an analysis of the evolution of Buziaş spa in terms of tourist consumption across time and to reveal to which degree tourists are satisfied with both curative treatments and related-tourist services such as accommodation, food and cleanliness.

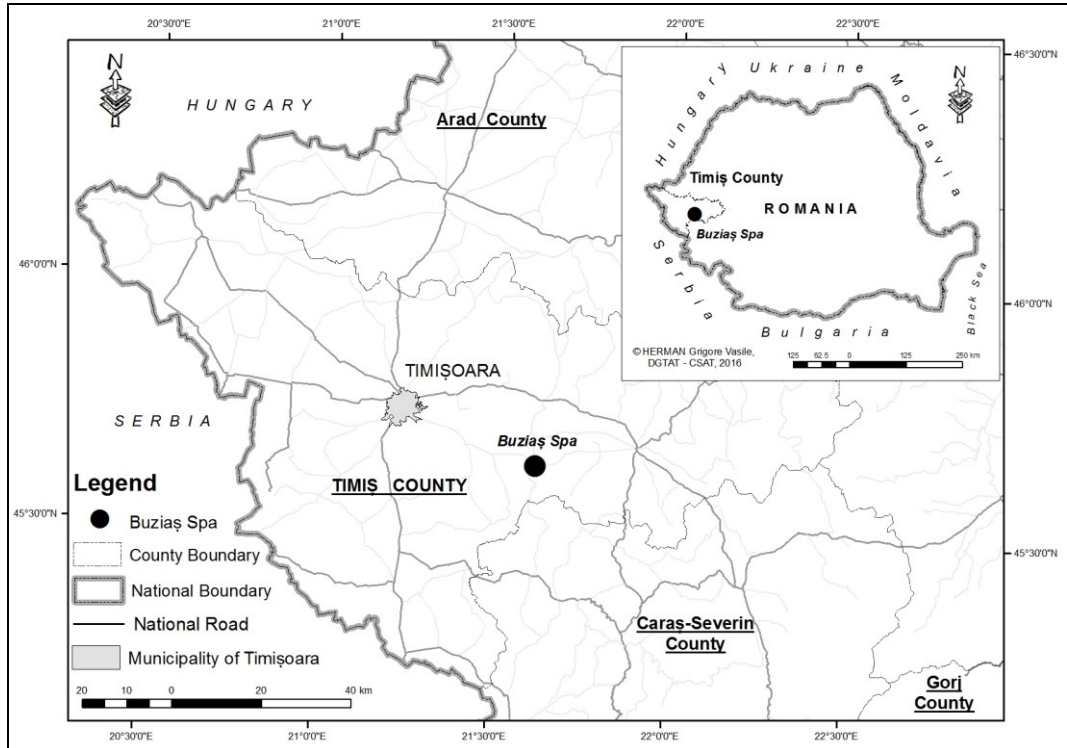


Figure 1. Buziaş Spa Location

METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on desk research where the related references available within Romanian libraries were consulted and field research. The scope of the research was to apply a satisfaction questionnaire to retiree persons who have received curative and treatment procedures within the spa and reveal their satisfaction level.

The used method was the survey and investigative technique through face-to-face questionnaire (Chelcea, 2007; Bryman, 2012; Babbie, 2010; Herman et al., 2015) which was conducted by the authors.

As a tool for investigation, choice questions were used. Ten retiree people were interviewed per day (30 May, 31 May, 1st of June 2015), amounting to a total of 30 respondents. From a structural viewpoint, the questionnaire was made up of two distinct parts. The first part aimed for information related to the respondents' socio-professional structure, and the second part was made up of nine items which aimed to collect information related to the diseases of the interviewed, the diet followed and the satisfaction degree versus the quality of treatment, food and accommodation services, the doctors' and physiotherapists output and cleanliness degree.

EVOLUTIONARY TRENDS ACROSS TIME IN BUZIAS SPA

For a better understanding of the spa's evolution across time, the accomplishment of the spa's life cycle was hereby drafted.

Known in the Roman times as "*Ahibis*", the resort is documented in the year 1320 and was declared a fully-fledged resort as early as 1819. There are numerous traces and evidence of life-related age and continuity in this territory. The oldest discoveries revealed in Silagiu village date from 18 - 17 BC.

