

EXAMINATION OF DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS IN SUSTAINABLE HEALTH TOURISM: CASE STUDY OF SELTERS SPA

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Geothermal waters are very important as a natural resource and represent hot water rich in minerals, which is the basis for the development of health tourism. In this paper, the research was conducted with the aim of pointing out the real state of the Selters Spa in Mladenovac, the City of Belgrade, as a tourist destination, with a focus on the attitudes of visitors. A quantitative comparative analysis of tourist traffic in this spa in relation to other spas in Serbia was performed using official statistical data. Empirical research was conducted through interviews and surveys, and then, based on the obtained results, a qualitative analysis of the current situation in Selters Spa was performed. The obtained results indicate that the development of tourism in the Selters Spa is stagnating. The data analysis suggested that the most significant reasons for this are the concept that mainly relies on visitors who come for rehabilitation treatments, the elderly and almost mostly domestic tourists.

Keywords: *health tourism, spa tourism, visitors' attitudes, tourist traffic, attributes of competitiveness.*

Introduction. Within tourism, health tourism plays a key role with the increasing emphasis on health among the population. As health is becoming more and more appreciated, there is an increasing emphasis on preserving it (Hojcska and Szabó, 2021) [13]. Hall (1992) [11] pointed out in health tourism that the main motive is to improve the health of an individual in other climatic conditions, i.e. travel to specific locations for a complete spa experience. Health (spa & wellness) tourism, involves a stay in a spa and medical institutions (Ivanov and Marandyikina, 2021) [16], involves professional and controlled use of natural healing factors and physical therapy procedures to preserve and improve health and quality of life.

The emphasis is on the revitalization of psychophysical capabilities in climate, sea and in thermal destinations/health resorts through treatments, special programs of recovery, a balanced diet and the like (Gredlčak and Demonja, 2020) [6; 10]. Spa destinations are actually health tourism destinations, thanks to their basic specific offer, which is thermo-mineral water (Lund, 2002 [21]; Boekstein, 2014) [2].

The International Spa Association (ISPA) defined spas as 'entities devoted to enhancing overall well-

being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit' (ISPA, 2006) [5]. In balneotherapy, medicinal waters are used in curative procedures, but it is associated with the use of medicinal muds and natural medicinal gases in health treatment, which can be part of prevention, curation and rehabilitation for many diseases (Hojcska and Szabó, 2021) [13].

Spas destinations must have a comparative advantage not only when it comes to water quality, because for more complete success they must be competitive at least in relation to the spas in the area (Cohen and Bodeher, 2008) [3]. These are the reasons why the management must very carefully develop and combine all the elements of the tourist offer (Csirmaz and Károly, 2015) [4], but also keep in mind that the demand is also influenced by external factors due to which the tourist market is lost (terrorism, epidemics, natural disasters).

There is an increasing concern about health and disease prevention leads to increase in demand for various spa treatments. To satisfy the demands of modern tourists, European spas are destinations of health tourism (spa, wellness tourism) and they offer integral tourist products of dynamic growth. It

is interesting that a large number of European spas offer opportunities to valorize a number of different programs: springs with medical water for therapeutic use, healing gases, peloids in spas, bioclimatic/healing climate, kneipp therapy (Smith and Puczkó, 2014 [29; 30]) with combination quality accommodation, gastronomic offer, sports, entertainment, and cultural activities that complement the tourist stay (Milićević, 2015 [25]).

Unlike the traditional spa concept, whose priority was the health-healing function, the modern spa and wellness concept emphasizes the health-recreational component, which means that the offer must be more complete and broader (Radivojević, 2011 [27], Štetić et al., 2014 [32]). However, with the development of the spa, the multipolar type of space organization is becoming more and more popular: tourists are being accommodated in more and more neighborhoods that are not only related to spa treatment, but also sports, recreation, culture and entertainment (Gligorijević and Novović, 2014 [9]). This practice characterizes most other spa centers in Europe (Dryglas and Różycki, 2016 [8]; McCarthy, 2017 [22]).

Health — recreational facilities and services intended for people of different ages, based on shorter stays to improve overall health, suppress traditional and long spa treatments (Milićević, 2013 [24]). Another important feature of the modern development of spa tourism in Europe, refers to the multipolarity of these centers that develop multiple poles of tourist attractions (health services, recreational activities, monuments, events, congresses, excursions, weekend tourism, entertainment — art facilities) which attract more heterogeneous structure of guests (Jovičić, 2008 [17]). In many countries, especially in Europe, water-based therapies are accepted as a legitimate form of medicine where they are supervised and supported by governments and can be a reimbursable medical expense (Smith and Puczkó, 2016 [31]).

