



Some Aspects of the Historical Connection between Traditional Hydrothermal Public Baths and the Modern Spa Industry

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ABSTRACT

The volume of wellness tourism in the world was rated at 639.4 billion US dollars in 2017. This is one of the fastest-growing segments in tourism, and it grew by 6.5% annually from 2015 to 2017. In 2017, 830 million wellness trips were made, which is 139 million more than in 2015.

Throughout the millennia, numerous different cultures have used the power of water and warmth for cleanliness and treating their ills. In ancient times, both water and warmth were considered luxuries and were scarcely available.

On the outskirts of Dzalisa village in Georgia, an ancient settlement was found, where a bath made with hewn stones was discovered within part of a palace complex. The Roman-type bath was constructed at the beginning of the 3rd century and consisted of three sections, with cold, warm and hot water tubs, and a well-preserved heating hypocaust system. The floors of the cold and warm baths and the dressing room were covered with mosaics.

The origin of Roman thermal baths, Turkish hamams, Finnish saunas, Japanese onsens, and other hydrothermal spa procedures led to the custom of body cleaning and cleansing. Today, however, the health and aesthetic benefits of hydrothermal bathing are more widely recognized. In recent years, medical scientists have been researching the effect of cold action on high temperatures and the body, and have determined that a key benefit of such a temperature change is detoxification. Body heat and sweating rid the body of toxins, and the extreme change in temperature improves blood circulation and gives a positive boost to organism function.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic plunged the travel and tourism sector into a deep crisis around the world. A similarly strong blow was dealt to the health tourism and spa industry. The consequences of this crisis in the post-pandemic period are having a major impact on both the demand and supply of the health and wellness tourism markets. Now that Georgian tourism is starting to emerge from its stagnation, the industry must prepare for the resumption of business in the wellness and medical tourism markets. It is likely that the growth of this sector, which was two times higher than the general rate of tourism development in the pre-pandemic period, will be maintained- a prognosis made possible by the fact that this unprecedented crisis has once again convinced people of the importance of health and wellness procedures.

Georgia has a long and rich history of hydrothermal spa treatments, but we should note the unfortunate fact that the country's unique natural factors need to be more actively made use of by the tourism industry. And in terms of tourism marketing, a lot more needs to be done to develop the wellness and spa economy, so as to advance the industry through modern marketing methods.

Theoretical Background

Issues in the history of health tourism and the spa industry and its state before the COVID-19 pandemic

The volume of health tourism in the world in 2017 was estimated at 639.4 billion US dollars. This is one of the fastest-growing tourism segments, having grown by 6.5% an-

nually in the years 2015-2017. In 2017, 830 million wellness trips were made, which is 139 million more than those carried out in 2015. Such an increase was driven by the growth in the number of the middle class globally, consumers' aspirations towards a healthy lifestyle, the increase in the affordability of flights, and the availability of a vast number of trips. Europe leads the world in the number of wellness trips, while North America ranks first in terms of revenues from health tourism.

One of the most important parts of recreational tourism is spa tourism, which is characterized by a fairly high rate of development. Although wellness tourism is much broader than spa tourism, still, the spa industry is a major business in this market. Revenue from spa tourism in 2017 was estimated at 309.1 billion USD (48% of wellness tourism), while the number of spa trips stood at 450.0 million. Since 2015, the revenues of the spa industry have been growing by 8% annually.

Interestingly, local spa tourism revenues amounted to 172 billion USD, which is more than the volume of international spa tourism - 137 billion USD (Global Wellness Institute, 2018).

The statistics presented above clearly show that the spa and wellness industry is constantly growing and, at present, there are more than 100,000 resorts and spa centers in the world. More and more people are looking for natural and authentic ways to improve their own health. Among these ways, the oldest, best proven, and most effective spa treatments are hydrothermal baths, which improve the state of the immune system, promote weight loss, regulate high blood pressure, and detoxify the body.

