

The role of stakeholders in thermal tourism: a bibliography review

Abstract

It is our goal to review the existing bibliography on the determinants of thermal waters tourism, its resources and its impact. This article presents both the characteristics of thermal tourism and the distinction between health thermal tourism and leisure thermal tourism. On the presentation of the several variables taken into account to the right readings on what this kind of tourism is, we concluded that it is a developing activity and it translates the increase on the population longevity along with the desires of: living more, living better and looking for new well-being experiences.

Key words: thermal waters, health tourism, well-being tourism, leisure tourism, sustainable tourism.

1. Introduction

The activity known as international tourism is defined by the circulation of people between cities and countries; it is a social phenomenon that is directly related to economical means. International tourism offers the consumption of specific services that may not be offered in the tourist's country; in general, tourism is a very important factor to the growth of world economy once it is directly related to intense human experiences.

Pessot et al. (2021) outline the relevance of the correct exploration of natural resources to enhance tourism activities. The synergic combination of activities, treatments and cure effects is the basis of the decisions of managers and policymakers to understand which are the areas of intervention to develop the area of thermal tourism. Bayat and Yalman (2020) argue that health thermal tourism is one of the types of alternative tourism emphasized in tourism policies, being essential to ensure a country's touristic diversity. Ramić, Salkić and Salkić (2020) state that life, culture, prosperity, well-being, and power in all civilizations is connected to water. For the authors, hot springs are an inspiration for common people and places where life, work, treatments, and personal development happens.

When defining leisure, Pineda-Escobar & Falla Villa (2017) agree with Neumeyer & Neumeyer (1958), Boniface & Cooper (1994) and Ramos (2008). It's their opinion that, on a holistic perspective, leisure can be defined as a non-specific time of relaxation and tranquility. On an organic perspective, all these authors define leisure as a time out of working activities; this perspective clearly distinguishes between work and pleasure, or private life, and unlike the holistic perspective, it establishes that even when you have some leisure activities during

working time, these activities are quite residual when compared to the time and dedication work demands.

Weaver & Oppermann (2000) defend that the multiple meanings of the words tourism and tourist tend to be presented as obstacles to the establishment of a universal terminology. We can't forget that both those words have evolved and now they present the answer to very specific goals and aims. Throughout the world there is a considerable number of sacred places that have remained from the Greek-roman tradition; these places, where the water is a reference, represent the beginning of local tourism, and, somehow, we can consider it the beginning of tourism itself.

Generally speaking, tourism has been defined as a motivation, or a set of motivations, that leads to a temporary displacement into attractive places where one can perform activities without receiving any payment in return. It's in the main motivation that the definition of tourism can be segmented, once tourists travel seeking both for health and well-being; these displacements work in one of three ways: preventative, curative, or enhancement of quality life. Health tourism stands for all the activities tourists do in other countries or regions combining health services with holidays. Percy and Lester (2012) characterize this kind of tourism using three elements: people are away from home, health is the main goal, and the activities take place in a specialized unit. There are other authors that divide between tourists that seek for services that can enhance their well-being- to which we can call well-being tourism-, and tourists that seek treatment to a specific medical situation- to which we can call medical tourism. According to a study led by one university in the south of Spain, Correa and Leiva (2016) have analyzed the possible effects of two variables on what the tourist's choice is concerned: a) familiarity, motivation and image as the intention for visiting a place of well-being; and b) motivations operating as sociological criteria that create different groups of tourists.

The aim of this study is to review the bibliography related to the determinants of thermal tourism, of its resources and of its impact. In order to achieve these objectives, we have divided this work into six sections: introduction; methodology; concept of thermal tourism, its evolution and the distinction between health tourism and leisure tourism; studies referring the determinants factors when choosing thermal waters tourism; quantitative and qualitative studies on thermal waters tourism, as well as its variables; and main conclusions and questions leading to future research.

2. Methodology

It is the goal of a research work to provide the answers to questions concerning concepts, techniques, theories and means that had been previously used by other authors.