It is necessary that any touristic fitting is conceived as a subsystem of an integrated higher rank system where the tourist component can be affected by the economic one with local, regional or international consequences and the general financial reasoning can win over one that focuses on local particularities (Ilieş and Josan, 2009 [14]). At the same time, for the balanced development of spa areas, it is necessary to implement and valorize the principles of sustainable tourism. According to Puczko and Ratz (2020) [7] sustainable tourism development has to be economically viable and naturally and culturally sensitive at the same time.

Due to the favorable geographical position Serbia has over 1000 springs have been discovered, of

which about 500 sources of cold and hot mineral water, about 50 climatic places and spas have been defined, which with a wealth of natural minerals and medicinal mud, have huge potential in health tourism and all in accordance with the Tourism Development Strategy of Republic of Serbia from 2016 to 2025 [34; 35].

The aim of this paper is to present the characteristics and possibilities of tourist development of Selters Spa, with special emphasis on sustainable development, presenting the results of the analysis of the perception of local residents and tourists about the current situation, but also the potential for sustainable health tourism.

Study area. Selters Spa is located in Serbia, about 50 km from Belgrade and belongs to the one of the 17 municipalities of the City of Belgrade, Mladenovac. Located on the forested slopes of Mount Kosmaj, in the basin of the river Veliki Lug, well connected with Belgrade and the highways E-70 and E-75, close to two artificial lakes — Markovačko and Rabrovačko represents significant potential for tourism development.

The waters of Selters Spa and Koračićka Spa represent hydrogeological heritage according to the Inventory of Geoheritage of Serbia (Karamata and Mijović, 2005 [18]). A special feature of the spa is the highly mineralized thermal water that belongs to the group of homeotherms, temperatures up to 50°C. It is used in all hydro procedures, inhalations and for drinking (Mijović, 2007 [20]).

Another specificity of the spa is the application of peloid therapy, which manifests thermal and mechanical properties at the site of application, which gives exceptional results in the prevention and treatment of many diseases (inflammatory and degenerative rheumatism, posttraumatic conditions, neuralgia, peripheral nerve damage). The most common patients in Selters Spa are those who have had a stroke and those who have had an artificial joint implanted. According to that, this spa is one of the few in this area, having in mind the successful rehabilitation and recovery of patients thanks to the healing mud and water.

The first data on the thermo-mineral spring date back to the end of the 19th century, when the local population accidentally discovered hot and salt water in 1893. As water of exceptional quality, it was compared with thermo-mineral sites in Europe, a similarity was observed with the Selters spring in Essen (Germany), and the Mladenovac Spa was named Selters Spa. At the beginning of the 20th century, the first accommodation capacities were formed, and

the development continued between the two wars, when the accommodation and health facilities were improved.

Selters Spa experienced the greatest momentum in development in the 70s and 80s of the XX century, when the entire complex became part of the “Institute for Occupational Medicine and Rehabilitation” and then the hotel building was renovated and then built new hotel. The spa has been transformed into a modern health resort, with specialized professional staff, modern diagnostic cabinets and equipment that, along with the natural factor in treatment, give exceptional results.

Visitors to the Selters Spa have at their disposal: the Selters Hotel, which currently has 229 beds, a facility for inpatient treatment and rehabilitation of disabled and immobile patients, and a large number of beds in private accommodation. In order to avoid the inelasticity of the tourist offer, spas in modern conditions develop the specifics of elite and highly paid tourism, through the wellness centers and aqua parks so as to develop the recognizability of the destination and attractiveness (Krešić, 2007 [20]). Wellness center in Selters Spa contains an indoor pool, outdoor pool, sauna, salt room, jacuzzi bath, underwater massage baths, mud treatments (peloid), ten types of massage (relaxation, sports therapy, anti-cellulite, manual lymphatic drainage, royal, essential massage oil), as well as a hairdressing and beauty salon.

Selters Spa needs reconstruction and modernization in order for the dead capital to come to life. Selters has all the necessary facilities to provide health and tourism services. However, the existence of only the necessary conditions is not enough, much more needs to be done. It is indisputable that Selters Spa functions quite successfully in the part of rehabilitation, that it has accommodation capacities, professional staff and relatively satisfactory equipment, but if only tourist visitors are observed, the condition is not satisfactory. According to the data of the competent Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications (MTTT) and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), in recent years there has been a slight decline in tourists, which is explained by greater competition in this area.