The cultural complex Basarabi illustrates the state of civilization of Geto-Dacian tribes (Sfetcu, 2001) on this territory, a spa-consumption, later on completed by the Dacian-Roman people, as asserted by the botanist Al. Borza who said: "*Buziaș was certainly known and exploited, because there have been discovered Roman water pipes and bricks.*" (Borza, 1943, apud Simuț & Simuț, 1986). In the same respect, Tudor (1968) wrote: "*We have archaeological evidence that in Roman times in Banat were also used thermal waters (actually, minerals) from Buziaș (Timiș county). Around these springs, a whole assemblage of masonry, tile pipes, coins, bricks, sculptures and inscriptions on stone, unfortunately all scattered, without any previous study can be noted*". Unfortunately researchers could not undertake systematic research leading to discovery of conclusive material evidence, so there is still uncertainty regarding the period of using mineral waters from Buziaș. Nonetheless, more doctors have researched and applied water as a healing procedure for patients such as doctor Lindenmayer Adalber, doctor Gheorghe Ciocârlan (1764-1848), doctor Mahler Julius, a cardiologist and gynecologist, who introduced external cure (in baths) inspired by the German resort Bad Neuheim.

The discovery of mineral waters in 1805, which has contributed to designate Buziaș as an administrative center of the 31 municipalities of the Timiș Regional County Fund, marked the beginning of the output from a secular anonymity. In the evolution of the settlement, an important role was played since it was declared a spa in 1819. The therapeutic value of mineral waters soon became known both in Hungary and neighboring countries. Planning of the springs "*Michael*" and "*Joseph*" in 1837 for internal cure and research work carried out by the Romanian doctor Gheorghe Ciocârlan in the period 1838-1848 led to the growth of the fledgling renowned resort. Hungarian doctors and the naturalists' Congress held in Timisoara in 1843 also brought Buziaș spa into the spotlight (Simuț & Simuț, 1986).

As with most tourist destinations of the time, the elite class were the prevailing clients. The number of those who were treated in Buziaș grew considerably from 662 in the year 1872, up to 10966 in the following period 1885-1895. In recognition of the prestige enjoyed by the resort, in September 1898, Emperor Franz Joseph and heir, Prince Franz Ferdinand visited Buziaș.

On the 17th of December 1903 the artesian aquifer was discovered, very important both quantitatively and qualitatively, a fact which created the prerequisites for diversification of spa treatment and bottling of carbon dioxide mineral water. Thus, a bottling plant was built in 1907. The bottled mineral water, back then well ranked at national and international exhibitions was awarded with a Gold Medal (at Bratislava in 1908). Currently the mineral water from Buziaș is no longer bottled.

In 1906 the Muschong family bought the resort and restored Bath no. 1 and Bath no. 2, thus achieving increased bathing procedures that were performed daily. On 11 June 1948 the spa nationalization occurred – thus the private Muschong-owned property passed to state-owned property and an economic enterprise was created which was designated to ensure the accommodation and treatment of patients. Since year 1991, the enterprise is called "*Buziaș Treatment Trading Company*".

Further on, three hotels were built between 1975 - 1984: Buziaş, Parc and Timiș currently known as Phoenix, Parc and Timiș, the last being in conservation. The latest data processed according to the national statistics shows that there are currently five hotels (of which three are functional) in the resort along with 2 guesthouses, villas which used to be trendy in the spas up to the '90, but the latter are nowadays obsolete and not planned for tourism accommodation. The tourist frequency was further on analyzed (Figure 2), the highest level recorded for arriving tourists was in the year 2011 followed by year 2013.