Our purpose is to review and analyse literature on thermal waters tourism; we also intend to know both the international literature on this industry, and the variables and factors that guests consider more important. First, we have collected the information on an academic data base, which is the primary research and it allows the access to a big number of academic and scientific resources in real time. This strategy defines the way results are collected, observed and exposed. In order to guarantee the authenticity, the transparency and the possibility of comparing the different studies, we have used the literature systematic revision method used by Denyer and Tranfield (2009). This method not only identified, selected, analyzed and synthesized the previous clear research on thermal tourism and their exposition, but also led us to think about the subject and its level of knowledge. To help us on the chosen method, we can rely on Denyer and Tranfield (2009) who assure that a deep revision is willing to be both supervised and replicable, and they indicate the process that has to be followed: (i) the definition of the research question; (ii) the place where the study is being done; (iii) the selection and evaluation of the studies; (iv) the analysis and the synthesis; (v) the presentation of the results.

As these authors proposed, we looked for books and scientific articles, published up to 2018, mentioning the key words “thermal tourism” and clarifying what had been studied that far, in order to allow us to present the results observed on the abstract of this article before presenting the conclusion.

3. The concept of thermal tourism

The historical origin of thermal hot springs can be traced up to the first civilizations where that type of tourism aimed directly to the improvement of health and well-being (Erfurt-Cooper, 2009).

For Chrobak et al. (2020), over the past years there has been a growing demand for places to relax, relieve stress and treat physical and mental illnesses due to the constant social changes and a more stressful lifestyle. That demand is observed in locations where health and well-being benefits are promoted. Encarnação (2017) refers that man looks within nature for the answers to health and well-being worries ever since ancient civilizations. The culture of water as therapy has made its first appearance in Classic Greece, but it was during the Roman Empire that thermal waters have acquired the status of a tradition as a public space of relaxation and leisure. Nowadays, thermal tourism has become a segment of an emergent market directed to people

that both look for treatments on the prevention of illnesses and improvement of their physical and spiritual condition, and search for cultural and relaxing programs. As a result of this new era, Magdalini & Paris (2009) think thermal tourism is not just a tendency, instead it is a millenary activity constantly renewed.

Aguilar, Gemar e Aguilar (2021a) refer that the boom of global health tourism led the touristic destinations and companies to specialize in health and well-being tourism as a form of corporate strategy. In some destinations, health tourism not only fights seasonality and diversifies coastal tourism but also contributes for the sustainable development of rural destinations (Aguilar, Gemar e Aguilar, 2021a). Thermal waters have been used throughout history to treat health conditions and are sought every year by people who intend to have healthier holidays and to improve their health and well-being (Aguilar, Gemar e Aguilar, 2021a).

Today the word thermal itself leads to a concept of a healing thermal water that is medically recognized by its chemical and therapeutic effects. This means that the use of this water aggregates medical, social, sanitary, administrative, and homing conditions, all properly organized. This concept has been adapted to new market demands and faster life rhythms; it has been a focus for new researching projects aiming to associate it to healthier ways of living, in a transversal perspective that combines cure, prevention, leisure, and well-being.

The new millennium brought new society living habits, and health, well-being, life quality and leisure have become common words. Some authors, like Leoni et al. (2018) and Valeriani, Margarucci & Spica (2018) consider water as the differentiating factor, once water needs to have a satisfactory microbiological quality, and, to attain it, it has to be properly managed in order to control its exposure to habitués and infectious agents; it is known that several cases of individual and collective outbreaks are associated to pools, spas, and similar other places, such as jacuzzi and natural spas used for well-being and leisure activities. Actually, depending on the exquisite composition of each thermal water, there are different beneficial characteristics to improve one's health, though this also implies difficulties both on the monitorization and on the maintenance of each property.

To keep all the benefits of thermal waters, and according to Giampaoli et al. (2013), natural waters can be enriched with salts and minerals depending on their geological composition; sulphur, chlorine (Cl) , bromo (Br), iodine (I), magnesium (Mg) or calcium (Ca) are some of the elements that can be added to natural waters without changing their health original benefits (Özkuk et al., 2018). As Godoy et al (2017) refer, water is essential to life, it cannot be replaced in environment. We can say that the development of a place is directly associated to the presence

of thermal waters and hydric resources; these two elements are directly linked to touristic, natural and cultural available resources.

