

## MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITIES FOR SPA TOURISM IN SERBIA

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### Abstract

*Two forms of tourism, which are represented to a large extent in the world, are spa and wellness tourism. In Serbia, spa and wellness tourism are not sufficiently used, although there are excellent conditions. During twenty century the state was paying more attention and money on the sea and river tourism. However, the separation of Serbia and Montenegro in two independent counties had left Serbia without an entrance to the Adriatic Sea, so development of other tourist products and destinations became an imperative for survival and existence in the tourist map of Europe and the world. The paper presents the basic aims and policies of development of spa tourism in Serbia and data obtained in the survey regarding quality of services provided in some spa towns in Serbia. Based on the results to which the research occurred, authors wished to point out main activities and tasks that the state uses in creating a development strategy of spa tourism, the programs that have already been taken, so as the influence of the economic crisis to spa tourism.*

**Key words:** *spa tourism, quality management, development, wellness, Serbia.*

**JEL classification:** *L83, O21, P11*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism as a tertiary economic activity gives more and more possibilities for countries to compete with each other in various tourist products and destinations. New forms of travel, new tourist products and tourist destinations are the new facts of contemporary global tourism industry. Among the attractive tourist destinations, spas get great significance and development of spa and wellness tourism is becoming an imperative for many countries that wish to actively participate in the world tourism.

Spas and health resorts in Serbia have a long tradition and have always been favorite places for a holiday. They were developed as a beautiful oasis of greenery and quiet. Spas are located in the valleys or on slopes of hills, surrounded by woods, with a mild climate. Today, modern facilities, sports facilities and swimming pools are a health, i.e. spa travel content. Serbian spas are rich in thermo mineral waters that are used to treat almost any illness for which the spas are recommended. There are about 1,000 thermal springs. Water temperatures range from 19 to 98 °C. In over 53 thermal sites, whose benefits had been enjoyed by ancient Romans, spa therapies and treatments are adjusted to a wide range of health disorders or diseases. Spa represent excellent place for recreation and various sports activities such as jogging, cycling, swimming, mini golf, tennis, handball, basketball, volleyball, soccer, hiking. Many spas have carrying capacity for organizing sports camps and preparation. Beside recreational character, spas are places for the successful organization of business seminars,

conventions, meetings, so there is a chance for making business or MICE tourism. Most Serbian spas are located near the medieval monasteries, which reflect the cultural heritage of Serbia. In addition, the various manifestations of traditional and modern art and the rich offer of traditional national cuisine contribute to an unforgettable stay in spas. This is one more attribute to Serbian spas, and also a possibility for tourism development.

Despite the fact that Serbia has many natural and anthropogenic resources for the development of tourist activities, it can be safely said that the spas in the near future will constitute one of the leading tourist products of Serbia. However, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the state felt into great economic and political difficulties, which have many negative implications for the development of the entire economy and thus tourism. Very small financial assets have been given for the development of tourist activities and tourist infrastructure. Nowadays it is necessary to take corrective measures to stimulate the development of spa tourism, which has been in shadow of all events for several years. Success is guaranteed only by proper management policy for development in this sector of tourism and by occupation of all subjects in development.

From presented facts about spas in Serbia, it appears the inevitable question about the development of spa and wellness tourism as a recognizable form of tourist activity, and a unique brand of Serbia.

## 2. THE LITERATURE PREVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT SERVICE OF SPA TOURISM

The definition of spa tourism of Europe states: "Spas and climatic resorts are the irreplaceable part of the health system, cultural heritage and an important economic factor in Europe." The essence of the development strategy of the European spas is the activation of self-consciousness about the responsibility towards their own health and orientation towards the creation of offers to users. Growing needs and a comprehensive approach to the user result in a complex bid, which is defined as the wellbeing. Under this term it implies the renewal of mind, body and soul, as the essence of the orientation of European spa strategy. Although Serbian spas have professional medical staff in terms of providing medical services, in attracting foreign tourists, it is necessary to develop wellness tourism (disease prevention, rest, shape, relax, relaxation, rehabilitation) that is applied in many European countries. This can be understood as one of the imperatives of new approach to spa tourism recovery.