For millennia, various cultures have sought to use water and heat for cleansing

and healing, being largely hard to find and considered something of a luxury. This led to the desire of relatively civilized societies worldwide to find creative ways to deliver “Hydro” and “Thermal” to their own citizens.

Often, the easiest way to achieve this was through natural hot springs in regions that had always played a crucial role in hydrothermal bathing. The abundance of hot springs in many cultures around the world made it possible to use such places for said purpose, and to build special buildings around them, the concept of which would be public bathing.

It is now scientifically proven that the geothermal waters that flow from beneath the earth were used not only for the bathers’ hygiene, but also to replenish their bodies with various minerals, improve their skin condition, and ease the pain of joint and muscle diseases. Chinese historical sources, as far back as the 7th century BC, mention a “spring containing sulfur for treating diseases”.

In the old days, private and individual baths were few and far between, and the most effective means of bathing was to take the waters in public bathhouses. Perhaps the best-known example is the Roman public baths, with their advanced technology and magnificent architecture. According to historical sources, as early as 339 BC, some Roman baths were used specifically for healing purposes, and people visited them to heal wounds and treat rheumatic diseases and paralysis. Roman baths can rightly be considered the forerunners of modern hydrothermal baths (Cavanah, 2016).

However, there are other cultures that, along with the Romans, also claim to have invented modern popular hydrothermal applications. For example, the Finnish sauna, with its popular and long-lasting hydrothermal

impact on the body. With its cold climate, heating is an expensive endeavor in Finland, yet the Finns found a way to achieve the same form of cleanliness and detoxification through steam. They developed a system of heating a wooden cabin to a temperature high enough to make those within it sweat. The cleansing came when the occupants of the cabin left and dove into the snow outside, using it to cleanse away the sweat and dirt. This process was to be repeated several times until an acceptable level of cleanliness was reached. That is why Finns, even today, as a rule, after taking a sauna, rub their bodies with snow. The practical reason for the use of snow in ancient times is that there was a shortage of running water due to severe frosts in the north. However, the result is a cleansing/detoxification ritual that is still highly valued today, one which has been proven to improve the immune system and lower blood pressure.

Although Finland is recognized as the homeland of the sauna, there were similar types of baths throughout Northern Europe, for example, the Russian “Banya” is practically identical in its construction and purpose.

In the 16th century, the well-known hamam, or Turkish bath, was said to have been born in the Ottoman Empire. However, there is evidence that these types of baths were widely used in North Africa and the Middle East long before the Ottomans, even before the advent of Islam. Stopping by a traditional hamam became especially popular before visiting the mosque, as a means of cleansing the body through sweat. The old hamams of Istanbul have excellent interiors, featuring fantastic traditional Muslim ceramic and mosaic art, often with wall texts derived from the Quran. You can also see excellent examples of hamams in Syria,

Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco. Note: The name of the Turkish bath contains only one central letter sound “m” (Turkish hamam), while the Moroccan hammam is written with two “m”s (Cavanah, 2016).

Japan is also known for its great tradition of bathing, and, consequently, the ethic of cleanliness is deeply rooted in its culture. As far back as in 3rd-century historical sources, there are references to the Japanese habits of body hygiene, and in the 6th-7th centuries, the dominance of Confucianism and Buddhism generally reinforced the cult of cleanliness, along with the love of the bathing ritual.

There are more than 20,000 natural hot springs in Japan, based on which the Japanese Onsen were formed. Onsen is the name of a hot spring in Japan. Often, the term Onsen involves not only the hot spring but also its associated tourist infrastructure – hotels and restaurants that are built around the spring. Onsens can be open-air, when swimming is practiced in a natural hot water pool, or closed - when special hot baths, “furo,” are filled with mineral waters to soak in.

In Japan, another form of popular recreation is the steam bath, which are called Sento. These facilitate aromatherapy elements and wet skin scrubbing. The furo is a wooden bath in which one must lay for a time to absorb the beneficial minerals. Such baths are common in private homes.

From 1900, the French began to use the healing-restorative properties of seawater. Seawater is rich not only in sodium chloride (salt), but also in minerals and trace elements. The treatment, known as “thalassotherapy,” was developed using warm seawater (Cavanah, 2016).

