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Health tourism in the context of active ageing of Slovak population

Abstract. The article examines health tourism in the context of active ageing of population. The proportion of senior age in the total European population is constantly increasing. The ageing of population becomes a global phenomenon. Currently, active ageing as a process of optimising opportunities for maintaining health, participation in public life and security in order to enhance the quality of life of elderly people can solve problems related to the demographic development. Health tourism facilities may enrich active ageing by adapting their services to the needs of visitors, whom active ageing concerns. The aim of this paper is to point at the ageing of population as well as at the growth of importance of health tourism in Slovakia in terms of the demographic structure of population. For this purpose, the research was undertaken of 175 respondents over 45 years old who, at the time of the survey (March-May 2014), used health tourism services in investigated facilities. According to the results of our investigation, it is worth mentioning that providers of the relevant facilities should explore the segments of middle-aged, elder and senior customers over 45 in detail meet their new needs by creating complex innovative products which may combine health, anti-age and social aspects.

Keywords: Active Ageing; Health Tourism Facilities; Middle-Aged Visitors; Old Age Visitors; Senior Visitors

JEL Classification: I15; I30; J11; L83

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21003/ea.V156-0025>

Acknowledgement. This work was supported by the Slovak Academy of Sciences under the grant VEGA-1/0669/14.

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Оздоровчий туризм у контексті активного старіння населення Словаччини

Анотація. У статті розглянуто питання оздоровчого туризму в контексті активного старіння населення. Кількість людей старшого віку від загальної чисельності населення Європи постійно зростає. Старіння населення стає глобальним явищем. У зв'язку з цим, пристосовуючи свої послуги до потреб людей, яких стосується проблема активного старіння, оздоровчий туризм може бути корисним для осіб похилого віку. Автори статті зосереджують увагу на старінні населення та наголошують на зростаючій ролі оздоровчого туризму в Словаччині.

Ключові слова: активне старіння; оздоровчий туризм; відвідувачі відвідувачі похилого віку, відвідувачі літнього віку.

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Оздоровительный туризм в контексте активного старения населения Словакии

Аннотация. В статье рассмотрены вопросы, имеющие отношение к оздоровительному туризму в контексте активного старения населения. Количество людей старшего возраста от общей численности населения Европы постоянно растет, а старение населения становится глобальным явлением. В связи с этим, приспособляя свои услуги к потребностям лиц, которых касается проблема активного старения, оздоровительный туризм может принести пользу людям пожилого возраста. Авторы акцентируют внимание на старении населения и возрастающей роли оздоровительного туризма.

Ключевые слова: активное старение; оздоровительный туризм; посетители преклонного возраста; посетители пожилого возраста.

1. Introduction & Brief Literature Review. Ageing concerns all European countries, including Slovakia (Sedlakova, 2012) [17]. Several foreign surveys suggest that aging affects even those countries which are outside Europe, for example the USA (Loh, 2015) and China (Huang, Xu, 2014) [10]. It represents a complex and dynamic process, comprising mutually related processes of biological, social and psychological aging (Sykora, 2007) [18]. Various authors, such as J. G. Ferrer, M. F. Sanz,

E. D. Ferrandis, S. McCabe, J. S. Garcia (2015) [6]; M. Ferri Sanz, E. Dura Ferrandis, J. Garcés Ferrer (2015) [7]; Y.-F. Ho, L.-S. Lu (2014) [9]; E. Z. K. Lim, C. L. Thompson (2015) [12]; B. Mikusova Merickova, J. Sebo, H. Kuvikova (2007) [14]; M. Vozikaki, M. Linardakis, K. Micheli, A. Philalithis (2016) [21]; E. H. K. Yung, S. Cohejos, E. H. W. Chan (2016) [22], focus on active ageing and health tourism. As ageing is irreversible, the population must be prepared to function/exist/live in changed conditions. Human

society has never experienced such a situation, as the current range of human society ageing has never been recorded in the past (Balaz et al., 2013) [3]. Based on surveys, it can be suggested that the increasing number of the elder generation in Slovakia will grow until 2060. Proportion of middle age (middle adulthood), elder and senior age population (by the WHO age classification) in the total population of Slovakia can be found in Figure 1.

The state does not possess tools to stop or even to slow down the trend of population ageing. It is necessary to make sure that the ageing population will still be active and continue participating in tourism, which has a significant economic, social, political and cultural importance (Tej, Matusikova, 2014) [19]. In this respect, it is very important for the ageing population to overcome isolation; to get rid of feeling of exclusion and deteriorating health state; to live an active lifestyle, for instance by practicing travelling, tourism, sports and taking part in wellness programmes (Brezinova, 2013) [5]. Foreign studies indicate positive effect of travelling on the psyche of elderly people and their overall life satisfaction (Morgan, Pridchard & Sedgley, 2015). Active ageing represents a widely discussed topic. Specifically, the tourism sector is emerging as one of the biggest beneficiaries of the aging process as a result of changes in the lifestyle of the population which is currently more leisure-oriented than previous generations (Alen, Losada, Dominguez, 2015) [2].