As stated, spa tourism of Europe is based on the principles of spa and wellness tourism. Wellness and spa in the world are more and more beyond of what is called as trend or a fashion, and are becoming a way of healthy life. Essential modern programs have been developed in the spa, with thermal mineral water. These programs include not only treating disease but also specific treatments for face, body and soul aimed at relaxation and enjoyment, anti-stress and health programs. Strategy of development of spa tourism in Europe is going in the direction of connections between "beautiful and useful". Wellness treatments, which complement the main program, are definitely proved to be the decisive instrument for achieving the goal of increasing the role of spa tourism in the overall tourist activity. Recommendations arising from the general strategy of development are that people should take care of their health, but much more about prevention of illness, in the form of regular travel to a relaxing treatment in the spa and wellness centers.

According to many researchers, an optimum wellbeing comes from a balance between wellbeing in the body, the mind and the spirit (i.e. a holistic approach to life). The American Holistic Health Association in 2007 estimated that holistic health as an approach to creating wellness encourages people to:

- Balance and integrate their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects,
- Establish respectful, cooperative relationship with others and environment,
- Make wellness – oriented lifestyle choices,
- Actively participate in their health decisions and healing processes. (Melanie Smith)

In one word, the development of spa products in Europe and the world is going in way of understanding spas and wellness tourism as a style of life which considered holistic approach – life in accordance to body and soul, so as environment and others.

Widespread opinion is that the spa tourism in Serbia is in a starting stage of its development and that after many years of discouragement lot of actions are needed to place this tourist product in the world market. Quality is one of the basic elements of development concepts. It is often said that profit is not always an adequate measure of economic success in now days competitive struggle, and it is certainly superfluous, if it is looked at statistically, because there is no parallel evaluation of changes in position on the market. Expanding of the market and position in the destination market in the form of perspective are correlated with quality. Companies or tourist destinations that lead their business policies on the principles of modern development create all of its efforts for the innovation thought expanding new products and services, improving existing and finding new groups of consumers. When it comes to managing the development of spa tourism in Serbia, it is necessary on the basis of market research design such a level of quality as the consumer wants and expects.

## 3. THE LEVEL OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENT OF SERBIAN SPA TOURISM

Serbia is a country that has a tradition longer than 160 years in health tourism. Medicated water, mud and fresh air are a real potential for Serbia. Today there are 49 active natural spas and health resorts in which there is full expression of spa - recreational - tourist economy. The total number of beds in 2007 was 41.416 (Republic Bureau of Statistic, 2008, "Statistical Yearbook of Serbia", Serbia, chapter 19, pg. 324), and the number of employees is around 4000. Many spas are modern in terms of providing hospital services, but most require intensive application of scientific and technical achievements and modern construction and renovation of existing accommodation facilities. Our country is valid for the country spa, which once had a high European reputation, but today is necessary business expansive approach to the evaluation of our resources.

However, spas as a tourist attraction are not far enough valued for the simple reason that tourism, in general, as a business, was never a serious issue of development policy in Serbia. On the other hand, another country with the same or weaker spa potentials have made fundamental changes in this form of tourism, which led them to the place of the relevant tourist destinations of the world. Serbia has a comparative advantage when it comes to spas, as well as other forms of tourism, close to the traditional and

new tourist markets, and has rich natural and human potential (Tourism Development Strategy of Serbia, 2006, p.1). Despite these advantages, to which can be added preserved natural resources, general recognition, long tradition and all, spa tourism is on very low level of development. The reasons are as follows: closed market - there has been no process of restructuring and privatization, and thus neither to new investments and investment, high centralization - there has been no investment in maintenance and construction of tourist infrastructure in many spa towns, which reduced development, (many spas were left to small budget of the cities near them), gray economy – because of the influence of bad economy practice, it could not be recognized the real macroeconomic influence of tourism to Serbian economy, general orientation of Serbia to other activities and not on tourism - the spa were left to local authorities, who did not have enough resources to improving this aspect of tourism (Tourism Development Strategy of Serbia, 2006, p.1).