The spa industry in Georgia

According to the remains found of sanitary-hygienic structures, we can assess the high standard of living of the population in this era and, consequently, the highly hygienic culture.

From this point of view, Dzalisa ruins are especially interesting. Dzalisa’s architecture, especially the bath and pool planning, hot and cold-water supply and hypocaust heating systems, sewer, mosaic flooring, use of a hydraulic system to fill the pool, and other high-tech building materials in the area, unsurprisingly astonish those who see it. Detailed information about the Dzalisa monument is given in the book “History of Georgian Art” by Professor Irakli Tsitsishvili:

“In the Mukhrani field, on the left bank of the River Narekvavi, near the village of Dzalisa, the ruins of a town were discovered. Remains of large buildings built of hewn stone, cobblestone foundations for mudbrick walls, water supply and sewage networks, stone bases and pillars were found there. The bath, which was presumably a part of the palace complex, is relatively well preserved. The Roman-type bath consisted of three sections, with cold, warm and hot water tubs and a well-maintained hypocaust heating system. The floors of the warm and cold baths, as well as the adjoining dressing room of the latter, are covered with mosaics. Especially important is the mosaic floor in the “House of Dionysus”, which is directly connected to the dressing room of the bath. The bath must have been built at the beginning of the III century A.D.. Near this bath, a second, larger (1500 sq.m.), public bath was discovered. In addition to the traditional bathroom sections, it also includes an atrium, an open courtyard, and even a temple. The largest

building in Dzalisa is the palace (its ruins exceed 2500 sq.m.). It included up to three dozen rooms of different sizes and shapes, with a courtyard-atrium in the center. The remains of a stone fountain can be seen in the center of the atrium. There is a hall, bedrooms, and a two-section toilet with its own water supply and sewer system. It is noteworthy that the palace had a separate building for the central hypocaust heating system.

1. Next to the bath, the first known swimming pool in Georgia was found. It is rectangular in plan, and all four of its sides have semicircular apses in the center of all four walls. The dimensions of the pool are: length 33.4 m., with apses 39.6 m.; width 11.5 m.; height of the remaining walls 2.07 m.. The walls of the basin are built of cobblestone on mortar, and the inside is covered with well-smoothed white stone slabs. In the northern apse, which once connected the pool with the bath, there is a nine-step entrance staircase. In the south-east and north-west corners, stone slabs have been placed for bathers to relax on. In the northeast corner there was a trap and a locking building connected to the sewage collector. The pool floor was plastered with hydraulic mortar, and the pool walls were plastered on the outside. The swimming pool had another large building to the south which had seven halls, three of which had gabled apses - triangular in the middle and semicircular on the sides. Arranged in the north wall of the apse rooms are narrow permeable arches, conceivably to conduct hot air for heating. The purpose of this building has not yet been determined, but it is conceivable that there were halls of

the Roman curia type here. Since this building is said to have damaged the water pipeline of the palace during its construction, it must be of a later period, probably the IV-V centuries.

The Dzalisa complex, according to its buildings, was likely the residence of a high-ranking official. The Dzalisa settlement was turned into a residence around the end of the 1st century BC, and its development dates back to the I-III centuries A.D., following periods in which it was destroyed.

The Dzalisa mosaics are characterized by construction tectonics. The designs exhibit the traditions of Hellenistic art - the movement is alive, and the form is depicted with light and shadow; something that is no longer a plastic sculpture, but a linear drawing. The mosaics of Dzalisa once again confirm the popularity of the cult of Dionysus in Georgia, where viticulture and winemaking were developed. Only in recent years have more discoveries been made attesting to this, among them: a bronze statue of Pan in Mtskheta Akldama, terracotta statues of Dionysus and Ariadne in Sarkineti, a bronze statue of Dionysus from Kodistskaro village, and a silver mirrored statue depicting Dionysus awakening Ariadne from Samtavro. The Mosaics of Dzalisa demonstrate Iberia's close contact with the Western Roman world and Hellenistic culture in the East (Tsitsishvili, 1955).

