

## **The Balkan balneotherapy product – an approach from the destination marketing perspective**

**Aurelia-Felicia STĂNCIOIU**

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies  
stancioiufelicia@hotmail.com

**Andreea BOTOȘ**

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies  
andreea\_botos@yahoo.com

**Ion PĂRGARU**

Polytechnic University of Bucharest  
pargaruion@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** *Considering the common features in the resources field, but especially the way in which they have been managed at the level of each individual country, it can be stated that a destination such as the Balkan peninsula represents a culturally homogeneous space, which has been crystallized over centuries of common history and which has imprinted a “common” destiny to the member countries, regarding the economic and cultural development. Regarding natural resources, the main similarity resides in the existence of balneotherapy resources, with particular therapeutic properties, nowadays’ development being pressured by the deterioration of one’s conception about its own health (from the demand perspective), on the one hand, and extending the concept of health (from the supply perspective), on the other hand. In the context of a less-controlled development of certain methods/techniques/procedures by the stakeholders of wellness industry, it is necessary to maintain the authenticity of the balneotherapy product whose essence is the treatment. The purpose of the paper relies in establishing the common elements which could form the essence of the balneotherapy product (sui generis) and, in the same time, the differentiation elements which form the developed product of each Balkan country, alongside with the establishment of joint actions, in order to set the coordinates of the regional balneotherapy marketing strategy for the Balkan peninsula.*

**Keywords:** balneotherapy product; Balkan balneotherapy product; Balkan balneotherapy marketing strategy; Balkan balneotherapy brand.

**JEL Classification:** M3, L83.

**REL Classification:** 14F, 14G.

## Introduction

Identifying the specificity of balneotherapy background starts, obviously, from the “inventory” of resources and services “composing” the place/places identity – ideally to be dominant, representative and which could be generalized in the reference frame (region, area, country, etc.), taking into account the way it is perceived by some segments of consumers (who have a set of opinions, interests, perceptions and attitudes, according to which different local resources become primary for those consumers). The balneotherapy identity, in other words, represents a necessary requisite for the tourism product positioning (set of services or destination), and, by generalizing certain characteristic features, can constitute “a development frame” likely to be integrated, as a constant, in elaborating the destination marketing strategies.

## Conceptual frame

In the attempt to build a balneotherapy-specific brand, fundamental is the acceptance, fructification, development, and, subsequently, communication of balneotherapy resources, highlighting the medical significance and effects, which involve specific procedures, in a well-defined methodological and scientific framework. These are afterwards integrated in balneotherapy destinations with certain historical-cultural components, their crystallization being represented, for the Balkan region, by the “traditional Balkan spas” – a combination between elements of balneology, climatology and environment, necessary to be integrated into both traditional and innovative structures (Karagülle, 2013).

In the context of a very broad field, as health tourism is (which can accommodate under its “umbrella” multiple other types of tourism which attract specific consumer segments with needs/requirements that divide the market very clearly - e.g., surgical, balneotherapeutic, climatological, relaxation-type etc.) – it is absolutely necessary to unambiguously define the existing resources in the reference frame, these constituting the “raw material” for the development of tourism products and/or services, outlining the category in which they shall enclose (e.g., medical tourism, balneotherapy tourism, wellness tourism, etc.). The clarification is all the more important, as the existing resources differentiate (both quantitatively and qualitatively) in the sense of therapeutic properties, impossible to be “anthropogenically rebuilt”. This is the case of the Balkan Peninsula, which is “dominated” by the existence of balneotherapy resources, in an overwhelming proportion, in comparison with other countries of Europe.

Balneotherapy (located at the core of balneotherapy tourism in the Balkans) is defined, according to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, as

“the treatment of diseases through the methodic use of thermal or mineral water and muds”. The resources, comprising mineral, thermal water springs and muds, are the natural factors used in balneotherapy resorts, rendering thus the specificity of the destinations (Teleki et al., 1984, p. 14). Hence, it results a well-defined profile of balneotherapy resorts, declared as balneotherapy touristic potential by all the profile institutions from the Balkan countries; however, it faces the current development, almost exclusive, towards relaxation and wellness, concepts partly supported by investors and consumers. Thus, for the recognition of the true identity of balneotherapy tourism, the clear delimitation of market segments related to health, in a broad sense, is necessary, by constructing a brand of Balkan balneotherapy destinations, whose rational side should contain eminently therapeutic effects of the cure factors, being then completed, on the emotional level, with the ambient rendered by the cultural specific (language, folklore, ethnography), marked by the same history and/or religion.