Based on the presented data, it can be recognized the need for restructuring and privatization of spas as a one way for attracting foreign direct investment for a process of development and

modernization of spa offers. In this enterprise, it is necessary to follow examples of successful countries in the area of spa and wellness tourism, and make a development strategy based on the European strategy. In attracting a larger number of tourists in our country it is necessary to build a wellness centers that are sports and recreational centers, for which the state has begun to separate the money, and develops strategy. With the application of the principles of wellness and spa programs Serbia expects to receive about half a million tourists in the near future. However, poor infrastructure, especially roads, insufficient number and poor accommodation facilities are only one of many reasons why medical tourism, which is increasingly popular in the west, still does not attract many tourists.

Before any other efforts to emphasize importance of creating a development strategy for spas, it is very significant and necessary to present what is the actual position of spa tourism in Serbia. By research trough based on data from 2003 until 2009 of Statistical Office of Serbia it can be shown the actual position of spa and wellness tourism in Serbian economy.

**Table 1 - Tourists' Arrivals in Serbia – type of resort from 2003 to 2007**

*In thousands*

Year	Main administrative centers	Spas	Mountain	Other tourist places	Total
2003	776	306	370	489	1998
2004	728	301	391	492	1972
2005	713	303	401	508	1989
2006	742	319	392	473	2006
2007	817	384	446	565	2306

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Serbia, Republic Bureau of Statistics, chapter 19, 2008, p.321

**Table 2 - Tourists' Overnights in Serbia – type of resort from 2003 to 2007**

*In thousands*

Year	Main administrative centers	Spas	Mountain	Other tourist places	Total
2003	1334	2072	1870	1231	6685
2004	1324	2089	1808	1239	6643
2005	1310	2012	1766	1244	6499
2006	1311	2183	1743	1168	6592
2007	1531	2335	1934	1307	7329

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Serbia, Republic Bureau of Statistics, chapter 19, 2008, p.321

According to Table 1 it is obvious that spa tourism takes fourth place in tourist resorts. In the first place there is tourism of the main administrative centers, Belgrade and Novi Sad. Important fact is that visits to spas were growing each year in the past and the biggest growth was from 2006 to 2007, when number of arrivals in spas increased for near 70 thousand. Also, important indicator is the number of nights in Serbia. According to this indicator (Table 2) spas take first place, and data show that number of nights was growing during this period of time. For example, in 2006 there were 2.183 thousands of nights and in 2007 this number increased to 2.335 thousands.

Beside this total number, it is also significant to show a ratio between domestic and foreign tourist. For tourism industry, and total value added from tourism to domestic economy, it is very important the number of foreign tourists because funds from abroad, brought by foreign tourists, are very interesting for domestic balance of payments. Tourism is called “invisible exports” – it brings in a foreign currency from tourists all around the world and in that way it is one of the easiest and relatively cheap efforts for earning money needed for investments and development of economy. In the next table it will be presented the number of arrivals and nights between these two categories of tourists.

**Table 3 - Tourists' Arrivals and Overnights in Spas - domestic and foreign tourists from 2003 to 2007***In thousands*

Year	Arrivals		Nights	
	Domestic tourists	Foreign tourists	Domestic tourists	Foreign tourists
2003	291	15	2009	63
2004	285	15	2031	58
2005	286	17	1947	65
2006	302	17	2113	70
2007	359	25	2243	92

Source: *Statistical Yearbook of Serbia, Republic Bureau of Statistics, chapter 19, 2008, pp. 320 & 321.*

Table 3 represented number of nights and arrivals among domestic and foreign tourists in Serbian spas. More than 90% of all arrivals in spas during five years analyzed are from domestic tourists and only 10% and less are linked to foreign visits.

Conclusion is that, although there is increase in visits, foreign tourist are still not interested in spas, like they are in our cities, Belgrade and Novi Sad. Only a small number of them go to spas and stays there.