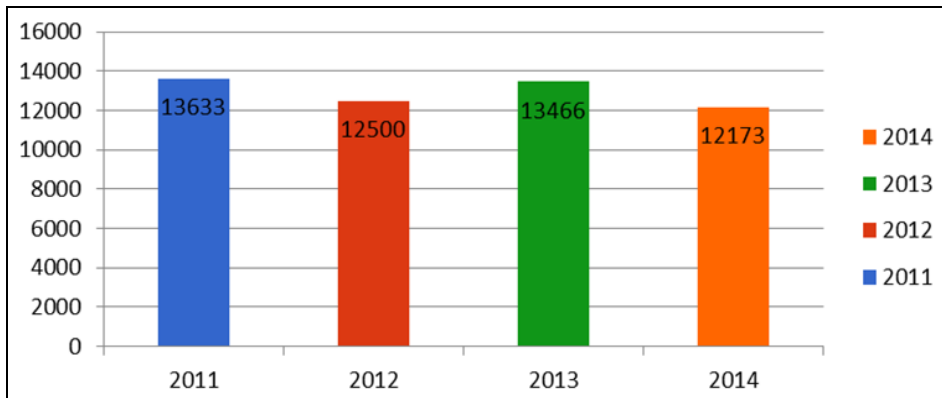


Figure 2. Tourist arrivals in Buziaş during 2011-2014
(Source: National Institute of Statistics)

The average length of stay in the resort, based on own calculations has increased from 7,11 days/tourist in 2011 to 8,83 in 2014, despite the decreasing number of tourists in the latter year. In 2014, 41% of the net accommodation capacity in function was used.

The accomplishment of the spa's life cycle was based on all the above indicators, i.e. earliest historical proves of tourist consumption, persons involved in the spa's development, buildings erected across time to accommodate tourists with cardiovascular affections mainly, the form of property of the spa, private or state-owned, statistical indicators and qualitative surveys which all allowed to spotlight the old and current situation of the spa and its evolution across time (Figure 3). As with most Romanian spas, we can see how its ascending path to success was cut on the analyzed timeline in 1948, along with the territory nationalisation and thus a production and consumption uniformisation of most Romanian spas.

This occurred along with the onset on the Communist Party, in 1945, when all spas fell in the hands of the state, the result being of a product standardisation. So cutting away rich investors, not taking into account former local architecture of the spa has triggered a great disruption for the local tourism business whose results can be seen today when the spa is struggling to adjust to the contemporary needs of the clients. Nonetheless there are slight burgeons of tourism revirement with the new accommodation units, i.e. guest houses that have appeared after 1989 in the democratic era. Guesthouses are on the second place of the market share with a total of 28.58% preceded by hotels which hold 71.42% of the existing tourist accommodation capacity in Buziaş. If in 1990 there weren't any guest houses, only 18 villas and 5 hotels and in 2014; there are 2 guesthouses, 5 hotels and no functional villas (INS, 2016).

The spa's future may lie in the small local entrepreneurship, such as the small folk museum and aviation shows held on a regular basis. Such a positive example resides in Iulia

Folea-Troceanu’s folk art collections exhibit with clothing items, costumes, sewing and fabrics made by the hands of hardworking women, old items of furniture and other objects which can be admired within the the small ethnographic folk museum which exhibits an impressive number of local folklore items from Banat. Based on this model of local entrepreneurship further small sustainable local projects can be developed which will help differentiate among cardiovascular spas in Romania and create branding strategies with local specificity.

