



Enlightening Tourism.

A Pathmaking Journal



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BOOK REVIEW:

Periz-Ortis, M. & Alvarez-Garcia, J. (Eds.) (2015). *Health and Wellness Tourism: Emergence of a New Market Segment*. Springer International Publishing Switzerland. ISBN 978-3-319-11490-3. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-11490-3_1.

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I must start by saying that this research theme might particularly interest the readers. Therefore, this book by Periz-Ortis and Alvarez-Garcia is actually an informative and reflective reading.

It is not a traditional book that begins and ends with the same thread. We are talking about a collective book that presents a set of separate articles though united by a common theme. Allow us, however, to detail our approach to the different perspectives exposed by various authors.

This publication comprehends the following key concepts: Networks; Education; Regional Development; Promotion and Marketing; Quality Management; Motivations; Barriers; Social Program; Diversity and Interconnection; and Innovation. These ideas are strongly associated with the keywords: Health and Wellness Tourism; Welfare Sector; Thalassotherapy; Hydrotherapy; Spas; and Thermalism.

Two aspects stand out: The classic thermalism, with health treatments and prevention goals, and the new wellness tourism providing a wide range of activities related with the diversity of spa treatments, including complementary recreational nature, as well as cultural products and services.

Besides the different chapters that can be published in specialized scientific journals, the book structure encompasses several chapters, all related to health and wellness tourism, thus dealing with thermal, spa, thalassotherapy, and hydrotherapy realities.

The book starts (very appropriately) with the Portuguese and Spanish thermal legislation and regulation, in a comparative study of thermal legislation in Galicia and North Portugal Euro-region. According to the authors, “it is a heavily regulated activity at various stages of its production process, guided by multiple entities (...) whose competencies often overlap.” The main conclusion is that there is a possible suitability of a legal framework for the Euro-region with similar objectives.

Chapter 2 – “Health and wellness tourism: A strategic plan for tourism and thermalism valorization of São Pedro do Sul” – addresses aspects related with local development, quality and global tourism products of one of the oldest and best thermal centers in Portugal. As reported by the authors, “it is evident that change is inevitable and change is influenced by a number of forces and factors in the external environment of tourism, as well as the global competition emerging (...)” and “Innovative tourism organizations and destinations should explore consumer trends and design suitable offerings and experiences to entice consumers”. The authors claim that “(...) health travel is (still) a niche and special interest market, but is significantly and increasingly contributing to the economy”.

According to chapter 3, “In the provision of health and well-being services there has been, in the last 10 years, a huge increase in demand of this type of organizational approach, to solve issues of employment and creation of self-employment”. This chapter has the title “Networks in the health and welfare sector: a

study beyond borders – Portugal/Spain”. It highlights the structure and the defining mechanisms of control in the development of the mentioned networks and the proper units of franchising that contribute to the business sustainability.

In chapter 4, we find another case study with the title: “Eurocity Chaves-Verín: regional development strengthened by spa-linked research and professional education”. It refers to two “bordering towns gifted with about a dozen of mineral hot water springs – Chaves in northern Portugal, and Verín in southern Galicia that were united in the Eurocity Chaves-Verín (ECV). According to the authors, the water has a unifying and sustainable role in the region, and it benefits health and spa services with its natural resources. It also allows research and professional education to promote the sustainability of water-projects, in line with strategic trends in Europe.

Chapter 5, one of the shortest of the whole book, presents a different reality from the Iberian region (Portugal and Spain), seen in the other articles, since it covers the Italian case as one of the most traditional countries in the world, with a high number of thermal centers. The authors state that the thermal bath industry is growing, largely thanks to the change of lifestyle and consumer habits (...) but “it is necessary to reconsider the actions of valorization and enhancement of thermal bath destinations. The actions designed to promote the development of the thermal industry need to take into account that the final product is the result of all actions (...), without none excluded, namely Governance, Communication and Promotion, Channels of sale, Product Offer, Reception, Transport and Infrastructure, Education and Training, Investment, and Legal Framework.”.

Chapter 6 provides a relevant empirical study to discover the level of implementation and degree of maturity of critical quality factors in Spanish thalassotherapy centers. As we can see in the conclusion, the level of implementation of critical factors is above 69% (stated in a report). This result is very important for the managing directors of these centers, both to provide the strengths and also to identify the areas for improvement in the area of quality.

We found, in chapter 7, a theme that is similar to the previous chapter. However, the objective of this chapter was to identify the importance and structure of motivations that drive the thalassotherapy centers in Spain to implement and certify a Quality Management System. This paper shows that the key motivations are

“enhancing service quality, improving processes and procedures, and creating awareness of quality in centers”.