**Table 4 - Tourists' Arrivals in Spas – domestic and foreign tourists in 2009***Data taken in table 5 are for the first seven months in 2009 (until July).*

Tourist resort	Domestic	Foreign	Total
<b>Republic Serbia</b>	<b>828.398</b>	<b>371.463</b>	<b>1.199.863</b>
Main adm. centers	142.155	230.151	372.306
<b>Spas</b>	<b>194.519</b>	<b>14.151</b>	<b>208.670</b>
Mountains	240.086	23.843	263.929
Other resorts	215.657	89.508	305.165
Others	35.981	13.810	49.791

Source: *Tourist traffic in Serbia in July 2009, Republic Bureau of Statistics, Press number 250, 2009. p. 1.*

According to Table 4, spa tourism still take fourth place among all tourist resorts in Serbia. Total number of arrivals by the end of July is 1.199.863 and 17, 4 % of them are linked to spas. The most visited resorts are still main administrative centers, such as Beograd and Novi Sad. Also, according to this data, main guests in spas are domestic people, and only a small number of foreign tourist come in spa resorts.

In July 2009, there were 194.519 arrivals of domestic tourists and only 14.151 of foreign tourists. This indicator shows those foreign tourists are not interested enough in tourist supply of ours spas.

Also, a number of tourist nights can be presented in terms of understanding position of spa tourism in 2009.

**Table 5 - Tourists' Overnights in Serbia – domestic and foreign tourists in 2009***Data taken in table 6 are for the first seven months in 2009 (until July)*

Tourist resort	Domestic	Foreign	Total
<b>Republic Serbia</b>	<b>3.298.199</b>	<b>897.154</b>	<b>4.195.353</b>
Main admin. centers	253.724	557.039	810.763
<b>Spas</b>	<b>1.235.857</b>	<b>54.578</b>	<b>1.290.435</b>
Mountains	1.140.175	82.069	1.222.244
Other resorts	575.380	173.960	749.340
Others	93.063	29.508	122.571

Source: *Tourist traffic in Serbia in July 2009, Republic Bureau of Statistics, Press number 250, 2009. p. 1*

In Table 5 it is represented a number of nights in Serbia in first seven months of 2009. According to data, the biggest number of nights is linked to spas, almost 31% of all nights. But, number of foreign tourists night is very low, only 54.578 due to 1.235.857 nights from domestic population. This is indicator that spas have a great possibilities and that they are our significant resource, but also that there is still no enough efforts and strategy for this kind of tourism.

#### 4. ACHIEVED LEVEL OF SERVICE QUALITY IN SPA TOURISM OF SERBIA

Researches on the territory of Serbia indicate that the tourists require a very high level of service quality. The battle for quality is actually a struggle for survival on the tourist market. In the modern world people needs become more diverse, and they do not want to satisfy their needs in any way and any product or service. They insist that more and more products that supplied their needs are accurately determined by

quality. This is one reason why the quality becomes a basic component of social work and modern life. Quality is the key factor of competitiveness and market competition. For tourists or visitors of spas, quality is consisted from several elements, for example: image of spa or destination before their arrival, information obtained before arrival of tourists, place where they will stay, accommodation, reception or arrival, infrastructure, quality of air, water, environment, food, attractiveness, etc. For spa tourism in Serbia it can be said that it is in one of the first phase of its development. The reasons for this are economic and political difficulties that have engulfed Serbia during the last decade of 20th century. However, it is known that Serbia has many natural and anthropogenic resources for the development of almost all forms of tourist movements, but these resources are not sufficient for development. They are,

can be safely said, only the starting point for this kind of activity. What is necessary to do is to make a proper evaluation of these values and include them in the system of tourism. The development of spa tourism can contribute to overall economic development of Serbia.

The best way of determining the degree of quality of services proved in spas is research of tourism market, more accurately survey that includes the main participants in the tourist movement. The survey was conducted in six spa resorts in Serbia, during the month of May 2009 (Vrnjacka spa, Sokobanja, Koviljaca, Banja Kanizsa, Ribarska and Spa Junaković). Survey had a wider significance, but for the purposes of this paper it will be taken in the analysis only segments that are necessary to determine the degree of the quality of certain services.