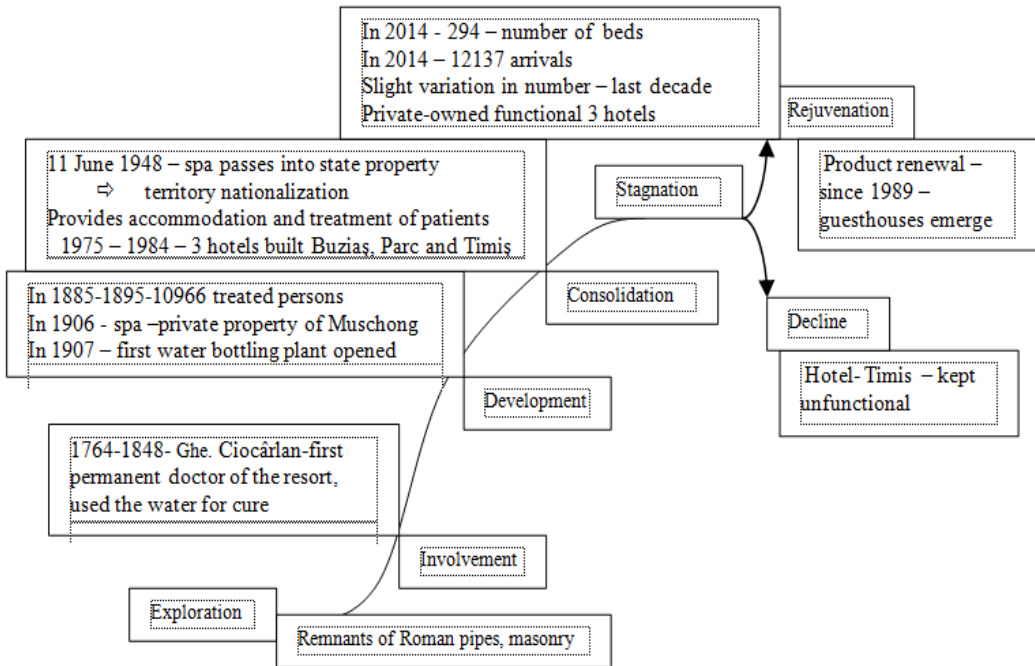


Figure 3. Evolutionary trends across time in Buzias spa
Source: adaptation after Butler (2006)



Figure 4. Parachute jumps
Source: www.buzias.ro



Figure 5. Aircraft fleet
Source: www.buzias.ro

As far as the tourist product differentiation is concerned, an aerodrome is located in Buzias, the private property of Aero West aviation school. Occasionally, they organize

air shows. People from Timișoara and from the county come to see the great air show. Other than aviation classes, Aero West organize parachute jumps (Figure 4) and offer services like air taxi, parcel post, advertisement banner fly and various activities in agriculture. The aircraft fleet (Figure 5) consists of eight AN2 aircrafts, two Cessna 152 aircraft and one Cessna 172 aircraft. This attracts a younger segment of tourists or day-trippers versus the ones taking baths within the treatment centres of the resort.

So, the cardiovascular resort has all premises for becoming a sustainable resort with a diversified supply and also capable to attract a younger segment of population. Currently in Buziaş live 8388 permanent residents, which divided to the number of tourists allowed the calculation of the tourist density, which in the year 2014 amounted to 1,45 tourists/resident, thus rendering a sustainable carrying capacity in the territory.

CURE FACTORS AND THERAPEUTICAL INDICATIONS

The resort is specialized in the treatment of cardiovascular and central nervous systems. Other associated diseases can be treated such as diseases of the digestive tract, neurasthenia, occupational diseases, nutrition and metabolic disorders and certain rheumatic diseases. Climate, free CO₂ and mineral waters are the natural cure factors representative for Buziaş resort. Many patients and tourists benefit from the healing properties of climate influenced by local relief. Sunbathing and field cure (brisk walk in the park) are boosted by the ionization air present in the area of Buziaş resort. The sedative bioclimate characterized by very weak request to autonomic nervous system and the endocrine glands allows the rapid acclimatization of the patients.

The four springs with healing factors are named: *23 August, Phoenix, Fenix and Mos Bîzieş*. These waters are indicative in cardiovascular diseases, the preventive treatment as well prevention of disease evolution towards more advanced stages and are recommended against: Dyslipidemia, Primary hypertension (stage I), Raynaud's disease. The therapeutic treatment (for consolidating medication results or boost the effects of a current medication treatment) is recommended in: stage II of myocardial infarction (convalescent) three months after hospital discharge; stage III of myocardial infarction (post convalescence) in summer; primary hypertension (stage II); secondary atherosclerotic hypertension and varicose veins. For recovery it is recommended for: peripheral vascular disease, varicose veins without trophic disorders (Pasztai, 2011).

For Central Nervous System diseases, therapeutic treatment is recommended for Hemiparesis (two years after onset), for the treatment of circulatory, osteoarticular or trophic complications; also for treatment of basic diseases (primary hypertension, diabetes, etc.) Recovery treatment is also recommended for hemiparesis (six months - two years after stroke). For diseases of the digestive system, the preventive treatment is recommended for irritable bowel syndrome.