Reaffirmation of tourism as a significant economic and cultural activity would mean strengthening the position of Belgrade as an attractive tourist destination in SE Europe and the metropolis on the Danube, competitive with other Danube metropolises. This area is a tourist zone of the first rank in the Republic of Serbia, with specific types of tourism (includ-

ing spa tourism in Mladenovac) which derives from the character of the natural, cultural and economic structure of Belgrade and its surroundings (Čerović, 2020 [7]; Radosavljević, 2006 [28]). According to the Tourism Development Strategy of the City of Belgrade from 2020 to 2025 [35], the development of Mladenovac in the direction of an eco-city would contribute to the development of Selters Spa, and connecting Selters and Koraćička Spa into a single complex would create opportunities to attract more foreign tourists.

According to Agenda 21 for tourism, the seventh goal “Welfare of the local community” says that tourism should contribute to maintaining and strengthening the quality of life of the local population while avoiding social degradation and exploitation (Hrabrovski Tomić and Milićević, 2012 [12]; Kostić et al., 2018 [19]). In order to achieve that, it is necessary to carefully plan the further development of tourism, with an emphasis on the implementation of the principles of sustainable development. The research presented in this paper was conducted with the aim of pointing out the real situation of Selters Spa in Mladenovac as a tourist destination, with a focus on the attitudes of visitors.

Materials and Methods. In order to collect data on the physical impacts of tourism on the analyzed destination, as well as the results of tourist trends, a complex methodology was applied: (1) analysis of available data (data from the competent Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications (MTTT) and Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), official pages of the sites of the National Tourist Organization of Serbia and some spas in the Republic of Serbia), (2) analysis of papers from international and national journals for theoretical framework and regulations in the field of business practice, (3) structured interview with residents and employees in local government and accommodation in Selters Spa, (4) structured survey with visitors to Selters Spa.

Field research was conducted using interviews and surveys. In the interview, data were collected on the attitudes of randomly selected residents of Mladenovac, the reception staff and local government employees. The research in the form of a survey was conducted with the aim of collecting data on the attitude of visitors about the competitiveness of Selters Spa as a tourist destination as well as the key attributes that determine it. The survey questionnaire consists of two parts: the first, which refers to the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, age, education, number of household members, status, monthly household income, and

occupation), and the second to assess the seventeen attributes of destination competitiveness. For each of the attributes, the respondents gave a grade of 1–5, with 5 being the highest grade. The obtained results were statistically processed and presented in tables and graphs.

Results and Discussions

Quantitative analysis of tourist traffic in Selters Spa. A comparative quantitative analysis of tourist traffic in the Selters Spa in relation to other spas in Serbia indicates trends in the development of these destinations. The common characteristics are a consequence of what is happening in the society in the observed period, while the specifics are a signal in which direction the development of Selters Spa should be continued in order to be sustainable (Vuković et al., 2010 [36]).

The guest rate in spas in Serbia has a growing trend in the period from 2016 to 2019, which cannot be said for the data from 2020. Based on the data in Table 1, it can be concluded that tourists came to spa places depending on the economic and political conditions in the country, where the purchasing power of the local population was crucial. Having in mind the specifics of the restrictions on tourist movements caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the situation that part of the capacity was engaged in the “COVID system” of patient treatment, in 2020 the number of visitors decreased.

The statistical services of spas in Serbia are obliged to regularly fill in the form TU — 11 and send it to the SORS. At the same time, local tourism organizations collect data and submit it to the competent ministry (MTTT). According to these data,

overnight stays and tourist arrivals in Selters Spa are shown in Table 2.

The number of foreign tourists is far less in Selters Spa than domestic ones, every year. Regarding arrivals in 2017, compared to 2016, the number increased by 31 %, and the number of overnight stays by 73 %. When comparing 2018 and 2017, the number of arrivals decreased by 23.3 %, and the number of overnight stays by 34 %. In 2019, the number of guests stagnated, while in 2020, the number of visitor arrivals decreased. The given tabular data show that the total number of tourist arrivals in 2017 compared to 2016 increased by 7.9 %, and the number of overnight stays by 1.1 %. When comparing 2018 and 2017, the number of arrivals in 2018 increased by 5.2 %, and the number of overnight stays by 1.6 %. In 2019, there was a slight increase in the number of arrivals and overnight stays of foreign tourists.