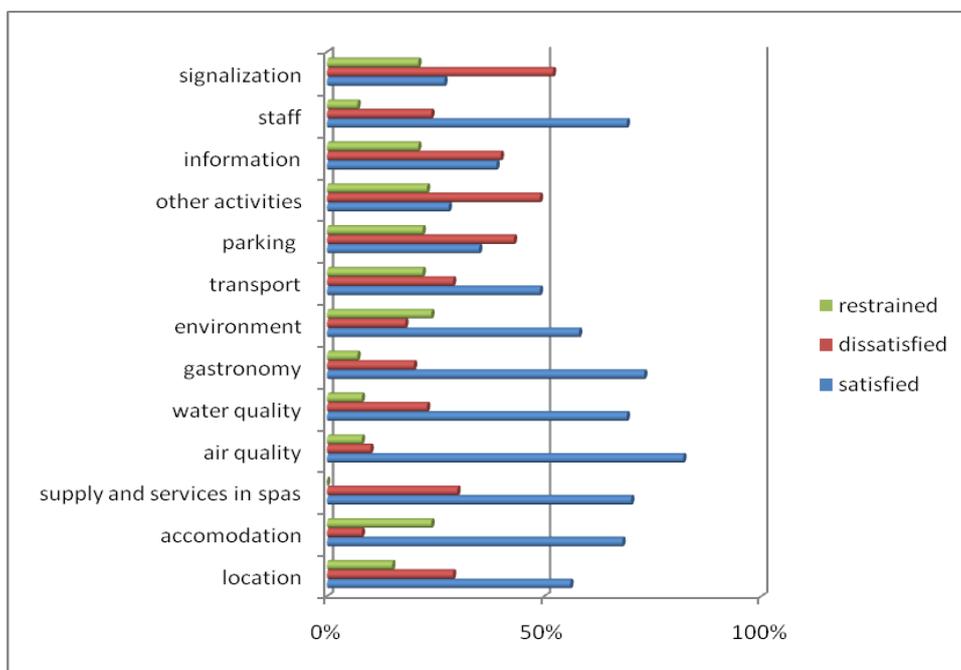
**Table 6 - Number of questionnaires**

<i>Total questionnaires</i>	<i>divided</i>	<i>Total number of questionnaires filled out</i>	<i>Number of questionnaires not taken into analysis</i>
<b>1.400</b>		800	600

A total of 1400 questionnaires have been distributed, but have been taken in the analysis only 800, because of difficulties in cooperation with the respondents, and the accommodation-catering facilities. The visitors were given the opportunity to vote for which of these services are satisfied, and which are not.

they were satisfied when it comes to offers, namely the entire spa or wellness programs (70% satisfied, 30% dissatisfied). Accommodation and catering services are also highly listed by visitors, which is of course very important for further development. It must be noted that the largest number of infrastructure units renovated in last ten years.

In Table 6 it is possible to see the level of satisfaction of tourists on services in spas. Notes that



**Figure 1 - The Degree of Satisfaction of Tourist on Services in Serbian Spas**

Source: Survey made by the author, 2009

There are data that indicate that the spa tourism had its great development during the 70's and early

80's years, and that the accommodation-catering facilities mainly built up in those years. It is also

necessary to mention the part which is linked to the restaurants (excluding visitors from medical reasons or severe patients). This is also very important for further progress, but the segment that should not be even a little surprising because Serbia is known for its gastronomic traditional values and hospitality of the population. It is important to say that the quality of air and water quality are values that often influence the attraction of tourists in these areas. The respondents in the highest percentage expressed themselves as satisfied with the environmental values and nature, and only a small percentage of them were dissatisfied: 23% were dissatisfied with the air, 10% with water, 20% with food and 18% with the overall environment. Lower grades received transport (49% satisfied), parking (35% satisfied) and signalization (27% satisfied). It is a fact that still there are no sufficient investment funds not only for infrastructure but also for other no less important segments of the supply such as the construction or renovation of certain roads, installation of signalization and construction of parking. Additional activities such as trips, participation in certain events and the like are also represented to a lesser extent in the offer of spa tourism.

Interpersonal contacts are also of great importance for the development of any form of tourist movements. When it comes to spa tourism, there is the sector related to health care workers, but also one that includes the tourist-hotel staff. Tourists were able to declare how much they are satisfied or not with the staff or personnel who provide services in the accommodation facilities. Approximately 69% of respondents were satisfied and 24% were declared negative on this issue, believing that it should be implemented some corrective measures when the personnel are in question. The fact is that in the sector of medical/health services work mainly health workers, while in the sector of accommodation and food there are no strict rules on this question. Employees are from different professional profiles and different levels of education, which is typical for tourism in Serbia. Only in the last few years there have been some changes when the personnel are in question and there were few restrictive measures in the management of human resources and employment of qualified workforce.