For nutrition and metabolism disorders, preventive, therapeutic and recovery treatment is recommended for obesity with cardiovascular complications. For occupational diseases, preventive treatments are recommended for maladies of the musculoskeletal system augmented by professional conditions (Pasztai, 2011). There are also some general counter indications: acute illness, cancer, repeated and abundant bleeding of any kind, pathological pregnancy in any month, normal pregnancy starting from 3rd month, epilepsy and leukemia (Simuț & Simuț, 1986).

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

A satisfaction questionnaire was applied to 30 retiree persons who have received treatment procedures, namely 17 male and 13 female respondents. Several sets of medical conditions were given and respondents indicated of which they suffer.

Respondents were also asked to rate general aspects of their stay, the assistance given by the resort's doctors, physiotherapists and other staff and a specific indicator of personal satisfaction: treatment results.

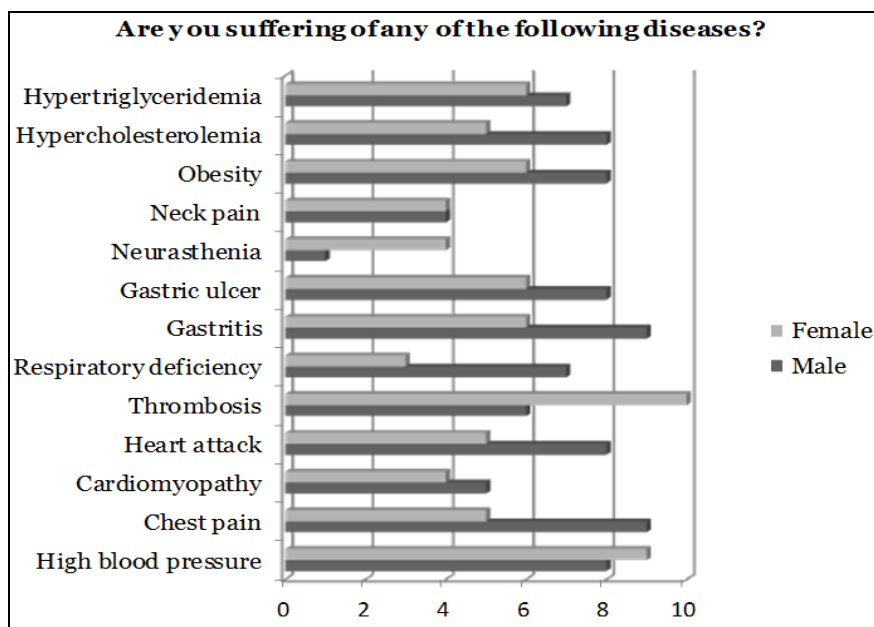


Figure 6. Medical conditions indicated by female and male respondents

As a result of the data analysis it came out that there are certain differences among the male and female respondents, among the male population the most frequent diseases being chest pains, gastritis and high blood pressure whereas among the female population the most acute disease is thrombosis and high blood pressure (Figure 6, Table 1).

Table 1. Medical conditions indicated by female and male respondents

The affected system	Name of the disease	Number of cases
Heart and Circulatory system diseases	High blood pressure	17
	Chest pain	14
	Cardiomyopathy	9
	Heart attack	13
	Thrombosis	16
Respiratory system diseases	Respiratory deficiency	10
Digestive system diseases	Gastritis	15
	Gastric ulcer	14
Nervous system diseases	Neurasthenia	5
	Cervical spondylosis	8
Nutrition and Metabolism Disorders	Obesity	14
	Hypercholesterolemia	13
	Hypertriglyceridemia	13

The respondents' assessment with relation to the followed diet

Diet has an important role in improving the medical conditions along with the therapy procedures. Under the strict guidance and supervision of a nutritionist,

patients may serve menus from different diets. For example, a menu can be recommended only for those who suffer from diseases of the liver and stomach and some forms of cardiovascular diseases. For those medical conditions, the most severe menu is served since that excludes fat, salt, spiced and fried food. Another menu is dedicated to diabetic people where foods rich in carbohydrates are excluded. The current study revealed that 57% of the respondents were following a diet despite the age. The remaining 43%, despite being aware of its benefits and the disease improvement, do not follow it for various reasons (Figure 7).