Quantitative assessment of the competitiveness of the tourist destination of Mladenovac can be given on the basis of the number of tourist arrivals, overnight stays and the average length of stay. For that purpose, Selters Spa was compared with more famous and developed spas in Serbia, through the observed years (2008—2020), (Table 3—5 & Fig 1).

By following the data during the entire period, and especially in 2018 and 2019, a distinct dominance of domestic tourists is noticed, although e.g. in Sokobanja and Vrnjacka Spa, a significant increase in the number of foreign tourists was recorded. In 2020, there was a decrease in the number of visitors and overnight stays in spas in Serbia, except in Sokobanja, where there was an increase of 10.3 % (Table 4—5 & Fig 1).

Table 1

Number of tourist arrivals in spas in Serbia (in 000)

Years	1970	1985	1990	2000	2006	2011	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
No. of tourist	336	493	454	330	317	375	477	510	597	670	523

Source: MTTT i SORS.

Table 2

Arrivals and overnight in Selters Spa (D — domestic; F — foreign)

	D	F	D	F	D	F	D	F
period	I — XII 17		I — XII 18		I — XII 19		I — XII 20	
arrivals	5 049	266	5 385	204	5612	213	1221	48
Overnight stay	109 867	2079	112 350	1372	116 653	1960	25 395	272
period	XII 17 — XII 16		XII 18 — XII 17		XII 19 — XII 18		XII 20 — XII 19	
arrivals	106,9	100,0	106,6	76,7	100,4	104,4	21,8	22,5
Overnight stay	106,9	270,0	102,3	66,0	102,6	142,9	21,8	13,9

Source: Authors’ calculations from MTTT & SORS data.

Table 3

Tourist arrivals in the spas in Serbia (2008—2020) (in 000)

Spa	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Bukovička	4	22	6	26	28	29	35	37	34	33	21
Vrnjačka	146	153	140	156	147	175	203	213	248	284	212
Vranjska	6	6	5	5	4	3	2	2	2	3	1,5
Vrdnik	9	7	10	17	14	18	24	29	28	29	31
Vrujci	12	11	9	9	8	10	10	11	11	11	8
Gamzigradska	5	6	6	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	1
G.Trepča	11	10	10	10	10	10	11	12	12	12	8
Kanjiža	13	11	8	11	12	14	12	12	12	13	7
Koviljača	21	22	18	21	15	15	23	24	24	24	14
Mataruška	9	7	6	5	3	1	0,4	0,5	0,4	0,4	0,1
Niška	21	22	18	4	5	5	5	5	4	4	1,3
Ribarska	11	9	8	8	7	8	8	11	10	10	10
Selters	9	9	8	7	7	6	5	5	6	6	1,2
Sokobanja	49	53	49	51	42	42	46	54	101	125	125
Sijarinska	7	6	5	6	6	6	6	8	8	9	7

Source: Authors' calculations from MTTT & SORS data.

Table 4

Tourist overnights stays in spas in Serbia from 2008 to 2020 (in 000)

Spa	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Bukovička	21	59	57	66	66	67	87	101	89	87	53
Vrnjačka	559	579	506	594	497	562	577	701	818	908	698
Vranjska	48	41	34	33	24	21	19	20	21	21	15
Vrdnik	64	54	64	77	60	65	100	104	102	105	93
Vrujci	40	46	40	39	29	39	46	48	53	56	38
Gamzigradska	57	72	65	59	33	24	21	16	16	22	19
G.Trepča	117	110	100	104	103	1020	113	124	119	123	79
Kanjiža	89	73	38	54	54	53	47	50	49	53	30
Koviljača	185	217	168	172	131	103	147	147	136	131	77
Mataruška	78	74	60	45	25	13	4	5	4	4	1
Niška	212	198	194	29	33	34	34	37	29	26	5
Ribarska	150	134	61	53	53	50	51	69	70	66	64
Selters	145	145	148	146	140	124	111	112	114	117	25
Sokobanja	295	326	306	307	219	195	220	260	500	589	649
Sijarinska	67	59	46	51	48	47	48	54	51	69	50

Source: Authors' calculations from MTTT & SORS data.