What is really missing in the tourist offer of spas is the availability of information. Tourists need to be better informed about individual capabilities and spa offers. Based on analysis of research, authors came to the conclusion that tourists or visitors are disappointed when the availability of information is in question. There are of course brochures, catalogs, and common souvenirs as an essential part of the promotion of tourist destinations. The most part, namely 40% of them were unhappy that they were not able to get some more information in the visited areas.

## 5. THE SUBMISSION OF SOME STRATEGIC CORRECTION TASKS FOR DEVELOPMENT MASS TOURISM IN SPAS OF SERBIA

At the end of 2006, in Serbia, it has been made general strategy of tourism development. For each aspect of strategy particularly is responsible a special tourist association. To complement the performance and development strategy of spas, Serbian Spas and Resorts Association is in charge, as an organization that defines and provides a spa business in the territory of the entire state. This association was established on 12 May in 1970 at the initiative of a large number of economic and social organizations and municipalities, which in their area have the spa or a climatic place, with headquarters in Vrnjacka banja. It consists of 26 municipalities, 26 institutes and 17 companies ([www.udruzenjebanja.co.rs](http://www.udruzenjebanja.co.rs)). In thirty-nine years of work, Association has achieved great success in the preservation, use and adequate implementation of remedial factors. Also, it has been engaged in the realization of goals and tasks that lead to faster development of spas and climatic places, market recognition of their social, economic and social functions with a clear vision of further development of spas and climatic resorts in Serbia. Since 2003 the Association has become a member of the European Spa Association (ESPA) with headquarters in Brussels.

Although there is an improvement in spas, it is necessary to prepare an adequate strategy for further development and promotion of this type of tourism, so there are certain steps which have to be done, such as:

- Define the vision and mission of spa tourism in Serbia;
- Define the objectives of development;
- Analyze environment and the strengths and weaknesses of spas, as tourist resources;
- Define the tasks that must be done in the shortest time, so the strategy will be achieved from "dead letters" on paper through concrete activities.

Vision and mission of spas and wellness tourism are largely already mentioned in the preceding sentences of this work. If we are talking about the vision and mission, it should be mentioned that the spa and thermal springs have always been organized as places for the healing, recreation, psychological and other needs of the people. The main purposes of spas are treatments, leisure, rest, and relaxation. On these premises it should be built general vision and mission of the strategy, which are organizing a special tourism products and spa design of modern and complex package of arrangements for future guests that included everything from accommodation, through treatments, leisure, vacation, maintenance, business meetings and seminars (MICE), to organize small tours around. Of course, our strategy should be in the same direction as European, that see spas as place for development of holistic approach to life. One of the

very interesting questions is what are the goals of development? The goals of development are to try to connect the spa with eco and rural tourism, as well as special tourist resources. Ecotourism, rural tourism and ethno-tourism are becoming more interesting for our, and foreign guests, and this is a chance for Serbia because there are preserved natural resources and history that last for hundered of years. Similarly, the direction of development may be addition to spa offer with some elements of MICE (business) tourism. All these methods support the same goal, which is complex and quality offers for guests, to meet all their needs and desires, on the one hand, and for the spa industry, in order to achieve financial inflows through profitable business, on the other side. Authors already emphasized the importance of tourism in terms of “invisible exports” and influence to economy of one country. One way of development in this area is the restructuring of spas in Serbia. Many of the high quality health resorts operate in poor conditions, with outdated and old equipment. It is necessary to make financial and organizational restructuring, and prepare a social program for employees. After the initial restructuring, it is necessary to effectuate the privatization and attract foreign capital. However, the privatization of the spa sector is the only possible option for the inflow of funds needed for reorganization and the introduction of modern methods of doing business in this area. Centralism, lack of funds, and closed market has led to a situation where the only opportunities for improvement of spa tourism are foreign direct investment.