Integrating quality accommodation conditions or culture (in this case, multiculturalism) in the structure of a product can no longer represent mere elements of differentiation, these having become basic standards of current building tourism products processes, fact which inevitably leads to the necessity of creating an identity (Popesku, 2013). Therefore, it is required a careful analysis of all resources (natural, anthropogenic, cultural and infrastructure-type) in order to identify the proper, relevant and multidisciplinary elements, which synergistically compile a uniform and homogeneous structure – the destination’s identity. To recompose a complex and relevant touristic identity, it is necessary to integrate the balneotherapy resources, specific to the geography of the place, as mineral water springs and climate, which provide the specificity of the balneotherapy profile, through the diseases they treat and prevent, in a broader context – local, regional or even national, referring to certain generally valid features – natural, ethnic, cultural etc. Important to study as well are the activities, the interests and opinions of consumers from different regions (including the Balkan area) regarding the way in which they perceive and interact with various elements of balneotherapy destination, in order to constitute consumer segments for each type of tourism structure.

The identity of a certain balneotherapy destination should enframe or relate to the regional, national, or even transnational specific – regarding nature and culture as well as balneotherapy – in order to have consistency and support in the context of positioning towards more complex and robust structures. This analysis of balneotherapy destinations, from several perspectives, underlying a logic of comparison and contrast in relation to other balneotherapy destinations’ identity, resembles the determination of “focal length”, so as to measure the power of convergence or divergence towards other systems.

Thus, considered at a local, national, regional or continental level, the balneotherapy identity can confine various “models” of composition and recomposition of resources and their exploitation, whether they are natural, cultural, infrastructural or even human, which would lead to the construction of a balneotherapy tourism brand. In this context, shaping the Romanian balneotherapy identity, and, subsequently, identifying the joints with the regional one (of the Balkan Peninsula, in general, or of the countries that compose it, individually), along with the way of organizing and managing them, can constitute one of the premises of the marketing planning of each country/destination, and, respectively, of building the Balkan balneotherapy brand.

The authenticity of balneotherapy destinations (as “tourism constructions”) regarded as a key-element of the balneotherapy resorts in the Balkan space, is evaluated by criteria such as: natural resources, especially balneotherapy-type, architecture, history, social life, spoken language, gastronomy, customs and traditions, landscapes, infrastructure, colors, plants, community, art and religion. Beyond the existence of a common field of resources, the “background” similarities (which can compose a new statement, that of “diversity in unity”) indicate the possibility of creating a common brand, Balkan-type, containing certain “Balkan clusters”, according to the common products and services and to the existence of potential consumer segments (in terms of consumers sharing the same visions and attitudes), while the distinctive elements offer, at the same time, variety to the “Balkan route”, specificity to the place and consistent authenticity to the brand.

### **Operational framework**

The specific element of the Balkan area is, in general, the existence of pure water, especially represented by thermal, mineral, sea waters with a background of a favorable climate, altogether constituting the main requisites for the development of balneotherapy tourism, accepted and promoted by the specialized institutions of each country. The fact that these mineral and thermal waters are used for therapeutic, curative purposes, due to their properties, places balneotherapy tourism in the Balkans, mainly, in the area of medical tourism, of therapeutic cures, hydrotherapy, in this context, being the traditional procedure which is common to all Balkan countries. The traditional medicine specific to the Balkans is closely related to the each country’s religion, whereas, in the past, in the entire peninsula, the clergymen substituted the role of physicians. Therefore, faith and culture for health are the two main axes which define the Balkan Peninsula, considering the strong connection between them and the importance given by the inhabitants of the Balkan countries, found at the attitudes’ level. Another

important element of Balkan traditional medicine is represented by the use of medicinal plants in the treatments from balneotherapy resorts and not only, with auxilliary effects or reinforcing the effects of mineral waters. All these common features of the resources found in the balneotherapy resorts of Balkan countries are transcribed into similar SWOT analysis, in which the strengths and weaknesses could be the basis of a common strategy. The opportunities and threats (also similar) are mainly based on the fact that Balkan countries are, to a large extent, at the same level of national development (representing neighboring areas which have favored the trade in all its forms during centuries); thus, it can be stated that the analysis of the cultural, political, social, technological and economic environment presents similar results for the concerne countries, providing the premises of considering the Balkans as an “entity with identity”.