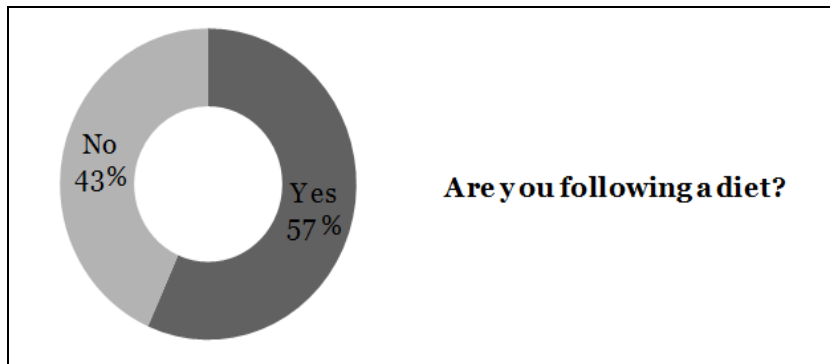


Figure 7. Percentage of respondents following or not a diet

The assessment of the respondents’ satisfaction degree related to the medical services

The assessment of the respondents’ satisfaction degree who followed a treatment procedure in Buziaș was centered on the following satisfaction-related indicators: the doctors of the resort, the physiotherapists, the quality and quantity of food during the stay, cleanliness, accommodation and treatment. The doctors of the resort constitute an important indicator with relation to the respondents’ satisfaction degree, decisive in the case of repeat customers. From the results’ analysis it came out that only 40% were very satisfied with the doctors’ output, the remaining part being somewhat satisfied (27%), somewhat unsatisfied (30%) and very unsatisfied (3%) (Figure 8).

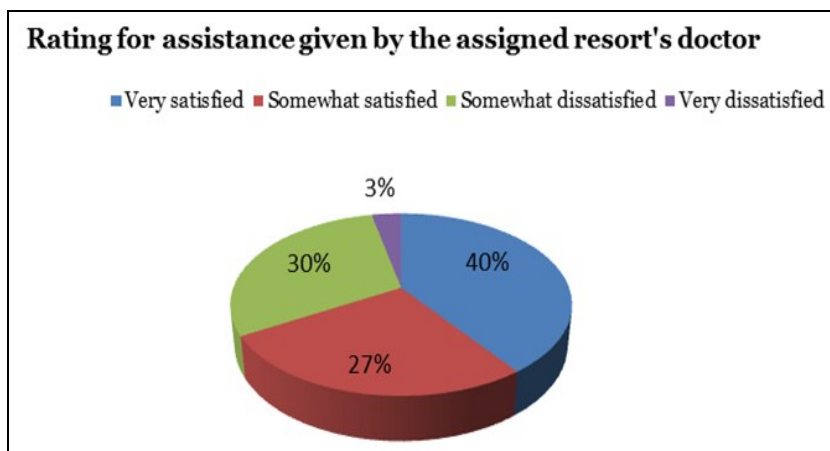


Figure 8. Rating for assistance given by the assigned resort’s doctor

Assessment of the respondents' satisfaction degree related to the physiotherapists' services

As in the case of the spa's doctors, physiotherapists reveal a sensitive indicator as far as the respondents' satisfaction is concerned with a decisive role in generating the tourist motivation. From the analysis of the respondents' replies, no person was unsatisfied, while 47% declared themselves to be somewhat satisfied by the physiotherapists services, 30% very satisfied and 23% somehow unsatisfied (Figure 9).