2. We mentioned the Turkish Hamam above, and when we talk about this type of bath, we should remember the Abastumani resort. The healing properties of the essential minerals found in this area have long been acknowledged, even since ancient times. Historian, geographer, and cartographer

Vakhushti Bagrationi wrote that on the site of present-day Abastumani, as early as the VIV century, there was a densely populated town of Otrzkhe, home to renowned healing waters. In the 17th century, during Ottoman rule, a Turkish bath was built there. In the 1870s, the heir to the throne of the Russian Empire, Prince George, who was ill with tuberculosis, was forced to relinquish the royal throne and move to Abastumani. A palace was built for him, as was a bath near the thermal spring, which still functions today.

One of the most famous resorts in Georgia is Tskaltubo, written about as early as the VII-IX centuries. In the XII-XIII centuries, Tskaltubo, as a healing destination, was already widely popular. According to legend, a shepherd was out with his grazing herd near the springs of Tskaltubo, when he accidentally stumbled upon a “pump” of warm water, which he discovered he could bathe in. He suffered from joint pain and soon noticed that he felt relieved after putting his diseased legs in the water. This story was told by the shepherds to the “Queen of Megrelia”. After swimming in warm water several times, she also found herself healed of her ills, and this is how this particular spring got its name.

It is well known that the history of Tbilisi began with sulfur water, and for centuries people used it in the form of baths. Especially great interest in Tbilisi’s sulfur water was observed in the 18th century, when it was often visited by foreign scholars and travelers, among them Turenfort, Delaporte, Parot, and Du-Boa.

In 1866, by the order of the Governor of the Caucasus, a commission headed by the world-famous geologist Academician Abich

began to study the mineral springs of Tbilisi. In his findings, the scientist expressed great surprise that “the mineral waters have not been studied and have no purpose other than to supply baths and laundries.” He considered such a situation to be “a disrespectful attitude towards the healing treasures that nature so readily gifts the oppressed humanity here” (Nodia, 1954).

Following the results of Abich’s research, the issue of creating a Tbilisi balneological resort became part of the agenda. The commission, headed by Niko Nikoladze, created various versions of plans and projects, but it went no further than that until the 1930s. In 1930, under the leadership of physiotherapist and spa specialist Mikheil Zandukeli, a unique project was created, according to which the resort around the Krtsanisi government residence would be built on an area of 3-4 km. In 1938, the Tbilisi Balneological Resort was put into operation. Today, a scientific-practical center of spa, physiotherapy, rehabilitation, and medical tourism operates on this base.

The Georgian capital’s sulfur baths are a beautiful feature of Tbilisi, and have become something of a visiting card. In the 10th century, Arab geographer Ibn Hawqal, in his *Book of Roads and Kingdoms*, states: “In the city [Tbilisi], there are baths similar to those of Tiberias, the water of which boils without fire” (*Essays on the History of Georgia*, 1973). According to historical records, in the 13th century, there were 65 mineral baths in Tbilisi. Further information is provided about the baths of Tbilisi in the XIII-XIV c.c. works of Venetian traveler Marco Polo, 18th century Russian merchant Vasily Gagarin, and of Vakhushti Bagrationi. In 1833, the great Russian poet A.S. Pushkin wrote: “I have never encountered anything

more glorious in my life, neither in Russia nor in Turkey, than the baths in Tbilisi” (Chronicle of Friendship, 1961).

Today, the capital’s sulfur baths are visited by many foreign tourists besides Georgians. Abanotubani is something of an Asian corner in the city, one that strives towards Europe, and so it is a popular destination for European tourists.

Intangible cultural heritage and health tourism

A most interesting and important event in medical tourism occurred in 2016 when UNESCO recognized medical tourism as an intangible cultural heritage. Two decades ago, it would have been impossible to read or hear of such a proposal, because cultural heritage was not divided into parts, tangible and intangible, while medicine was not even considered an object deserving of such a label. However, there are examples worthy of the rare title, one being in Germany, where, in 2016, “Kneipp” was included in the list of the intangible heritage of Germany. “Kneipp” comes from a popular German doctor Sebastian Kneipp, and, since his last name consists of two “P”s, we have brought it as-is into the Georgian text so as not to confuse it with Kneipe, which refers to a brewery, or pub.