In other words, in this way it can be favoured the creation of a balneotherapy brand, enrolled in an identitary space, especially cultural, well-rounded, of the Balkans; also considering the fact that health represents, to a large extent, also culture, the belief of certain cultural spaces, imbedded over time due to history, aim at the existence of *homo balcanicus*. Following the exchanges between Thracian and Greek factors, the influence of the “Macedonian federalism” and the Romanization, considering the road networks built by the Romans, a perpetuation of culture occurred. This became, in time, a homogeneous Balkan culture, shaped by the unifying influence of Byzantium, by the Slavic factor as well as by Islam, which imprinted a unique identity to Balkan Peninsula (Mesnil, Popova, 2007, pp. 47-48).

In order to ensure a Balkan-based developed product is necessary to align all elements which complete the Balkan identity, defining as many aspects of the lifestyle and experience in a Balkan balneotherapy resort. The purpose of building this “tourism alliance”, whose aim is to create the tourism brand, is, firstly, a better positioning (according to the local identity) of each resort in each Balkan country, part of a system in which the trust capital of each country (in the consumer’s opinion) has a contribution in raising the capital of all other countries and in standardizing the Balkan health-related characteristics. Sharing the same field of resources, in a purely declarative way, is certainly not sufficient in order to build a brand. This process includes collaboration between countries, for the purpose of an exchange of experience and knowledge that aim to educate, research and establish a framework for marketing cooperation by connecting the specialized institutions in each country with similar institutions/organizations in the Balkan area (Stanišić, 2013). In addition, other advantages of the Balkan brand are represented by facilitating the creation of Balkan-themed routes and circuits, with health as focus point, and, of course, by the default creation of a larger market for new tourism products, however respecting the same structure of segments, considering the psychographic and behavioral criteria of the Balkan tourists.

According to Smith and Puczkó, the resorts in South-East Europe are in the development phase in which most services are sponsored by the state or by the union (Smith, Puczkó, 2009, p. 26), framing in the category of “traditional spas”, where the main activities are represented by mineral water baths, massages and sauna, focusing on the physical side of healing, curative, medical, to which seniors with various diseases appeal (Smith, Puczkó, 2009, p. 134).

Starting from the existence of “traditional” resources (mineral waters on a favorable climate background, presented as “balneotherapy” since the Roman times), as well as from the fact that in all Balkan balneotherapy resorts exists the possibility that medical rehabilitation is applied within the health cures, the objectives of each Balkan country’s institutions could and should, in the context of “health for each and everyone”, regard the tourism product development, through supplementing the “treatment” product with relaxation, wellness, sport etc. to as many potential consumer segments as possible.

A common element for the future Balkan balneotherapy product (*sui generis*) could be considered the gastronomy, especially the ingredients specific to the region. Closely related to the idea of health, gastronomy in the case of Balkans, is strongly influenced by the Mediterranean cuisine, combining similar products of meat, such as kebab, pljeskavica, ćevapčići, forcemeat rolls in cabbage leaves, moussaka (with local herbs and spices, such as oregano, coriander, cumin etc.). Some of them are common to all Balkan countries, having a high degree of awareness and consumption, such as the halvah, moussaka and yoghurt. The plants are, also, of great importance in health recovery or disease prevention in the Balkan countries, not only in balneotherapy destinations, but also through the entire region, with a Balkan culture for natural treatments integrated in the traditional medicine (e.g., the chamomile). In this regard, given that natural resources allow their cultivation and growth, plants represent key-factors in combination with other methods of treatment, especially since the reference destinations should provide to potential tourists multiple possibilities to recover and maintain their health, in an environment of rest and relaxation.