As referred before, thermal tourism has a long and constant history (Connel, 2011). Though it was first forbidden due to epidemic illnesses and religious strictness, this kind of tourism made its reappearance in the XIXth century, when several changes were introduced, and they have determined the future of the sector. It was revitalized by the glamorous aristocracy, and this has helped to keep the tourist's presence. Traditionally, thermal waters stays were for 14 or 21 days. The length of these stays presents a problem to most of the Portuguese thermal structures. Along with this, the development of medical technologies has discredited these kinds of hydro treatments. As a result, the number of clients has dropped. Fortunately, this tendency is changing, and according to Antunes (2012), products connected to well-being and health have been rising, which can be seen as a relevant economic and social phenomenon.

Ortiz, Pacheco & Jatzire (2016), and also Antunes (2012), think that the ideas linked to environment and sustainability provided by this kind of tourism will bring the economic and social development needed to the quality of life of the population that live in or near these places. Enlarging the field of analysis, Costa, Quintela & Mendes (2015) agree that thermal tourism is associated to an intellectual activity, i.e., to historical, political and social fields. This is somehow corroborated by Vilar Rodríguez & Lindoso (2019); they state that the kind of people looking for this kind of tourism not only search for physical and mental stability, but also search for relaxing and cultural programs. In conclusion, thermal tourism is redefining the product, and it is converting outdated concepts into modern touristic centres.

Thermal tourism is an alternative to the beach and to the sun, particularly for those tourists that have a more modern vision of thermals as an entertainment time. This has become the biggest challenge thermal facilities have to achieve. As a result, the communities can witness a revalorization of their historical identity, as shown in Figure 1. The categories designated by model and cultural complementarity reflect the efficacy of systemic and political dimensions.

Fig. 1: Advantages/ Valences of Thermal Facilities



Source: Developed by authors

Vrkljan and Zvezdana (2016) see health tourism in three different ways: medical, spa, and well-being. A study made on Croatia has observed that in a health spa the tourism service is provided both by special hospitals and health resorts to get medical rehabilitation; their aim is to include medical supervision in the use of both natural cure elements and physiotherapy. The same study concludes that the special hospitals that are oriented to the market demands are more successful than those that are not.

When one speaks about the transformation of tourist's demand and the consumer's behaviour, Buhalis & Costa (2006) consider that the clients should be the owners of the industry; this means the consumers build their own experiences, a strategy called *customer-centric*. Silva & Silva (2003) show that not only Portuguese macroeconomy has been profiting from the leisure and tourist activities, but also the regions have been breaking some traditional barriers, allowing these microeconomic structures to develop. On the other hand, Antunes (2009) and Gonçalves & Guerra (2019) state that health and well-being tourism can provide a great capacity of maximising local resources and dynamizing all the activities connected with those resources as long as there is an adequate plan so that it allows the growth of regional and local economies. New jobs and new activities generated by thermal tourism can erase some national asymmetries.

According to Ferreira (1995), the clients of health and well-being tourism look for leisure time, relaxation time in rural areas, and take advantage of the services provided to take care of their body (losing weight, skin treatment, anti-stress); this two-fold opportunity leads to the blurring of limits when we talk about medical, sports, leisure, and beauty tourism.

Regarding this absence of boundaries, Ramos & Santos (2008) present a perspective that considers Germany, Austria and Switzerland as being in the vanguard of thermal tourism conception. For example, Germany is the best European country for thermal institutions as it has a high level of clients and a various range of services. Santinha & Breda (2014) think that health tourism tends to answer to these requests because, when in need for a specific medical treatment, there's the medical tourism that can also include physical and psychological well-being found in resorts, spas or hot springs, the so-called well-being tourism. Also, Hall (2011) suggested that the health tourism concept was determined as a phenomenon of an industrial and commercial society concerning a person that travels to an unfamiliar environment to improve or to keep health. Lunt (2011), just like Voigt, Brown, & Howat (2011), has defined the well-being tourism as the act of travelling aiming the promotion of health, and physical, psychological or spiritual well-being.