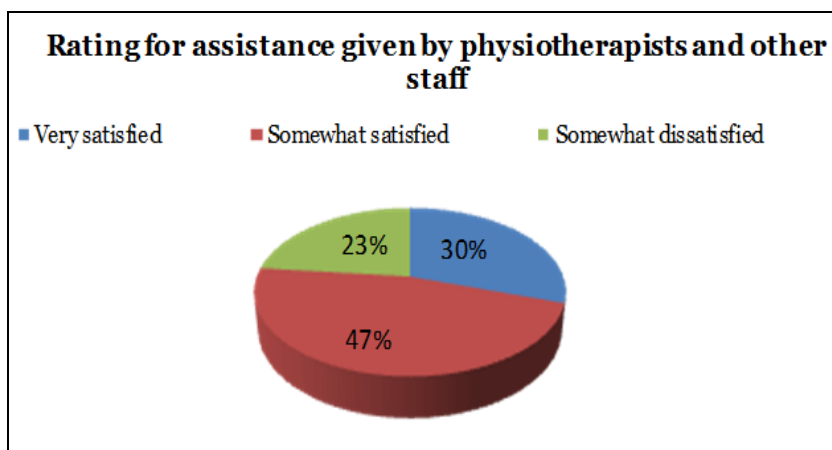


Figure 9. Rating for assistance given by physiotherapists and other staff

Comparing the satisfaction degree of pensioners who followed a treatment with relation to the services of the two professional categories, the one of doctors and physiotherapists, the latter category is preferred.

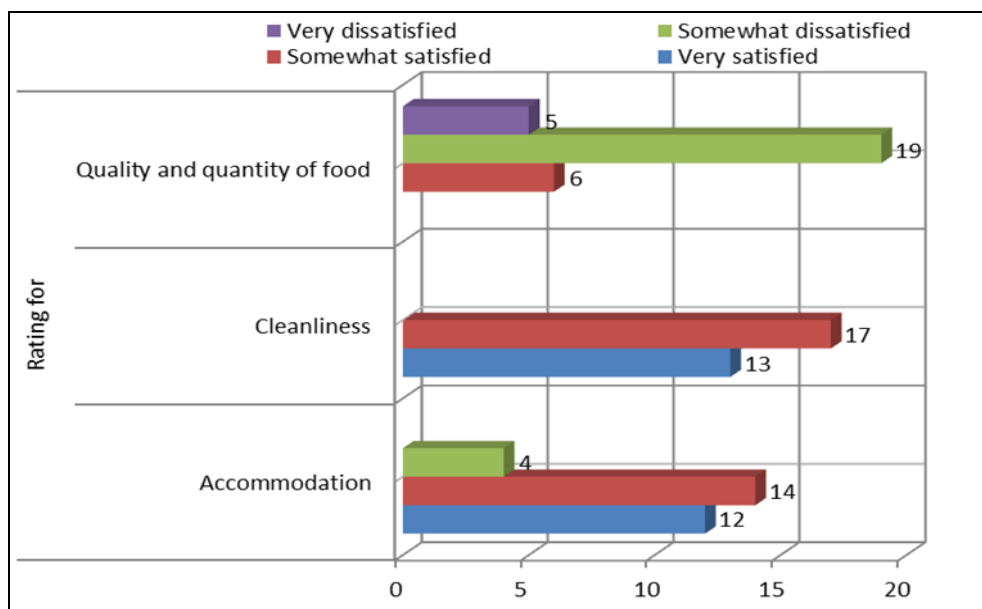


Figure 10. Ratings for quality and quantity of food, cleanliness and accommodation

Rating the respondents’ satisfaction degree with reference to the quality and quantity of food

The respondents’ satisfaction degree with reference to the quantity and quality of food also concurs to the socio-professional category which he/she belongs to. Nonetheless the global image reveals that the answers are somewhat unsatisfactory (19 persons), followed by the somewhat satisfactory (6 persons) and very satisfied ones (5 persons) (Figure 10).

Assessment of the respondents’ satisfaction degree with reference accommodation and cleanliness

The analysis of the obtained data with relation to the respondents’ satisfaction degree highlights a somewhat similar situation for the two indicators. Thus, the largest share of respondents have declared themselves to be somewhat satisfied and very unsatisfied whereas in the case of the indicator related to accommodation, merely 4 persons declared themselves to be unsatisfied (Figure 10).

Assessment of the respondents’ satisfaction degree about the treatment procedures

The spa treatment consists of heated strong carbonated mineral water baths and Carbon-dioxide healing bath “mofetă”. The two main types of treatments in the resort are known as major procedures and with recommendation from doctors, other adjuvant procedures are available: thermotherapy, electrotherapy, aerosols, physiotherapy, medical gymnastics as well as internal cure with mineral water.