The next chapter seems to be sequential to the two previous chapters, not just because two of the authors are the same, but also because it intends to “identify barriers that thalassotherapy centers in Spain perceive they must overcome to implement and achieve certification of a Quality Management System”. However, this process is not complete because it is a sector where there are no quality management studies. The major barriers the Thalassotherapy Centers have to face are the following: “resistance to (...) responsibilities followed consecutively by inadequate knowledge and lack of understanding of quality management, resistance to change and lack of time to devote to quality tasks”. Although we proceed with the main theme – health and well-being – chapter 9 raises a new theme, addressing hydrotherapy. This article outlines the IMSERSO Social Cures Program, trying to analyze future trends (estimating the number of available spaces; whether the program is sufficient or whether any social demand would remain uncovered) in such programs across Spain, based on estimations of the elderly population size. These trends are related to a decline in the number of spaces allocated in all the Autonomous Communities along with the demographic and territorial changes.

Chapter 10 is about wellness tourism. In a rupture with the classic view of health tourism, it outlines the diversity and interconnection between spas, health, and wellness tourism. According to the authors, “several situations call for new social restructuring forms and styles of life, (...) other environments and cultures capable to provide access to more time and leisure”. These changes affect behavioral decisions, in which “appellative alternative medicines” take a relevant place. The authors claim that the new health and wellness centers are “also appearing as an answer to these well-being matters”.

The closing chapter can be considered a gold key, introducing a relevant discussion about the theme of innovation applied to thermalism, while presenting a Portuguese case study of Beira Interior Region. As stated by the authors, the development of innovative and competitive thermal products can play an important role in the progress of the inland regions by effectively reducing the economic asymmetries. They sustain the view that “nanobiotechnological innovation, applied to dermocosmetic products based on natural resources like thermal waters, will have an

effective impact on the economic context of this sector, particularly in the inland region". The direct and indirect effects of thermal spa tourism, through the demand for goods and services, are crucial to the regional economy.

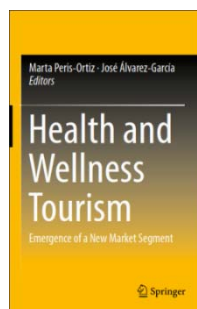
Portugal and Spain were shrewdly studied in this book, since they are countries with a meaningful health tourism tradition, particularly well represented in this book. Italy is a well-known country for thermalism, providing a high number of thermal bath sites. Nonetheless, in this book there is just one chapter addressing the Italian health tourism context.

In more detail:

- chapters 1, 3 and 4 present comparative studies between Portuguese and Spanish regions or even between the countries (chapter 1: Galicia–North Portugal as an Euro-region; chapter 3: Portugal-Spain; chapter 4: Chaves-Verín Eurocity);
- chapters 2 and 11 focus on the Portuguese regions of São Pedro do Sul (a case-study based on the strategic plan for tourism and thermalism valorization of one of the largest thermal health complexes in Portugal) and the inland region of Beira Interior, where the majority of the thermal and spa centers are located (an example of innovation in thermalism);
- chapters 6, 7 and 8 address the Quality Management process in Spanish Thalassotherapy Centers (in short: chapter 6: diagnostic; chapter 7: motivations; chapter 8: barriers); chapter 9 analyses the IMSERSO Social Program Hydrotherapy in Horizon 2020;
- chapter 5 presents an evaluation of the supply (the management of the thermal resorts website) and demand (customer satisfaction) of thermal tourism in Italy;
- along the 11 chapters of this book, only chapter 10 is not presented as a case study.

This book is a noteworthy collection of original papers on a growing tourism product all over the world, introducing a subject in which there is insufficient academic research. In a bid to adapt to new needs and consumption habits, some health and wellness centers are trying to diversify and promote their offer, thus investing in new equipment and in qualification of human resources. We would like to conclude our analysis with some food for thought:

- Are therms structured enough to be able to compete in the health tourism & wellness sector?
- Are there health and wellness centers that offer services and activities directed to tourists?
- Do the old establishments (some of them looking like 'hospitals') feature themselves as unattractive to the tourist activity?
- Are the thermal hotel structures 'attractive' enough to tourists?
- Can we consider the investments made in health and wellness tourism significant enough to position this segment as a competitive activity in the tourism industry?
- What are the real motivations, expectations and satisfaction levels of health and wellness tourists?



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More information about this book at:

<http://www.springer.com/de/book/9783319114897>