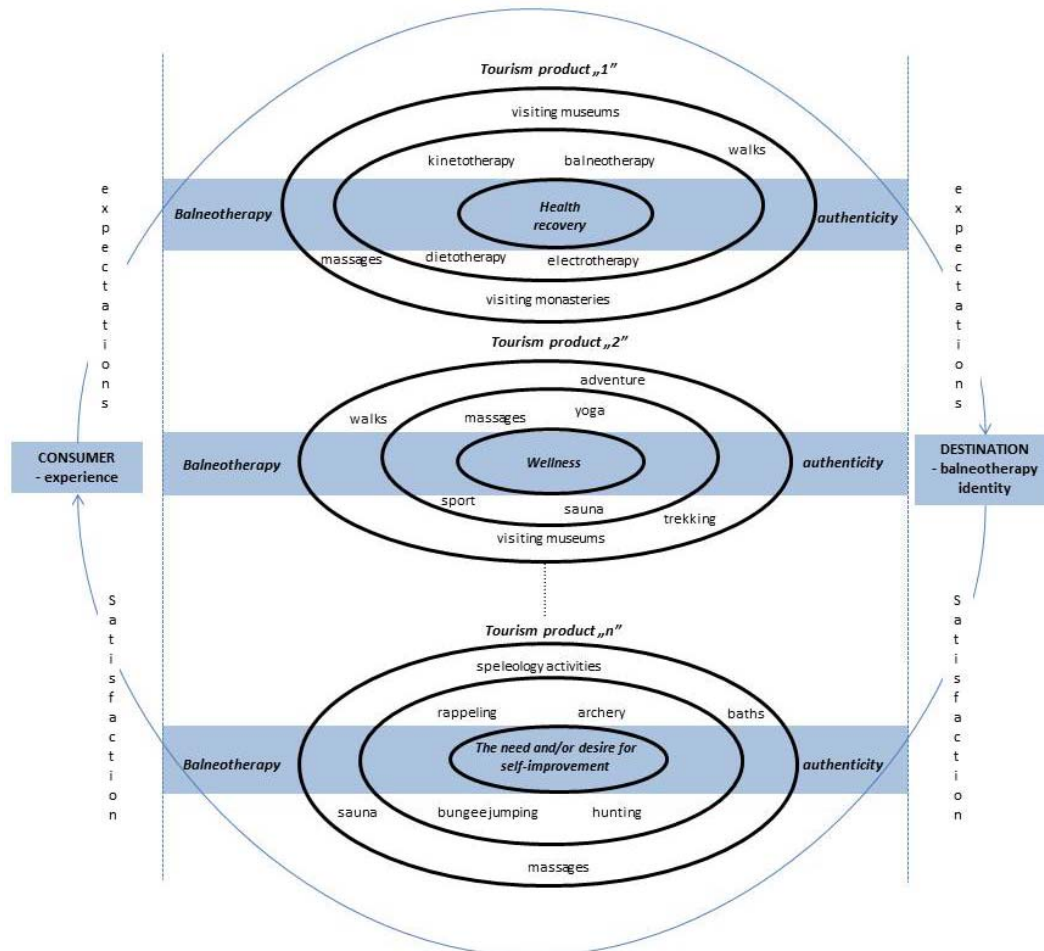
In addition, healing by means of nature, elevated to ritual status, is present in the Balkan culture both by the production and consumption of honey and other bee products for therapeutic purposes (besides, honey, along with the word “blood”, represents a building element in the etymology of the word Balkan). The existence of a wide variety of bee products on the Balkan territory, designed for different conditions, doubled by the existing culture for honey consumption could be a vital element in building complex tourism products, in which authenticity, expressed by a common culture of consumption, can be highlighted through elements on all levels of the product (e.g., chestnut honey, typical Croatian, can be

used to regulate blood flow, taking into account the disinfecting power of thyme or pine honey, specific Greek – Table 1). The exceptional curative effects belong to local natural herbal teas as well, such as the sedative actions of chamomile, the digestive actions of hyssop (pertaining to all Balkan countries), tonic effects of sage (Albania), stimulating effects on respiration and circulation centers of anise (Bulgaria) and antidepressive effects of cedar (originally from Turkey).

