

Contribution of health and wellness tourism to happiness and quality of life – A comparative study between Portugal and Hungary

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

This study evaluates the contribution of Health and Wellness Tourism (HWT) in the improvement of Happiness and Quality of Life (QoL) of Thermal Spa users in Portugal and Hungary.

Objectives

In line with the main goal, ten specific objectives (SO) were defined, conducting a comparative study between Portugal and Hungary:

SO1: Identify the correlation between the levels of Happiness and QoL among the users of Thermal Spas.

SO2: Analyse the influence of HW services on Happiness levels of Thermal Spas users.

SO3: Evaluate the influence of Happiness levels of Thermal Spas users on their Health and Wellness experience (HWE).

SO4: Determine the influence of regular use of HW services on the levels of Happiness.

SO5: Evaluate the contribution of HWE to the QoL of Thermal Spas users.

SO6: Determine the influence of regular use of HW services on QoL of users

SO7: Perceive how the valorisation of Health dimension on QoL influences the regular use of HW services.

SO8: Detect the influence of generation profiles on HW motivations.

SO9: Identify the influence of generation profiles on HW service preferences.

SO10: Observe the influence of generation profiles on the valorisation of HW destination attributes.

Methodology

This study is based on a survey methodology, supported by quantitative data collection and analysis. The empirical study was developed in two European destinations. The sample is composed by Thermal Spas visitors and the empirical study was conducted on twelve Thermal Spas in Northern and Central regions of Portugal and in the city of Budapest, in Hungary. The field work was developed over a nine-month period, where a face-to-face survey was administered, gathering a non-probabilistic convenience sample (N=753). SPSS and AMOS (25.0) software were used for data treatment and for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to characterise the respondents' profile, including travel behaviour and motivations, visiting habits and service preferences, and happiness and QoL levels. Perceived effects on HWE were identified by an importance-performance analysis (IPA). Multivariate analysis was used to analyse the correlations between variables. Multiple linear regression (MLR) was performed for measurement scales and model hypothesis test and ANOVA was calculated in order to attest the global significance of the theoretical model.

Results

The results reveal significant differences in users' generation profiles, in both cases. In Portugal the demand is composed mainly by national tourists, elder and retired, presenting high levels of fidelization. In Hungary there is a balanced presence of residents and international tourists, with lower levels of fidelization. These results are aligned with previous studies developed for these destinations (Antunes, 2004; Alpoim, 2010; Quintela 2008; Smith & Puczkó, 2018).

In general, Portuguese Thermal Spas visitants present higher Happiness levels and achieve more physical and emotional benefits from HWE. This trend corroborates previous research findings (Smith & Puczkó, 2018). Regular use of HW services and generation profile also determines the preferences on services and destination attributes. With respect to QoL, higher levels of importance were reported by the Thermal Spa users in Portugal, compared to Hungary. Although, regular users of HW services are the ones that valorise the most *Health* as a QoL dimension.

In short, the results are aligned with the research goals proposed and confirmed a wide range of the hypothesis, mainly in the case of Portugal (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of hypothesis' validation.

Research hypothesis	PT	HU
H1. There is a positive influence between Happiness and QoL satisfaction levels of Thermal Spas users.	✓	✓
H2. HWE contributes to the Happiness of Thermal Spas users.	✓	x
H3. Happier people achieve more physical and emotional benefits from HWE than non-happy people.	✓	x
H4. Regular users of HW services are happier than non-regular users.	✓	x
H5. HWE contributes to the QoL of Thermal Spas users.	✓	x
H6. Regular users of HW services are more satisfied with their QoL than non-regular users.	✓	x
H7. Regular users of Health and Wellness services are the ones that valorise the most <i>Health</i> dimension of QoL.	✓	✓
H8. There are significant differences on HW motivations according to Generation profiles.	x	x
H9. There are significant differences on HW services preferences of Thermal Spas users according to Generation profiles.	✓	x
H10. There are significant differences on the valorisation of HW destination attributes, according to Generation profiles.	✓	✓