Thermal tourism has also been described by Lopes et. al. (2005) as the set of displacements to all locations concerning physical and psychological well-being, and also providing relaxation and rehabilitation services that join medicine and complementary treatments (anti-stress, relaxations and beauty) in a comfortable and cosy space. The same authors refer that miner medicinal waters, i.e., therapeutic waters, are also the frame of those treatments, aiming either anti-stress treatments or somatic aesthetics. This definition has been also accepted and described by Ramos & Fernandes (2012). Accepting the same perspective, Gustavo (2010) mentions an interdependence of all the concepts presented before, which leads to a more sophisticated and diversified offer to keep with the motivations of the demand.

As Ramos & Ferreira (2013) have mentioned, there's a need to consolidate and implement a new cycle by joining the thermal waters activities with multifunctional spaces. The authors refer that those spaces need to be renewed so that the well-being and treatment centres are an alternative to the offers providing sun and sea. As a result, the profile of the new consumer, according to López & Ferreres (2004), includes not only health and relaxation, but also the contact with nature and beauty. This is what has dictated the changes done in the facilities (San Pedro, 2004 and Rodríguez; 2005), including anti-tobacco, anti-stress, and dietetics treatments, for example. That is the reason why thermal tourism should articulate therapeutics and entertainment (Monbrison, 1996); it is necessary to take the new trends and answer to the new

life style tensions. Offering different activities is a way to keep the clients' loyalty (Sarmiento & Portela, 2010), especially in our modern societies. That is the challenge of thermal waters tourism.

The tourist is the client. As a business, the tourist's needs have to be identified. There are four groups of well-being tourists, all motivated by relaxation programs, that were mentioned by Correa and Leiva (2016):

1. the indifferent: a great part of this group does not show any interest on this kind of tourism;
2. the motivated: at least 2/3 of this group has already done this kind of tourism, and intend to do it again as they know the concept and the advantages of using the well-being programs;
3. the opportunists: this high-income group values the utilitarian benefits of this kind of tourism (2/3 has done it), but they do not know the concept;
4. the unmotivated: this low-income group, though they have already done this well-being tourism, do not know the concept and do not intend to visit these destinations.

There are many historical, political and social contexts to take into account when thinking about thermals in a tourism perspective (Ramos, 2008) as it is related to pleasure, well-being and evasion activities. The concept of Health Tourism is the answer to the people's new demands and it leads to the adaptation of thermal institutions and spas, nowadays envisaged as places where relaxation, socialization, interculturality are supposed to be important and integrated in a healthy and sustainable environment (Ramos, 2008). This shows that each place has to keep its cultural and environmental features and specificities, it needs to adjust to its dimension; the outstanding development is seen as the natural result.

4. Determinant factors of thermal tourism

For Aguilar, Gemar e Aguilar (2021b), the term "health tourism" is a general concept that needs to be thoroughly studied because it comprises other general concepts such as spa tourism, well-being tourism, and medical tourism. The natural resources, the type of medicinal mineral water, the conservation of the natural environment and the sociocultural heritage of the surrounding areas are taken as essential elements of spa tourism (Aguilar, Gemar e Aguilar, 2021b).

ISPA (2011) classifies SPA in eight categories: (1) *cruise ship* spa (in a cruise); (2) *day spa* (one day treatments); (3) *destination spa* (life style treatments); (4) *medical spa* (medical

care); (5) *mineral spring spa* (hydro therapy treatments); (6) *club spa* (hotel gym facilities); (7) hotel spa; and (8) resort spa.

Elbaz et al. (2021) verified that the experience factors in health tourism play a key role in increasing the loyalty to the destination, inciting the tourists' satisfaction. There are three dimensions of the experience of health tourism that have a big impact in the tourists' satisfaction: the destination's appeal, infrastructures, and the treatment's quality (Elbaz et al., 2021). On a general note, for Portuguese tourism, Tavares, Pacheco and Borges (2016) also look at how a hotel room price is largely explained by the type of room considered and the hotel's location, especially if the hotel is by the sea. Wangchuk et al. (2021) understand that medical hydrology is the use of water as a therapeutical tool in different physicochemical processes that prevent and treat health conditions; in Bhutan's case, these therapeutical treatments are not very developed and lack the approval of clinical studies.