**Table 1.** Examples of elements entering in the composition of the “basic Balkan balneotherapy product”

	Balneotherapy resources	Honey	Plants
<b>Romania</b>	Over 3,000 thermal springs and 70 medical destinations	Linden honey (with sedative effects, used for combating insomnia and respiratory diseases) Acacia honey (with diuretic, sedative effects, used for combating liver diseases)	Hyssop, Devil's Grass, Chamomile, Basil, Thyme, Cumin, Coriander, Bay
<b>Albania</b>	Geothermal waters	Acacia honey (used for combating metabolic and nutritional diseases)	Thyme, Oregano, Hyssop, Gentian, Devil's Grass, Sage, Peony
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	Hiperthermal, termomineral, calcic and sodic waters	Acacia honey (with diuretic, sedative effects, used for combating liver diseases)	Hyssop, Devil's Grass
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Mineral waters (over 800 springs) Curative gases Peloids Favorable climate	Acacia honey (used for combating metabolic and nutritional diseases) Rose honey (used for combating rashes)	Hyssop, Devil's Grass, Anise
<b>Greece</b>	Seawater for thalassotherapy	Thyme honey (with antiseptic effects)	Parsley, Hyssop, Devil's Grass, Sage, Horsetail
<b>Montenegro</b>	Radioactive mineral waters	Mint honey (for combating stomach diseases) Linden honey (with sedative effects, used for combating insomnia and respiratory diseases) Acacia honey (with diuretic, sedative effects, used for combating liver diseases)	Hyssop, Devil's Grass
<b>Macedonia</b>	Geothermal waters (eight resorts)	Wildflower honey (with anti-allergenic effects)	Hyssop, Devil's Grass
<b>Serbia</b>	Mineral and thermal waters Favorable climate Curative gases Peloids	Acacia honey (used for combating metabolic and nutritional diseases)	Hyssop, Devil's Grass
<b>Croatia</b>	Peloids Bio baths	Chestnut honey (used for combating metabolic and nutritional diseases)	Hyssop, Devil's Grass
<b>Slovenia</b>	Thermal waters Wellness centres Sport	<i>Apis mellifera carnica</i> (with antioxidant effects)	Hyssop, Devil's Grass
<b>Turkey</b>	Thermal waters	Pine honey (for reducing toxins, for combating respiratory diseases) Chestnut honey (used for combating metabolic and nutritional diseases) Thyme honey (with antiseptic effects) Flower honey (with antibacterial effects) Linden honey (with sedative effects, used for combating insomnia and respiratory diseases) Citrus honey (with sedative effects)	Hyssop, Devil's Grass, Sage, Horsetail, Cypress, Cedar

A very important biunique relationship for the Balkan balneotherapy brand is represented by the relationship between the consumer experience and the balneotherapy tradition/identity resort/balneotherapy destination brand, characterizing the circle consumer – product/products – destination (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The biunique relationship between consumer, product/products and destination

Therefore, in shaping tourism products and, respectively, in supporting the balneotherapy brand, important as well are the brands of products and/or services which compose the balneotherapy experience in each country. In this sense, the tradition for treatment and healing needs to be valorized and supported by authentic and innovative products (e.g., the products created by Ana Aslan – in Romania – or products of reference companies, such as Apian – in Bulgaria). It is



necessary that renowned brands form a “network of health products in the Balkans”, in order to strengthen the identity of the peninsula in terms of this kind of understanding health and practicing medicine, based on the natural resources, whether they are represented by water, climate, plants, offered in a similar cultural, architectural, historical framework.

Although not all countries share the same main religion (mostly orthodox), the common point which connects the Balkan countries is the strong belief in divinity and the importance of religion in the development of daily life. This approach specific to Balkans, along with the presence of multiple churches, allows the development of religious tourism, as a secondary product, within cultural tourism, customary in balneotherapy resorts (most of them having a strong historical background, with still alive testimonies) or as part of health tourism, aiming at the “health” of the spirit, by completing bodily health with the feeling of peace and purification of the soul.

The fact that history and, implicitly, cultural and ethnic influences related to social axes, attitudes, opinions, activities and their testimonies, contained within the Balkan Peninsula, are very similar (some current countries have been a single state in the past, e.g., Yugoslavia, formed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Slovenia), has reflected in the “exterior” as well as in the “interior” of the countries concerned, and, thus, of the balneotherapy destinations, whose identity is closely related to the national one. Therefore, the architectural styles are largely due to the domination or influence of some of the more developed peoples upon some less developed peoples (e.g., the case of Turkish architecture in Albania etc.), fact which led to the homogenization of architectural styles in the Balkan Peninsula. History also explains, on the other hand, the similarity of customs, traditions and of the way of considering the main “forces” of the existence, high lighted by the similarity of rituals (e.g. the similar rituals regarding weddings and funerals), but also by the main forms of artistic expression (with the way of living as an inspiration).

In order to develop common product strategies, the first step is represented by the market analysis, respectively the segmentation of Balkan market, with the purpose of creating those tourism products which would lead to the consumer satisfaction of tourism products. This approach should consider rational criteria of choosing balneotherapy resorts (treating various disorders) as well as emotional criteria (from the perspective of “resort personality” and the ambient-related attributes in general).

It is therefore necessary that all the elements considered (natural cure factors and related elements) are prioritized and organized in each country, depending on certain relevant segmentation criteria, using the tourism product levels, with the

consideration of the strategic directions contained in the national strategies for balneotherapy tourism.