Bearing in mind that the opening of spa and wellness centers has contributed to the growth of spa attendance and competitiveness, Mladenovac must continue to enrich the Selters Spa offer and, above all, increase accommodation capacity and at the same time build and provide catering facilities for food and beverage services. Following the number of tourist arrivals during the observed period in Selters Spa, oscillations are observed as in other spas. The number of arrivals of foreign tourists in Selters Spa has not changed significantly in the last three years, but their number of overnight stays has, which means that foreign tourists in this spa have stayed longer

in the observed years than before, except in 2020.

According to the data on the average length of stay in spas in Serbia (Table 5), Selters Spa is significantly ahead of other spas, but this is not data that speaks of competitiveness, since visitors who stay in Selters Spa for recovery and rehabilitation, usually at cost National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). However, the success in that regard is certainly a signal to Mladenovac as a tourist destination that it must be very much engaged in order for the success to be general and for its results to be seen in the tourist turnover. First of all, the proximity of Belgrade should be used, as the most successful and thus as the

Table 5

Average length of stay in spas

Spa	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	Total	Foreign								
Bukovička	2,53	1,89	2,72	2,83	2,64	2,49	2,63	2,46	2,50	2,46
Vrnjačka	2,85	2,69	3,29	2,66	3,30	2,59	3,20	2,54	3,30	2,79
Vranjska	8,93	6,08	8,52	5,22	9,83	5,47	6,76	6,49	9,77	3,28
Vrdnik	4,27	2,31	3,62	—	3,67	2,29	3,65	2,37	2,94	2,22
Vruijci	4,55	3,54	4,35	3,31	4,84	3,81	5,28	4,69	4,54	3,44
Gamzigradska	11,91	4,35	9,51	5,95	8,65	3,42	10,61	14,09	15,76	23,40
Gornja Trepča	10,16	12,43	10,27	12,39	10,30	12,28	10,01	12,92	9,42	13,81
Kanjiža	4,06	2,46	4,18	3,18	3,96	2,44	4,11	2,61	4,32	3,01
Koviljača	6,39	5,56	6,11	5,67	5,64	5,30	5,38	5,49	5,42	6,64
Mataruška	10,00	9,55	9,41	8,26	10,15	8,15	9,42	7,90	9,37	10,00
Niška	6,70	3,08	6,99	3,26	6,49	3,25	6,95	4,76	3,53	7,68
Ribarska	6,55	3,54	6,51	9,75	6,83	6,45	6,71	5,34	6,42	6,30
Selters	22,50	5,91	21,06	7,81	20,35	6,73	20,79	9,20	20,80	5,67
Sokobanja	4,77	2,20	4,86	2,56	4,93	2,81	4,71	2,84	5,19	2,59
Sijarinska	7,95	4,90	7,10	3,96	6,35	4,49	7,84	4,25	7,05	4,88

Source: Authors' calculations from MTTT & SORS data.

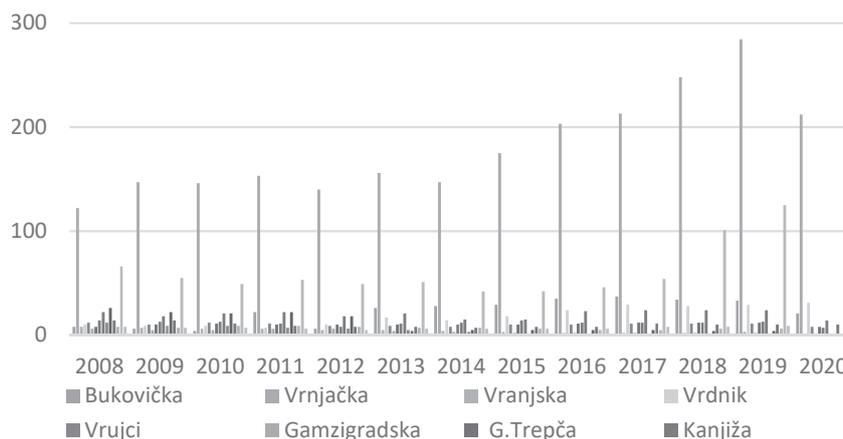


Fig. 1. Tourist arrivals in the spas in Serbia (2008—2020) (in 000)

Source: Authors' calculations from MTTT & SORS data.

most competitive tourist destination. The integration of Mladenovac's tourism as one of the 17 Belgrade municipalities into the tourism of City of Belgrade would be a huge springboard for the competitiveness of Mladenovac as a tourist destination.

Qualitative analysis of tourist traffic in Selters Spa. What is especially striking after the interviews with the employees is that Selters Spa has absolutely no records (separately, at least for its own needs) of tourist visits, unlike the visits of patients who come in the vast majority at the expense of the NHIF; in fact, they are all listed as visitors.