After the mission and goals are determined, it should be established tasks that would completely satisfy the specified development objectives. Some of these tasks are presented in the orientation program that is created by the Association, as priority activities that would have, as a result, a general and comprehensive development of spa and climatic locations in Serbia:

- Develop a development strategy for spas with short - and long - term plans in cooperation with

the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Services, Tourism Organization of Serbia, and the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia, which is partly done through the development of tourism strategy in 2006;

- Support the development of spa products;
- Determine oh which market Serbia should be engaged, and which sector would have the biggest growth: Health Tourism, Wellness, Congress tourism, Transit tourism, etc.;
- Examine and accept the principles of Wellness;
- Support private initiative aimed towards wellness and creating partnerships;
- Implement education and training in health care facilities in spas and in touristic enterprises, hotels and municipalities. Association should become an indispensable factor in the process of obtaining education and degree in Wellbeing Spa Management;
- Work to develop branding, marketing and sales;
- Conduct research for its members in all areas important for their development;
- Apply the experience of the European Spa Association to qualitative changes in the development of domestic members;
- A joint organization and quality performance in trade fairs at home and abroad ([www.udruzenjebanja.co.yu/strategija.htm](http://www.udruzenjebanja.co.yu/strategija.htm)).

After determining the general elements and directions of development strategy, it is a very important step to make the analysis of market and environment in order to determine the needs and preferences of consumers of spa services, as well as modern trends in tourism development and movement. Creating the appropriate organizations in spas and differentiated package of services enables successful respond to external impulses. The best way to display the results of the analysis is the SWOT analysis in order to become aware of all the chances and risks in the market and the strengths and weaknesses in spas.

**Table 7 - SWOT analysis for spa tourism in Serbia**

<b>S (Strengthens )</b>	<b>W (Weakness)</b>
Spa tradition	Poor infrastructure
Healing and health factors	Outdated medical equipment
Highly educated experts	Lack of strategy
Cultural – historical heritage	Lack of education for new programs
Good geographical position	Lack of finance for development
Preserved environment	Lack of marketing research
Low prices of treatments	
<b>O (Opportunities)</b>	<b>T (Threats)</b>
High quality of product	Competition from other countries
Combination of spa and eco tourism	Unstable political situation
Combination of spa, mountain and MICE tourism	Influence of economic crisis
Opening the wellness hotels	Bad privatization
Good organization	Standards of quality?
Support of the Ministry	
Opening to foreign customers	

Source: *Development Program of Vrnjačka Banja 2005 – 2015, Republic Development Bureau, Belgrade and [www.udruzenjebanja.co.rs](http://www.udruzenjebanja.co.rs)*

Privatization of the spas in Serbia has not yet begun. The biggest problem is the unresolved property relations. Searching for the best model for the privatization of spas will be continued this year, according to State Secretary for Tourism at the Ministry of Economy (www.b92.net/biz/fokus/analiza.php, 27 April 2009). So far none of the attempts was successful, and the next could be nationalization of public property in the spas. According to actual state, possibilities for spas are: nationalization of public property – mainly of the health centers in spas, like in Hungary, where spas bring about 6 billions of Euros, privatization of hotels and restaurants, foreign direct investment, very desirable, Joint ventures, etc.

In Slovenia, for example, property of spas is combined - private, fund, state, municipal, corporate. This project for privatization has to be developed soon, because already spas from England are interested in investing in Serbian spas, while for investment in some other content in Serbia are interested Slovenes, who invest enough in their spas segment such as parks, golf courses, sports fields and other ways to keep the guests.

For the future privatization, it is necessary to make some changes in the Law of privatization, Law of tourism, and to create special law of Spa tourism as the strategy for development of spas. Also, the Association is engaged in preservation of the spa content and invests great efforts to make quality approach for further actions in domain of privatization and ventures in spas.

## 6. TAKEN ACTIONS IN SERBIA

However, despite the problems of the uncertain political situation, the strategy of development of spa tourism began to implement through action plans. One of the very attractive and ambitious projects was the "Support the development of spas and spa tourism in Vojvodina, which was conducted during 2008. In this project are listed as the biggest problems of development and operations of spas right:

- Legal disorder;
- Lack of ownership status;
- Lack of development of ideas.