In Romania's case, given the exceptional background of therapeutic resources, segmentation is required, conducted in the first stage after the disease criterion. The most common diseases in Romania, according to the Statistical Yearbook of 2011, are the respiratory disease (6,984,000 people), the digestive diseases (1,646,000 people), the musculoskeletal system diseases (1,365,000 inhabitants), the nervous system diseases (1,306,000 inhabitants) and the genitourinary system diseases (1,075,000 inhabitants). These constitute, thus, motivations for the main markets of balneotherapy tourism in Romania, segregated in turn, according to the relation of potential patients/tourists to them, in different stages: recovery, treatment, secondary and primary prevention.

According to the "formula of identity", applicable to Romania as well as to the entire Balkan region, the tourism resources (therapeutic and non-therapeutic), viewed from a marketing perspective, could be presented as a single product – integrative, with its components being engineered according to every product structure, proposed by Philip Kotler, on three levels.

The essence of the product, represented by the first level, invariably contains natural cure factors, which would heal each of the major diseases considered (in balneotherapy resorts where procedures are performed for each of the analyzed disease stages). They have been clarified, according to the current legislation in Romania, namely therapeutical use of mineral waters, hydrotherapy, application of therapeutic mud and gases, the existence of therapeutic parks, the possibility of practicing kinetotherapy, occupational and massage therapy, electrotherapy and respiratory therapy (The technical unitary rules to achieve the complex documentation of attesting the functionality of balneotherapy, climatic and balneoclimatic resorts and of organizing the entire activity for the use of natural factors, from 23.07.2004, Art. 18). On the first level as well, phyto- and api-therapeutic resources could be added, which have the role of completing health recovery/disease prevention (e.g., using horse radish or apple cure alongside with the balneotherapy treatments for curing digestive diseases).

The second level, the tangible product, encompasses the named resources within the product offered to the consumer, which, along with the accomodation, treatment etc. suppliers, lead to a more exact positioning of the resort.

The developed product, on the third level, includes, in addition to the aforementioned elements, those which help the tourism experience develop, inside or outside the "destination perimeter", such as cultural, natural, ecotourism resources, etc.

It is necessary that this manner of organizing the tourism product is applied for each type of tourism product, designed according to the main types of diseases that can be cured/remissive/prevented with the aid of the balneotherapy destination resources.

Representing “a compendium of examples”, the tables 2-6 present the proposed tourism products, at a “large-scale”, designed according to the type of the disease being treated by the consumer and depending on the specificity of the destinations (the type of tourism resources).

Thus, in Table 2, in the case of respiratory diseases (most commonly found in Romania), out of the most important resorts, such as Slănic-Moldova, Băile Govora and Slănic Prahova, Slănic-Moldova has been chosen as an example for recovery from, Eforie Nord, for treatment, and Techirghiol, for preventing a possible recurrence of respiratory diseases, but also for primary prevention.

**Table 2.** *The structure and levels of balneotherapy products offered for the treatment of respiratory diseases in Romania*

<b>RESPIRATORY DISEASES</b>				
<b>Cure Level</b>	<b>Recovery</b>	<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Secondary prophylaxis</b>	<b>Primary prophylaxis</b>
<b>Resort</b>	<b>Slănic-Moldova</b>	<b>Eforie Nord</b>	<b>Techirghiol</b>	<b>Techirghiol</b>
Level I	Natural cure factors for the recovery after respiratory diseases Additional element: linden honey etc.	Natural cure factors for the treatment of respiratory diseases Additional elements: Glecoma hederacea, linden honey, seawater etc.	Natural cure factors for secondary prophylaxis of respiratory diseases Additional elements: horse tail, linden honey etc.	Natural cure factors for primary prophylaxis of respiratory diseases Additional element: linden honey etc.
Level II	Springs: 1bis, 3, 6, 15 Treatment services: respiratory therapy (practiced, e.g., in Euro Vacanța Complex etc.) Auxilliary services: sauna, leisure etc.	Treatment services: respiratory therapy (practiced, e.g., in Europa Hotel, Grand Hotel, Efosan Sanatorium etc.) Auxilliary services: sport, sauna, leisure etc.	Treatment services offered e.g., by Techirghiol Sanatorium (e.g. baths with salt water from the lake and mud baths)	Treatment services offered e.g., by Techirghiol Sanatorium (e.g., plant baths, under-water shower etc.) Auxilliary services: beauty services etc.
Level III	Recreative activities (walks in the park from Slănic-Moldova, visiting the Gorges and waterfall of Slănic) Mountain-based activities (crossing the route „300 stairs”) Cultural activities (visiting the Catholic Church, the salt works from Târgu Ocna)	Recreative activities (time spent at the beach, rides with the boat or hydro-bicycle) Sports activities (practicing sports such as football, tennis, basket, volleyball) Adventure-based activities (practicing diving or other nautical sports)	Recreative activities (time spent at the beach, rides with the boat or hydro-bicycle) Sports activities (practicing sports such as football, tennis, basket, volleyball)	Recreative activities (time spent at the beach, rides with the boat or hydro-bicycle) Sports activities (practicing sports such as football, tennis, basket, volleyball)