The interlocutors give a lump sum approximate assessment, and that is out of the total number of visi-

tors, 5—8 % per year are tourists. These are mostly older people, most often married couples, more educated and mostly from city centers.

The motives for their arrival are the preservation of health (or possible improvement) with healing water, healing mud, massages, they certainly like clean air as well as the change of living space. This category of tourists rarely comes in the winter months. A small number of tourists are young, and those are those who come before the operation of the bone and joint system or muscles to accumulate strength through recreation, in order to recover faster after the operation.

The interlocutors state that since the introduction of the Internet (at the end of 2000), there has been no

significant increase in the number of direct accommodation reservations, which they explain by the age of the tourists. The vitality of tourists, most of whom have entered the “third age”, encouraged employees in Selters Spa to organize day trips that allow enjoying the mild climate, wild and anthropogenic vegetation, forest streams, rustic landscapes, rural events, fairs, and for lovers of hunting tourism.

The same tourists come every year and in fact, they “bring” new ones. A note that perhaps an online presentation needs to be completed is met with disapproval, the interlocutors believe that the growth of demand cannot be significantly influenced in this way, because Selters are best promoted at tourism fairs, where they actually conclude arrangements on the spot. A certain extent there is aversion to the new, “We think we are doing quite well”. This is not in line with the view that the marketing concept in service companies requires a good knowledge of the market (of all its segments), which implies continuous analysis and a planned approach. In this way, preconditions are created for the successful delivery of the service to end consumers, which ensures the basic role of the company in the market, and that is, through the provision of appropriate quality of service to consumers (Cvijanović et al., 2016).

Systematized survey results are presented in *Figure 2*. It is noted that there were more male than female respondents. Most of the respondents were aged 49–58, the least were under 18 years old. Most respondents live in a three-member household (40 %); at least in a single. The largest number of respondents is permanently employed (42.5 %), and the least is students. Following the educational structure and the structure of occupations, this is the structure of monthly income that represents a logical sequence. Two respondents have the lowest income (5 %). The largest number of respondents have high education (35 %), and the smallest university (15 %) (*Figure 2*).

Respondents in the survey rated the factors necessary for determining the competitiveness of spas with a score of 1–5. It is evident that they gave the best assessment (5) to the cultural-historical heritage, accessibility and location; followed by a score of 4 for natural resources and climate, a mix of activities in the tourist destination and infrastructure, and location. The largest number of respondents gave a grade of 3 to the quality of services, entertainment and recreation, safety, kindness, the image of the spa, market connections, infrastructure, and special events. With a score of 2, most respondents rated market positioning, superstructure, and cost-value ratio, and as for

score 1, the largest number received the cooperation of the public and private sector and market positioning (*Figure 3*). The analysis of average ratings shows that Selters Spa as a tourist destination received the highest average rating for the location (4.05) then 3.63 for cultural and historical heritage; 3.45 for security; 3.40 for natural resources and climate; 3.38 for kindness; 3.33 for accessibility. The lowest marks were given to market positioning and the cost/value ratio (2.08; 2.33).

When the presented results are compared with similar research recently conducted in Vrnjačka Spa, which is a much more developed tourist destination, which has doubled the number of visitors in the last 10 years, it is possible to notice that the motives that determine visitors to choose this destination are only 26 % of treatment and rehabilitation, 32 % water consumption of medicines, and much more socializing with friends and leisure time in intact nature constitute (Podovac et al., 2016 [26]). On the other hand, satisfaction with services is mostly due to the quality of medical staff, diverse medical treatment, while 46 % of respondents said that a wide variety of local attractions are factors that attract them to a specific destination.

Comparison with Lithuania, as a country in which health tourism is rapidly developing, has shown that the most important factors influencing the choice of destination speed of service and exceptional patient care, high-tech medical equipment, cheaper and price / quality ratio, professional and certified doctors and staff. Price and location have the least impact. Demographics: gender, age, place of residence, income, frequency of use influences the choice of factors for the choice of destination, has a strong influence on the destination of spa tourism (Černikovaitė and Mameniškis, 2016 [5]).

In Poland, the situation is similar to that in Selters Spa: most visitors come for treatment, mostly locals, the elderly, similar educational structures, usually stay 21 days for treatment and / or rehabilitation, three quarters stay in sanatoriums or hospitals. The survey found that the main motives for visiting a particular spa are Spa treatment quality and accommodation quality, then, to a lesser extent: a wide range of spa treatments, catering services and to the spa landscape and local culture (Szromek and Wybranczyk, 2019 [33]).