The Kneipp Baths (Kneippheilbad) or Kneipp Resorts (Kneippkurort) are distinguished by the fact that the water treatment is carried out using a method promoted by a Bavarian priest, Sebastian Kneipp (1821-1897), in the 1850s got a reputation as a “water doctor” due to his ability to treat the sick using cold baths, in particular, using the healing properties of water to cure those suffering from tuberculosis. He conducted his research in secret, mainly treating students,

gained a great deal of knowledge in hydrotherapy, and developed a new direction of therapy that became known as Kneipp Therapy. In 1855, he left his pastor position at the church in order to devote the rest of his life to water treatment and the formation of this new direction. He also laid the foundation for the first Kneipp resort.

The German Association of Kneipp Resorts and Kneipp Baths, located in the city of Bad Münstereifel, considers the inclusion of Kneipp Resorts and Kneipp Baths in the German Intangible Heritage List as a major success of 2016. “Today is a special day,” said Achim Bedorf, Executive Chairman of the Association of Kneipp Resorts and Kneipp Baths. This association includes more than 60 of the largest medical companies in the whole of Germany. The baths and resorts of this system cover the whole country, from the Baltic Sea to the Alps, and from Eifel to Saxony. In addition to the resorts, there are hundreds of Kneipp clubs. The German Commission for UNESCO and the Permanent Conference of the Ministry of Culture (KMK) were able to jointly assert the special place and role that Sebastian Kneipp’s treatment, based on traditional knowledge and practice, holds in the history of the German people. Knapp was the first person whose healing procedures and methodologies were incorporated into the list of intangible cultural heritage and, thus, it was the first instance that one was able to have a positive impact on the decision of the Interdisciplinary Commission of Experts. It was included in the UNESCO list as follows: “The Committee of Experts considers your proposal as a priority aimed at restoring human health by traditional methods. Traditional medicine must constantly evolve and improve its base. This idea can be spread all over the world and take deep root, especial-

ly since the existing network of Kneipp clubs, baths, and resorts guarantees that this experience will be enriched and developed in the future” (Kneipp, 2022).

Conclusion and Recommendation

In summary, the emergence of Roman thermae, hamam/hammam, sauna, onsen, and other hydrothermal spa treatments was ultimately related to the cleansing and cleanliness of the body. It is well known that the use of natural cold and hot waters for hygiene and relaxation was widespread both in Europe and Asia. Later, steam baths also came into use. The next stage was aromatherapy and thalassotherapy.

It is now widely accepted that all types of hydrothermal bath are associated with improved health and aesthetic benefits. Physicians have been studying the effects of cold on a body previously heated to high temperatures, and have found the main advantage of such temperature fluctuations to be detoxification. Heating the body to the point it sweats leads to the release of toxins, while extreme changes in temperature improve blood circulation and give a positive impetus to the functions of the body (Cavanah, 2016).

Various forms of treatment and healing have become a tradition in a number of countries. The inclusion of the Kneipp method as an intangible cultural heritage in 2016 should be considered as an example of recognizing and acknowledging traditional methods.

Georgia has a long and rich history of hydrothermal spa treatments, and these unique natural factors need to be highlighted and used more actively by the tourism industry. In terms of tourism marketing, a lot needs to be done to develop the wellness and spa

economy in order to advance the industry with modern marketing methods.

Now that Georgian tourism is starting to emerge from its pandemic-induced stagnation, the industry must prepare for the resumption of business activity in the wellness and medical tourism markets. It is likely that the growth of this sector, which was two times higher than the general rate of tourism development in the pre-pandemic period, will be maintained. The grounds for saying this are given by the fact that this unprecedented crisis reminded people of the importance of health and wellness procedures.

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