In the case of digestive diseases, widespread in Romania as well, there were selected Covasna (for recovery, secondary and primary prevention) and Slănic-Moldova, for treatment, according to the resources of the two destinations (Table 3).

**Table 3.** *The structure and levels of balneotherapy products offered for the treatment of digestive diseases in Romania*

<b>DIGESTIVE DISEASES</b>				
<b>Cure Level</b>	<b>Recovery</b>	<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Secondary prophylaxis</b>	<b>Primary prophylaxis</b>
<b>Resort</b>	<b>Covasna</b>	<b>Slănic-Moldova</b>	<b>Covasna</b>	<b>Covasna</b>
Level I	Natural cure factors for recovery after digestive diseases Additional element: Biborțeni water etc.	Natural cure factors for the treatment of digestive diseases Additional element: apple vinegar etc.	Natural cure factors for the secondary prophylaxis of digestive diseases Additional element: horseradish etc.	Natural cure factors for the primary prophylaxis of digestive diseases Additional element: apple cure etc.
Level II	Springs: Olteni springs Treatment services: treatment for digestive diseases (practiced, e.g., in Montana Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: gym and other sportactivities etc.	Springs: 3,14, 15, Bore 2 Treatment services: treatment for digestive diseases (practiced, e.g., in Euro Vacanța Complex etc.) Auxilliary services: sport, sauna, leisure etc.	Springs: Olteni springs Treatment services: treatment for digestive diseases (practiced, e.g., in Montana Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: gym and other sport activities etc.	Springs: Olteni springs Treatment services: treatment for digestive diseases (practiced, e.g., in Montana Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: anti-stress and relaxation procedures, gym and other sport activities etc.
Level III	Cultural activities (visiting the ruins of dacic citadel of Dealul Zânelor) Nature-based activities (visiting the reservation Balta Dracului)	Recreative activities (walks in the park from Slănic-Moldova, visiting the Gorge sand waterfall of Slănic) Mountain-based activities (crossing the route „300 stairs”) Cultural activities (visiting the Catholic Church, the salt works from Târgu Ocna)	Cultural activities (visiting the ruins of dacic citadel of Dealul Zânelor) Nature-based activities (visiting the reservation Balta Dracului)	Cultural activities (visiting the ruins of daciccitadelof Dealul Zânelor) Nature-based activities (visiting the reservation Balta Dracului)

In the case of osteo-articular and muscular system, for recovery and treatment, among the most important resorts, such as Băile Herculane, Băile Felix and the seaside resorts, Băile Herculane resort has been chosen, as an example, and for the secondary and primary prophylaxis – Călimănești-Căciulata resort (Table 4).

**Table 4.** *The structure and levels of balneotherapy products offered for the treatment of osteo-articular and muscular system diseases in Romania*

<b>OSTEO-ARTICULAR AND MUSCULAR SYSTEM DISEASES</b>				
<b>Cure Level</b>	<b>Recovery</b>	<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Secondary prophylaxis</b>	<b>Primary prophylaxis</b>
<b>Resort</b>	<b>Băile Herculane</b>	<b>Băile Herculane</b>	<b>Călimănești-Căciulata</b>	<b>Călimănești-Căciulata</b>
Level I	Natural cure factors for the recovery after osteo-articular and muscular system diseases	Natural cure factors for the treatment of osteo-articular and muscular system diseases	Natural cure factors for secondary prophylaxis of osteo-articular and muscular system diseases	Natural cure factors for primary prophylaxis of osteo-articular and muscular system diseases
Level II	Treatment services: baths in thermal water pools, galvanic baths, electro-, magneto-therapy, medical gymnastics (practiced, e.g., at Ferdinand Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: acupuncture etc.	Treatment services: baths in thermal water pools, galvanic baths, electro-, magneto-therapy, medical gymnastics (practiced, e.g., at Ferdinand Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: acupuncture, fitness etc.	Treatment services: prophylactic kinetotherapy (practiced, e.g., at Orizont Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: swimming in fresh and salt water pools, sauna, Turkish baths, water massage etc.	Treatment services: prophylactic kinetotherapy (practiced, e.g., at Orizont Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: swimming in fresh and salt water pools, sauna, jacuzzi, Turkish baths, Vichy shower etc.
Level III	Nature-based activities (trekking until Vânturătoarea waterfall, visiting Grota cu aburi, Grota haiducilor)	Nature-based activities (trekking until Vânturătoarea waterfall, visiting Grota cu aburi, Grota haiducilor)	Cultural activities (walk until roman camp Arutela, Stânișoara monastery) Nature-based activities (trekking until Gardului waterfall)	Cultural activities (walk until roman camp Arutela, Stânișoara monastery) Nature-based activities (trekking until Gardului waterfall)