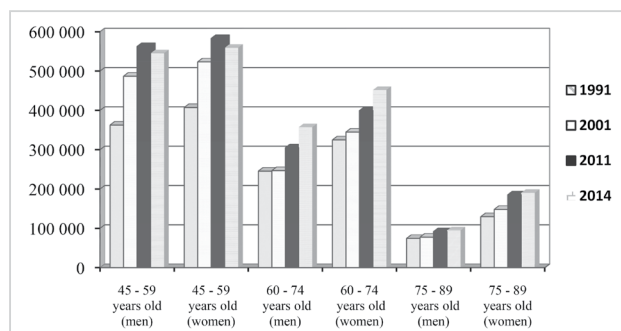


Fig. 1: Population of Slovakia in middle age and old age
Source: Own elaboration based on data of Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

According to the WHO, active aging means the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to improve the quality of life at each of the age stages (Sedlakova, 2012) [17]. Active ageing may be defined as:

- 1) autonomy (ability to provide for oneself, to live according to own rules and principles);
- 2) freedom and independence (the ability to function without assistance or with only minimal help from others);
- 3) quality of life connected with subjective positive evaluation of health and life, which is exacerbated by loss of autonomy and independence.

The European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations aimed at promotion of active aging as a life-long process (Active aging report, 2012). The WHO Regional Committee for Europe published a Strategy and Action Plan for Healthy Ageing in Europe, 2012-2020. The Active Ageing Strategy as a national project in the Slovak Republic was implemented in 2013. The National Program for Active Ageing 2014-2020 was developed, where active ageing is set as a political priority.

In addition to all actions taken at the national and international levels, it is necessary to change the negative attitude of society towards ageing, to adapt products and services to the increasing number and proportion of elderly people and to pay more attention to their needs, constraints and preferences. Success of active ageing is conditioned by health. The level of public health, the quality of life and its positive development are closely connected.

One of the active ageing objectives is to improve health awareness of people in prevention illnesses (The National Programme for Active Ageing, 2013). This objective can be achieved by their participation in health tourism. Active ageing may become an important stimulus for the development of health tourism, which is highly potential worldwide.

Prevention, care and health protection have increasing importance in the context of current unhealthy lifestyle and sedentary job, stressogenic environment, lack of exercise and due to various risk factors and the increasing rate of civilization diseases.

Health tourism began to be considerably promoted in late 20th century (Gucik et al., 2004) [8]. Currently it belongs to the dominant participation motives in tourism both in Slovakia and other European countries. Slovakia's health tourism is provided not only by natural spas, wellness hotels, but also by water parks with wellness services, hotels and other accommodation facilities with an integrated wellness centres in tourism destinations. The offer is usually distributed as a package of services both by tourism facilities and tour operators. Consumer behaviour of seniors who purchase these package tours matches their customs and lifestyle (Pompurova, Marakova, Simockova, 2015) [16].

2. The purpose of this paper is to emphasise the population ageing and increasing importance of health tourism in Slovakia in the context of demographic structure changes. To conduct this research, the authors used primary and secondary sources of information. The secondary sources include publications by domestic and foreign authors, relevant electronic resources, statistical data and legislative documents concerning examined topic. The primary data were obtained on the basis of a sample survey of 175 randomly selected respondents (demand side) in the group of over 45 years of age (middle age, elder and senior age respondents following the population classification according to the WHO) who, at the time of the survey (March-May 2014), used health tourism services in investigated facilities.

The focus was also on middle-aged respondents (not only the elderly ones) for two reasons: 1) the authors realise that active life and effort to create positive habits are extremely important. Unless elderly individuals live without active efforts for prevention and care for their health even during the period when they do not need medical treatment, it is difficult to change the acquired habits in the senior age; 2) the number of long-standing and chronic diseases increases since people's middle age, but individuals are still on top of their economic activity, which contributes to fatigue, tiredness and leads to health problems.

The paper examines offers from Slovak selected spas and hotels with integrated wellness centres for visitors of middle age, elder and senior age as well as the attitude of service providers towards such guests. Special attention is paid to satisfaction of visitors' demands in selected Slovak facilities. The authors used a questionnaire survey (demand side) and a standardized interview technique (supply side). Data collection was carried out personally.

3. Results. *Middle-aged visitors of natural healing spas (45-59 years old).* Middle-aged visitors represent a majority share in total spa visitation. This fact may result from a combination of economic activities related to available financial resources, stressogenic factors of everyday life of the economically active generation and the increasing number of civilization diseases in younger age groups. The product range for middle-aged self-payers is dominated by regeneration, relaxation and wellness weekend stays. Many providers of such facilities currently focus on this group of customers and plan to focus on it in the future. The reason is that these visitors have multiple financial resources; they are willing to pay more and use the health tourism services more often than older visitors.