In Brazil, Turkey, and Russia, in addition to medical services, traditional procedures are in the focus of health tourism. Furthermore, in these countries, medical tourism destinations are represented by private institutions that provide services based on

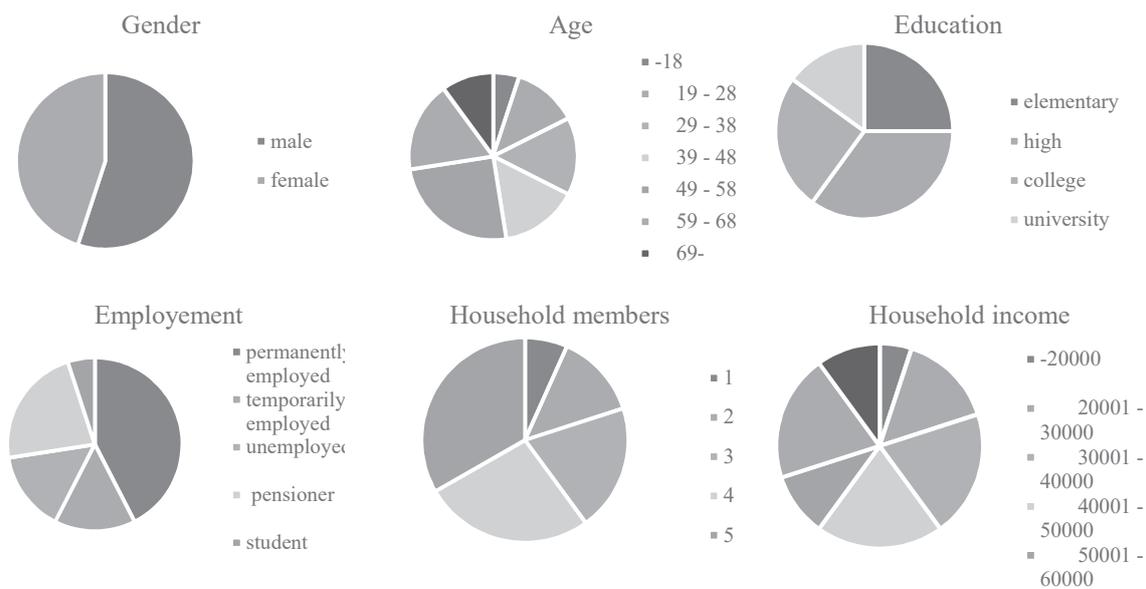


Fig. 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents — part I of questionnaire

Source: Authors' calculations.