The aim of the project "Support to the development of spas and spa tourism in Vojvodina" was to identify measures that contribute to increasing the competitiveness of Vojvodina spa investing in capacity development and enhancement and enrichment services (www.banjesrbije.net/akcionim-planom-do-razvoja-banjskog-turizma-Srbije.html). In cooperation with Hungary, there are solutions to the

idea of creating clusters of spa that gathered Serbian spas by region, in this case it just means that Vojvodina cluster included spa place on the territory of Vojvodina. Experiences of Hungary, which began the development and the promotion of spa tourism before Serbia, have shown that the definition of clusters gave the positive outcomes from the point of visiting spas because the development strategy can be differentiated according to each cluster and thereby maximize the advantages of each region.

Beside this project, at the end of 2007 the city of Kragujevac joined the project for the development of spas that triggered the Italian region Marco, Abruzzo and Veneto in order to take advantage of the natural healing potential of water from the village Voljavča. The value of the project "Termalis" was 50,000 € and the aim is to create a unique network of spas in Italy, Slovenia, Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. Local authorities, to ensure financial funds for this project, have applied to program for allocation of funds from the national investment plan, worth 44 million dinars (www.banjesrbije.net/razvoj-banjskog-turizma.html).

Another example of investment in spas is the development opportunities in Sijarinska banja, Medvedja, where Russian investors decided to build a hotel with four stars, as well as apartment village, which will be the beginning of a new era in the history of health resorts. In Sijarinska Spa, the only center of its kind in the Jablanica district, the Serbian Orthodox Church has sold 50 acres of land to Russian investors, for the construction of the hotel complex. Russian investors are interested to buy land and part of the rehabilitation center "Gejzir", and several attractive private lots (www.banjesrbije.net/poslednje-vesti/rusi-ulazu-u-razvoj-sijarinske-banje.html).

One of the first privatizations was in the spa Gornja Trepcica. The company "Bonida", which bought the spa, took over the obligation of investment of six million dinars, but the required investment was exceeded five times. This privatization was a real example of this model that the Ministry of Economy and Regional Development supports and advocates when it comes to privatization spa because the capital comes from private sector, and it is not in the relation with state budget. (www.b92.net/biz/fokus/analiza)

At the end of examples of actions that are already done, it is important to emphasize that the state started with the creation of Law of Spas, which will solve all problematic questions due to development and economic growth in spas, so as the model of privatization needed and this law will adjust regulations of spa tourism in our country with the regulations in this area in the European Union.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The Serbian spas can be said to represent one of the most important tourist resource that is definitely not used enough. This in the sense that even spa tourism has a long tradition in Serbia, at the end of the twentieth century; it has lost the contact with the modern world tendencies in the development of spa and wellness tourism. As shown in the paper, spas were passed mostly when it comes to investment plans and construction, in the last twenty years. A small number of spas have managed to adapt to the needs of modern guests of spa tourism. Only some of them were renovated in terms of increasing the accommodation capacity and the installation of modern technical achievements necessary for the provision of different types of therapy. Also, a modest number of spas has managed to accept the principles of spa and wellness centers, and to completely change its offer and focus towards the wishes and needs of modern man.

Today, the situation regarding the development of spa tourism is something different. It is more talked about the need to create specific strategies for the

development of spa tourism, outside, but in accordance with the strategy for tourism development in Serbia. The paper examine a given data quality survey research services in the spa tourism in Serbia. Research can be used as a starting point for further development and improvement of this form of tourist movements. The situation is not at the highest level, but with the help of proper management policy for tourism development, spa tourism can be lead to a level that it deserves.

National Strategy for the development of spa tourism has some very interesting details relating to the construction of infrastructure, introduction of modern equipment and technology, increase the accommodation capacity, changes in existing services and introduction of a completely innovative, interesting and extension activities with treatment and rest, entertainment, leisure, etc. Development strategy should point out the connection of tourist offer in destinations in Serbia. State has a great chance to connect ecotourism and spa tourism. Therefore, the state through the strategy expressed interest in promoting and respecting the principles of sustainable development and environmental protection.

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