According to Fernandes (2006), spas are more important now due to three fundamental reasons: (1) a growth on life longevity, leading to an increase of trips done by the elder; (2) a daily run away from nature as a result of big cities life; and (3) a civilizational crisis in the developed countries, leading to loneliness and to affective, emotional and spiritual crisis. Costa, Quintela & Mendes (2015) add their opinion to what is stated before by referring that there are three factors determining the development of thermal tourism: European population ageing, the ever-growing desire of living more and better, and the people's conscience that there are threats to their health. The search for new and different leisure experiences is also mentioned by the same author. All these demographic and lifestyle changes establish a new health and well-being paradigm (Laesser (2011)); this paradigm, clearly including alternative experiences, defines a personalized way of doing tourism, which not a mass tourism anymore. Tourism and destinations organizations are aware of this, and they are exploring tendencies and projecting suitable experiences, modernizing management and processes, and they are also developing liaisons with other organizations to attract and keep new clients.

Actually, the client's transformation is one of the most critical factors in all this process; tourism is changing dramatically in every possible way: volume, characteristics, locations, and preferences. As an example, we can quote Laesser (2011) who states that health and well-being influence the consumer's behaviour patterns; there's a rising interest for this health and well-being market niche as it can be proved by the economy growth and the number of published studies. Witt and Moutinho (1994); Gómez (1998); McIntosh, Goeldner & Ritchie (1999), these authors show there is a great number of factors changes and convergence (such as holidays schedules, weekend journeys, population progressive ageing) that will influence the tourism

system. The modern facilities, the diversity of services, the relation price/quality, the available accommodation (Antunes, 2009), or the décor, the price, the offered treatments, the professionals' attitude (Azman and Chan, 2010), are considered decisive factors when the client needs to choose a thermal facility. A study taken place in Portugal points treatment quality, hygiene, cleaning service, experience cost, and location as the criteria influencing the clients' choices (Gustavo, 2010).

Navarrete e Shaw (2021) state that the social important of spas is primarily motivated by their healing aspects related with a medical purpose. The trend that some European countries have been following reorients their functions, making them more related with beauty, recreational use, and the concepts of well-being and leisure. Navarrete, Escolano e Martos (2021) conclude that thermae have been gradually distancing from a secular form of implementation in a territorial context and from a model that once gained notoriety because of its both genuine and functional character. All seems to indicate that thermae are walking towards a transmutation of their functional profile in the geographic space but without distancing from a commercial brand that was based on the distinction, exclusivity, and the highest standards of quality, that is, without distancing from the basis of its success (Navarrete, Escolano e Martos, 2021).

Excellence, safety, ethics, these are indissociable words when talking about tourism in general or health and well-being tourism in particular. Barros et al. (2007) presents the factors that, according to him, have the most significantly contributed to the change of tourists' consumption habits in what health and well-being are concerned:

- ✓ Population ageing;
- ✓ Growth on average life expectancy in developed countries;
- ✓ Access to more information;
- ✓ Health care system inability to keep up with the health treatment demands;
- ✓ Price gap between prices in developed and in developing countries;
- ✓ Demand of health, well-being, prevention and relaxation programs.

Guerra (2016) takes the analysis to the side of the professional organizations and points ten determinants elements as the factors to take into account when talking about competitiveness:

- ✓ Geography and climate;
- ✓ Culture and history;
- ✓ Activities diversity;
- ✓ Tourism macrostructure;
- ✓ Water hygiene and quality;

- ✓ Image;
- ✓ Special events;
- ✓ Entertainment;
- ✓ Infrastructure;
- ✓ Positioning and branding.

In spite of all that is offered by thermal facilities, and as a consequence of these troubled days, Antunes (2012) considers that some organizations have been restructuring their services, creating wealth in their regions, and attracting investment, opposed to some that haven't done it. Antunes, just like Witt & Moutinho (1994), Gómez (1998) and McIntosh et al. (1999), establishes some differentiating factors important both to the development and growth of thermal tourism, and to the acquisition of customers, in a very demanding market:

- ✓ Elder people have more free time and a higher income, being more available to tourism;
- ✓ Leisure and holidays time are now dispersed along the year;
- ✓ Particular trips are a tendency;
- ✓ Bigger demand for cultural and leisure short trips;
- ✓ Better urban access and connectivity;
- ✓ Pleasure on discovery and on adventure;
- ✓ Nature grounded tourism.