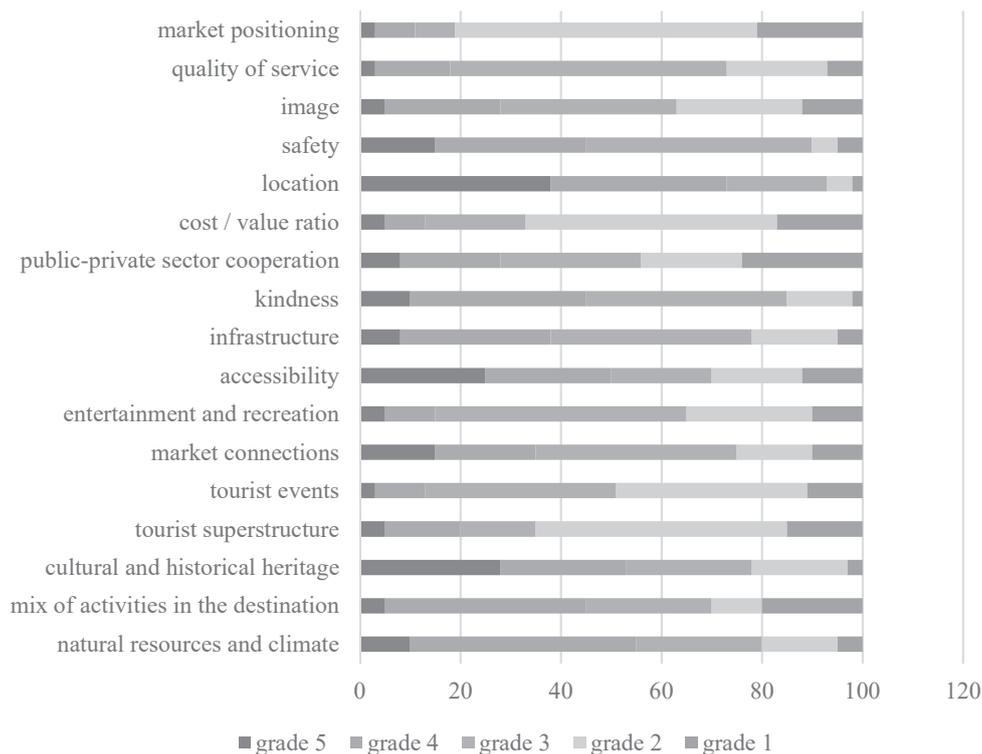


Fig. 3. Assessment of the competitiveness factors of Selters Spa as a tourist destination — part II of questionnaire

Source: Authors' calculations.

market demand, without the involvement of insurers (Hojcska and Szabó, 2021 [13]).

A good example of practice is the innovations in the Harkanj spa with the aim of improving the qual-

ity of life of the local community (Mihalkó, Bakucz, Rátz, 2013 [23]). According to Armenski et al. (2011) [1] the degree to which a country can benefit from its tourism industry depends largely on this competitive

position on the international tourist market. Therefore, it is very important for one destination to realise its real competitive position on the tourism market as well as to address its weaknesses comparing them to its major competitors.

Conclusions. The accelerated development of spa tourism in the world and in Europe brings through examples of good management practices that should be followed by countries in which this type of tourism is less developed. In Serbia, spa tourism is developing at different speeds, while some spas are significantly improving (Vrnjačka, Sokobanja [36]), others are stagnating (Koviljača, Sijarinska) and some are recording a smaller (Selters, Ribarska) or larger decline in the number of visitors (Mataruška, Niška).

Spas that are better positioned on the market, in addition to medical treatment, they need to offer other attractions, have more realistic plans for the development of tourist products, developed public-private partnerships, and thus attract a larger number of visitors with better purchasing power.

The analysis of the attitudes of employees in the local self-government and health resort indicates that they are mostly uninterested in promoting their spa and do not see their role in sustainable tourism development, which should include the use of a wide range of resources in addition to thermo-mineral water: climate, Kosmaj mountain and lakes, proximity to other spas.

The analysis of the attitudes of the visitors should direct the planning of the further development of this destination. From the assessment of 17 attributes of competitiveness of Sellers Spa, it can be concluded that the current situation is such that it can and must be improved in almost everyone. Innovations and investments in Selters Spa are necessary in order to fulfill the principles of sustainable tourism, e.g. employment of the local community, improvement of the economic status and preservation of the cultural heritage. At the same time, the implementation of geothermal and solar energy, which is simply abundant, along with other eco-activities would complete a more responsible approach to preserving the destination.

Therefore, on the basis of the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia and the Tourism Strategy of the City of Belgrade, and in accordance with the potentials of the Selters Spa area, innovations and investments are necessary in the field of tourist infrastructure and tourist superstructure. It is recommended to follow good examples of practice from neighboring countries that are leaders in spa tourism (Hungary, Slovenia) when it comes to

implementing innovations, it is necessary to educate employees from several aspects, but also to get acquainted with the possibilities of better positioning in the tourism market.

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Изучение конкурентоспособности дестинации в устойчивом оздоровительном туризме: тематическое исследование Селтерс Спа

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Геотермальные воды очень важны как природный ресурс и представляют собой горячую воду, богатую полезными минералами, что является основой для развития оздоровительного туризма. В этой статье исследование было проведено с целью выявления реального состояния спа-центра Selters в Младеноваце (город Белград) как туристического направления, с акцентом на отношение посетителей. Количественный сравнительный анализ туристического потока в этом спа-центре по сравнению с другими курортами Сербии был проведен с использованием официальных статистических данных. Эмпирическое исследование проводилось путем интервью и опросов, а затем на основе полученных результатов был проведен качественный анализ текущей ситуации в Selters Spa. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что развитие туризма в спа-центре Selters находится в стагнации. Анализ данных показал, что наиболее значимыми причинами этого являются концепции, которые в основном опираются на посетителей, приезжающих на реабилитационные процедуры, пожилых людей и почти в основном внутренних туристов.

Ключевые слова: оздоровительный туризм, спа-туризм, отношение посетителей, туристический поток, атрибуты конкурентоспособности.