In the northern part of the resort there are three therapy and wellness centers: the one from three-starred Hotel Parc which includes a swimming pool, Jacuzzi, sauna and general treatment procedures such as: electrotherapy, kinetic therapy and hydrotherapy, Carbon-dioxide healing bath “mofetă”, massage therapy, hydro-massage, hydrotherapy, paraffin wax treatment, ultrasound treatments; the one from the two-starred Hotel Timiș (currently unfunctional) and the last one, the newly built two-starred Hotel Silvana (2014) therapy center which also includes general treatment procedures. To be eligible for treatment in the spa, it is necessary for patients to come to the resort with a reference form with the specified diagnosis and a medical record. The treatments will be determined by the doctor as a result of the initial consultation and analyses presented by the patient (Simuț & Simuț, 1986).

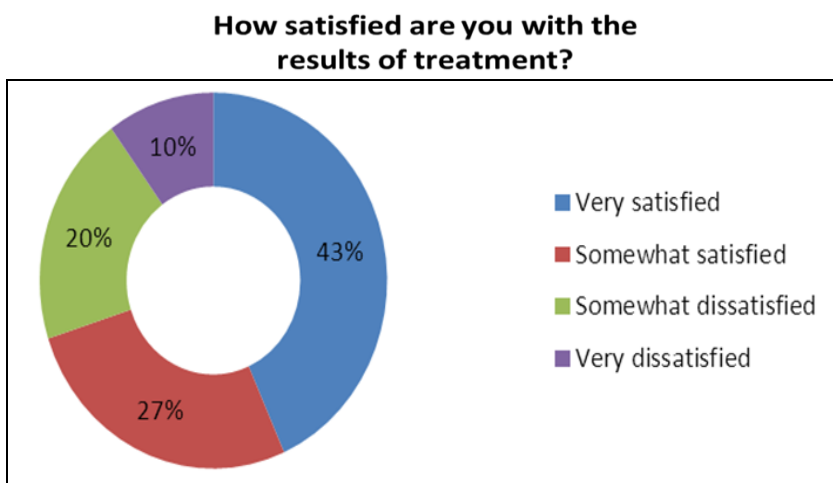


Figure 11. Satisfaction of treatment result

A great percentage of respondents (70%) considered that the results of treatment were satisfactory. Nevertheless, 30% of respondents considered that the results of treatment were not good enough. Of the total 30 interviewed retirees, 40% of them were there for the first time in Buziaș; among them 60% came from the urban background while 40% from the rural background (Figure 11).

CONCLUSIONS

Buziaș spa resort is the only one in the Western Plain of Romania specialized in treating cardiovascular diseases. The importance of natural cure factors on the human body from this area dates from ancient times, based on the the archeological vestiges and the written documents. Currently, treatments offered by the resort's therapy and spa centers are opened all year round.

Satisfaction with both medical services and the ancillary ones (food, accommodation, cleanliness) is an important issue both approached in the Romanian references (Berlescu, 1998; Gaceu & Herman, 2010; Gaceu & Teodoreanu, 2013; Herman & Tătar, 2015; Ilieș et al., 2015) as well as in the foreign ones (Bowen, 2001; Bramwell, 1998; Chon & Olsen, 1991; Heung & Cheng, 2000; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Liu et al., 2010; Huang & Hua, 2014). The research is up-to-date given the period in which the study was conducted, but it encounters some limitations given the representativeness degree, the group size limited to 30 retirees.

The resort has good premises for development and product diversification, the number of tourists revolving around 12000 tourists/year, sustainable local entrepreneurship should be stimulated and proliferated as in the case of the local folk museum and air-borne activities, a good investment would also be the re-opening of the former mineral water bottling plant, smaller wellness spa centres so as to attract a younger segment of population, as the vast majority of tourists in the resort are retirees. Accommodation units have diversified across time, guesthouses come to the forefront in this respect, nonetheless most medical services are carried out through the hotels and their associated medical staff.

As the study emphasized, most respondents declared themselves to be satisfied with most medical services, treatments, accommodation and cleanliness-related services, while the restoration-related area needs improvement for the quality and quantity of food served to its clients.

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