Goeldner, Ritchie & McIntosh (2002) show us that a destination is more attractive if it creates, keeps and develops a whole set of resources, products and services that can motivate the client when the choosing moment arrives. Pikkemaat (2004) adds that studying the concept of image and the factors that make a clients' decision is also very important. According to the author, destinations holding a positive and strong image are more easily chosen by tourist. Chart 1 reveals the factors that are referred in literature as having impact in thermal tourism. Though not mentioned in the Chart, the brand recognition and the services/procedures certification have to be added to all these factors.

Chart 1 – Impact factors on thermal tourism

Author	Factors
Fernandes (2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - population ageing, being more available to tourism; - distance from nature as a consequence of a city lifestyle; - a civilizational crisis in the developed countries, leading to loneliness and to affective, emotional and spiritual crisis.
Costa, Quintela & Mendes (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European population ageing; - ever-growing desire of living more and better; - people’s conscience that there are health threats; - search for new and different leisure experiences.
Laesser (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - demographic and lifestyle changes, need to reduce stress on everyday life; - search for personalized ways of doing tourism; - health and well-being influence the consumer’s behaviour patterns, rising interest for this health and well-being market niche.
Witt and Moutinho (1994); Gómez (1998); McIntosh, Goeldner & Ritchie (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - elder people has more free time and a higher income; - leisure and holidays time are now dispersed along the year; - particular trips are a tendency; - growth on weekend trips; - nature grounded tourism; - growth on the tendency for discovery and adventure.
Barros et al. (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - population ageing; - growth on average life expectancy in developed countries; - health services complement; - search for health, well-being, prevention and relaxation treatments.

Source: Developed by authors

Rudin-Brown & Burns (2007) mention the “pull-push” strategy as the glue to all concepts of tourism, i.e., destinations search to “pull” the tourists to the offer, and the tourists search to “push” for themselves everything that can satisfy their needs. Also, Brea and González (2006) refer to the intentions of the thermal tourism client, and they consider that the service quality is an important satisfaction antecedent but it is not the only determinant element when referring satisfaction. As a matter of fact, the consumer’s satisfaction influences positive and negatively the behavioral intentions. This means that satisfaction acts as an intermediate variable; service quality explains the variability of the behavioural intentions; so, satisfaction and quality have a huge impact on behavioural intentions. The same authors conclude that a service quality both improves the client’s satisfaction and increases the behavioural intentions, i.e., it increases the communication and the buying intentions of the word of mouth, and decreases the sensibility

to price. This is important once the thermal clients mainly choose the facilities following family and friends' recommendations.

Silva and Carvalho (2011) consider health and well-being tourism a strategic product, and yet it is away from the global tourist circuits. Traditionally a millenary activity, thermal tourism includes nowadays the leisure component, as stated before, and consumers do not have the cure as a central motivation; they face thermal activities as holidays, and they become tourists. In fact, the diversity of activities linked to thermal tourism is rather big. In Germany, Hungary and Czech Republic there are balloon rides; in Austria there are special spas for kids and babies; in France there are archaeology caves, thematic notes, charrette rides, artificial beaches, visits to parks or animal reservations, biological products fairs, beer festivals, jazz festivals, antiquity museums and vegan museums. Besides these offers, Joukes and Pereira (2017) state that medical tourism can be a good opportunity to some institutions. This is the reason why Rodrigues & Mallou (2014) consider that people's perceptions are influenced both by push motivations (search attitude, personal and interpersonal characteristics), and by pull motivations (the way people understand destination characteristics, i.e., quality and diversity of the offer). Pereira, Santinha & Breda (2018) identify this kind of tourist as being willing to travel with no time limitations; on the other hand, Carneiro et al (2013) indicate that when the tourist is older, the motivation is concentrated on cultural events, socialization, health, well-being and new experiences. As a conclusion, one may say that this a market niche ready to grow in the years to come (Paffhausen, Peguero & Villarreal, 2010).