(✓) Confirmed (x) Rejected

Theoretical conclusions

From a theoretical perspective, the thesis provides insights about the potential of HWT to improve happiness and QoL levels of demand. From this perspective, the research identifies a set of characteristics that contribute to understanding how demand profile, travel behaviour, visiting habits, may influence the HWE satisfaction, happiness levels and the most valorised dimensions of QoL. This approach contributes to expanding the scope of research on HWE-happiness-QoL nexus. Although these constructs have been applied in tourism area, the focus is mainly on the impact on residents of tourist destinations (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Chen & Petrick, 2013; Kim et al., 2013; McCabe, 2009; Moscardo, 2009; Michalkó & Ratz, 2010; Rivera, Croes & Lee, 2016; Weaver, 2012). The original character of this research lies in the approach to HWT, relating it to Happiness and QoL, mitigating a research gap in this type of tourism. The study also identifies a comprehensive set of items that assess the motivations and preferences of Thermal Spa users, contributing to expand the knowledge about HW demand in both destinations under analysis. Nevertheless, there is a lack of development of comparative studies in literature, despite the advantages they represent (Esser & Vliegenthart, 2017). Bearing that in mind, this study provides a comparative analysis of the phenomenon in two European destinations. Replication of this theoretical model in future research may reveal the importance of assessing the impact of HWE on happiness and QoL levels among other destinations from a comparative point of view.

Practical application of the dissertation

The main findings of the study provide useful insights with practical and managerial implications for the Thermal Spa sector. Marketing strategies are drawn in order to increase the demand, focused on campaigns associating thermal spas with ideas of happiness and QoL. This kind of campaign may be applied in both countries, promoting simultaneously the creation of a destination brand, based on the potential of using Thermal Spas to improve users' happiness and QoL. Research results may also encourage a focus on emotional branding, through the creation of a love brand associated with these

values. The creation of a love brand may represent an additional supply effort to meet the expectations of the demand, based on the values of the different generation profiles.

Content of the dissertation

The dissertation is divided into eight chapters.

Abstract of Chapter 1

The introductory chapter highlights the level of significance of the research. It focuses on the knowledge foundation and research background, presents the research framework and provides a methodology overview, as well as the structure of the document.

Abstract of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 covers a reflection on the importance of Tourism in the contemporary world with a particular focus in Europe. Also, trends in tourism research are analysed and some considerations about tourism as a scientific area are explored. Literature review is extended to the concepts of leisure and HWT as the central theme of this research. An historical perspective of Thermalism enlightening the importance and the power of cure attributed to water since ancient times. A perspective of the relevance of HWT for destination competitiveness regarding the cases of Portugal and Hungary is presented.

Abstract of Chapter 3

The third chapter focuses upon the conceptual approach to Happiness and Subjective Well-being (HSW), based on its scientific evolution and on its different areas of approach. The concepts of Hedonism and Eudaimonia are analysed, the determinants of HSW are mentioned and the correspondent theoretical models are exposed. Some of the methods used for the measurement of Happiness are described, with particular focus on the Oxford Questionnaire of Happiness (Hills & Argyle, 2002). Also the relationship between Happiness and Tourism is enlightened, regarding its influence on consumer behaviour.

Abstract of Chapter 4

Chapter 4 is focused on a conceptual approach of QoL construct, based on the identification of its social indicators, measurement models and measurement scales. An outlook of the relation between QoL and HWT is established. Some considerations are given regarding the multidisciplinary understanding of the tourism-health-quality of life nexus. It also examines the links with the well-being of the local community and visitors as an essential component of tourism activity, underlining its contribution to destination policy and practices of sustainability and development.

Abstract of Chapter 5

The fifth chapter bridges theoretical and the empirical parts of the study, describing the different stages of the research process. An approach to the epistemological issues is developed and paradigms in social sciences are discussed. Tourism is analysed under a phenomenological perspective and a theoretical approach to methodological perspectives in the research field is made. The research problem is enlightened and the research model is exposed. The research instrument is explained according to its conceptual structure and formal organisation. Also the data gathering process is described.

Abstract of Chapter 6

Chapter 6 addresses the descriptive analysis of the results identifying the sociodemographic profile of the sample. Thermal Spa users' travel behaviour and visiting habits are explored, based on univariate, bivariate or multivariate analysis. Also, the physical and emotional perceived effects of HWE, the

Happiness and QoL levels are exposed, and an Importance-performance Analysis (IPA) is improved, comparing the results obtained in Portugal and Hungary.

Abstract of Chapter 7

This chapter presents a multivariate analysis, based on a comparative approach between the two destinations. The statistical analyses include scales' reliability and validity. Exploratory and CFA and MLR are calculated and correlations between scales and explanatory sociodemographic variables are explored. Then the research hypotheses of the theoretical model are tested.

Abstract of Chapter 8

Chapter 8 describes the main findings of the research, analysing the theoretical and practical implications of the research. It presents the conclusions of the study, focused on a comparative synthesis of the results. The research limitations and shortcomings are analysed and future research directions are provided.

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