Middle-aged visitors of hotels (45-59 years old). Surprisingly, even nowadays, many hotels do not analyse visitors' consumer behaviour according to their age. Therefore, responses of facility providers result from their own experience and can be found in Table 1.

Older and senior age visitors (over 60 years old). Various investigations assume that age has a negative effect on travel desire but a positive effect on tourism expenditure (Bernini, Cracolici, 2015).

The result of the comparison between middle-aged visitors' demand examination (visitors who are 45-59 years old of both spas and hotels) and elder visitors' demand (60+ years old) is illustrated in Table 1.

4. Conclusions. Survey results from Slovakia and abroad indicate that society will more often be confronted with signifi-

cant ageing of population and a growing interest in the individuals' health. Health service is constantly developing. Along with this, it represents a huge opportunity for tourism too. Lee and Payne (2015) underline that leisure is one of the important aspects of successful ageing [15]. Demographic development in the world will affect the demand changes in the tourism market. Visitors' requirements for quality, professional competence and services will rise. They will prefer short stays and will be ready to adequately pay for quality and satisfaction. Although medicine records constant progress, the risk of disease remains increasing. Successful facilities in the tourism market will offer programs for specific medical reasons (especially civilization diseases) prepared in combination with a wide range of supplementary services. Furthermore, providers of services should focus not only on health but also on cultural and social activities. A growing demand for programs aimed at improving the physical appearance and mitigating the ageing process along with preventive medicine will be expected in the future. Investment in own health and appearance will remain a matter of personal interest. Employees, whose employers will invest in their health to enhance their productivity, will represent a largely growing group. The use of coaching starts to emerge in Slovakia. The demand for the most advanced diagnostic techniques combined with alternative methods of treatment supported not only by health care establishments but also by health tourism facilities will increase.

Health tourism represents one of the possible ways of influencing public health. Providers of services should focus on group of seniors because this group is especially prospective from the demographic point of view. It is important to view elderly people as an important segment of consumers with their specific needs, preferences, which are definitely not homogenous. Individuals within the mentioned segment differ according to their disposable resources, health condition, lifestyle, level of awareness and consumer preferences. It is not appropriate to neglect their purchasing power. It is important to emphasise that there is a sig-

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Tab. 1: Comparison of demand examination of middle-aged, older- and senior-aged visitors

Middle-aged visitors (45-59 years old)	Older- and senior-aged visitors (over 60 years old)
interested in products aimed at the anti-ageing prevention, focused on relaxation and Beauty care	interested in therapeutically oriented products
willing to pay an adequate price for quality	prefer more affordable stays, focus on price at maximum
interested in diversity of stays and trends and prefer short stays	profit from traditional and long-term stays
when needed, prefer personal contact with doctors	seek more intensive personal contact with doctor during the whole stay
in spas, require maximum number of curative procedures	in spas, they require the necessary procedures to improve their own health combined with sufficient rest
they prefer availability of services in the same building	they prefer the availability of all services in the same building, increased demand in wheelchair accessibility in all facilities as a result of reduced mobility
look for: 1) family stays; 2) business trips (congresses, organised events, trainings)	look for: 1) healing stays as unaccompanied individuals recommended by doctors; 2) relaxation stays for couples
the most decisive factors of choosing where to stay are: 1) price; 2) positive attitude and professionalism of personnel; 3) quality of accommodation services	come to spas as indication group A or B patients (they profit mostly from stays paid from public funds), and the utmost selection fact is their doctor's recommendation
focus on a balance between price and quality consider stress elimination, curative stay, active rest, business trip while planning their stay.	are self-payers in hotels and focus on low prices stay motives: (1) curative stay, (2) rest (passive also), (3) change of everyday stereotypes, (4) new incentives and stimuli for life enrichment
rely on the most important information sources: 1) recommendations of relatives; 2) own positive experience	rely on the most important information sources: 1) doctor; 2) own positive experience; 3) recommendations of relatives
use the same facility repeatedly	use the same facilities repeatedly
would appreciate the extension of leisure activities (especially cultural events, meetings, motivational seminars, spiritual exercises); sports-oriented activities, tourist maps offer and fast Internet connection	have their favourite leisure activities which mainly include organised lectures and discussions on interesting topics, entertainment, taking part in cultural events as passive spectators
are interested in changing their lifestyle change (they want to live a healthier life) and would appreciate specialist advice	are keen to face concern and care of personnel during the whole stay but have no ambitions to change their lifestyle in their domestic environment

Source: Own elaboration

nificant number of tourism customers who are getting older. Providers of the relevant facilities must treat this fact as a challenge: they should explore the segments of middle-aged, elder and senior customers in detail and respond to requirements of such visitors by preparing innovative products regarding customer needs. This is the only way to remain successful in the market in terms of a long-term perspective.