5. Thermal variables in study

Ramos & Santos (2008) have done a qualitative and quantitative study to conclude that the model of thermal development will reconvert and rehabilitate the strategies of Portuguese thermal waters activity; Portugal has to keep the therapeutic and entertaining components, it has to modernize infrastructures and equipment, to implement new activities, to preserve and to order physical spaces, and to integrate programs that seek for a more touristic perspective. Lopes (2016) shares the same point of view; this author states that health and well-being tourism is growing especially due to the great enthusiasm of getting physically in shape. According to Lopes, an adult, young, educated and financially independent class will be looking for this kind of tourism, mainly women, but also men. There are new values to take into account when looking for health and well-being care, such as:

- The feeling that life is uncertain brings daily hedonist concerns;
- The appreciation for youth and autonomy;

- The appreciation for physical appearance and aesthetics looks;
- The need to make a statement through experiences either personal or professional;
- The worship of health, youth and psychological balance, i.e., a healthy ageing that is being disseminated by media and celebrities.

These values take Sousa (2017) to present a map with the potential places to practice eco-sports, which is an advantage to thermal tourism:

- Nature tourism, that tended to eco-tourism, must evolve to contribute to the economic, environmental, cultural and social sustainability;
- Thermal tourism must explore its natural resources, which are a competitive advantage.

Esteves (2017) presented a study that aimed to understand the motivations tourists were searching for health and well-being in thermal facilities and spas. The results showed that health, relaxation and rest are the motives, along with peace, personal care and evasion, as Clark-Kennedy and Cohen (2017) also suggest.

Galiza (in Spain) is willing to grow in several fields; for example, a growing number of places offering services, and also the development of new products linked to the region natural resources, as Brea, Roget & Domínguez (2018) put it. These authors say that the community involvement of Galician Thermae in the national program of Social Thermalism has brought the decrease of job seasonality, the increase of job offers, and the annual municipality income; these three factors led to better business results just because new targets are reached: products coming from the natural, patrimonial and cultural environment, and a new market population with high incomes. Chart 2 sums up the most studied themes on thermal tourism.

Chart 2 – Themes on thermal tourism

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health care; - Physical therapy; - Social activity; - Entertainment; - Better life quality; - Relaxation; - Mental therapy; - Nature experiences; - Meditation; - Multiple activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fatigue release; - Physical or neurological treatments due to everyday working duties; - Release of daily life boredom and break downs; - Personality development; - Prestige; - Better family relationship; - Search for new experiences; - Self-knowledge.
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Source: Developed by authors

A survey done by Silva and Carvalho (2011) to thermal tourism entrepreneurs of central Portugal has identified the principal actions to be taken to develop the business and the places

where the activities are experienced: to lead scientific researches on the properties and therapeutic effects of mineral medical waters, to attract a young public, to qualify the lodging, to improve the link between thermal facilities and lodging, to improve outdoor spaces, to improve and multiply the accessibility requirements, to create and develop a brand, and to maximise the physical spaces to the promotion of cultural and entertaining activities. This survey also suggests: therapeutic programs for children with special needs, touristic and educational walks around the thermal facility, walks to promote other regional products, fitness programs, programs to fight children's obesity. According to the authors, the success of the strategy depends on the complement of all the possible business activities.

6. Conclusion

The first conclusion is clear: thermal tourism is a heterogeneous and transdisciplinary field; it needs a whole range of profound knowledge of the several branches of tourism. The other conclusion is that thermal tourism is divided into health tourism and leisure tourism.

As stated before, thermal tourism tends to grow; people live longer, people want to live better, people want to reconnect with nature, people want to work on the prevention of illnesses, people want to relax, people want individual and new experiences. Thermal tourism can provide these needs. Besides this, as the activities are grounded in a specific place, it has impact in the economic development of the region.

This article proved that the existing qualitative and quantitative studies present several and similar questions: distinction between physical and psychological therapies, topics related to leisure, new experiences, contact with nature, meditation, prestige, and so on.

In Portugal there are no academic studies on the factors that determine the preferences of tourists; we propose a future research done by surveys and a statistical processing of data to conclude on those factors.

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