Nervous system diseases can be treated in Romania, among others, in Băile Felix – for recovery and treatment, and in Băile Tușnad – for secondary and primary prophylaxis. The tangible product has been contoured according to the tourism infrastructure created around the resources and third level corresponds to certain related activities, in order to complete/expand the tourism product (Table 5).

**Table 5.** *The structure and levels of balneotherapy products offered for the treatment of nervous system diseases in Romania*

<b>NERVOUS SYSTEM DISEASES</b>				
<b>Cure Level</b>	<b>Recovery</b>	<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Secondary prophylaxis</b>	<b>Primary prophylaxis</b>
<b>Resort</b>	<b>Băile Felix</b>	<b>Băile Felix</b>	<b>Băile Tușnad</b>	<b>Băile Tușnad</b>
Level I	Natural cure factors for the recovery after nervous system diseases Additional element: saffron etc.	Natural cure factors for the treatment of nervous system diseases Additional element: "The herbs of life" (bitter made from traditional Romanian plants) etc.	Natural cure factors for the secondary prophylaxis of nervous system diseases Additional element: peas, royal jelly etc.	Natural cure factors for the primary prophylaxis of nervous system diseases Additional element: peas etc.
Level II	Treatment services: kinetherapy in thermal mineral water pools, warm mud wrap, physiotherapy, inhalations and aerosols (practiced, e.g., in President Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: gym, sauna etc.	Treatment services: kinetherapy in thermal mineral water pools, warm mud wrap, physiotherapy, inhalations and aerosols (practiced, e.g., in President Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: gym, sauna, swimming etc.	Treatment services: facilities for the treatment of nervous system (offered, e.g., in Ciucaș Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: gym, electrotherapy devices, carbonated baths, salt works, baths in mesothermal pools etc.	Treatment services: facilities for the treatment of nervous system (offered, e.g., in Ciucaș Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: gym, electrotherapy, salt works, baths in mesothermal pools etc.
Level III	Nature-based activities (visiting the park with old oaks, the balneotherapy park) Speleology activities Sports activities (practicing sports such as tennis, fishing, cycling)	Nature-based activities (visiting the park with old oaks, the balneotherapy park) Speleology activities Sports activities (practicing sports such as tennis, fishing, cycling)	Sports activities (fishing in Olt river, crossing the route Valea Minelor) Recreative activities (trekking at Saint Ana lake)	Sports activities (fishing in Olt river, crossing the route Valea Minelor) Recreative activities (trekking at Saint Ana lake)

From the resorts specialised in the balneotherapy treatment of the genital organs diseases, recognized as being important are Sovata and Techirghiol; Sovata has been chosen as an example for this case (Table 6).

**Table 6.** *The structure and levels of balneotherapy products offered for the treatment of genital organs diseases in Romania*

<b>GENITAL ORGANS DISEASES</b>				
<b>Cure Level</b>	<b>Recovery</b>	<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Secondary prophylaxis</b>	<b>Primary prophylaxis</b>
<b>Stațiune</b>	<b>Sovata</b>	<b>Sovata</b>	<b>Sovata</b>	<b>Sovata</b>
Level I	Natural cure factors for the recovery after genital organs diseases	Natural cure factors for the treatment of genital organs diseases	Natural cure factors for the secondary prophylaxis of genital organs diseases	Natural cure factors for the primary prophylaxis of genital organs diseases Additional element: horse tail etc.
Level II	Treatment services: salt water baths, medical massage, electrotherapy, paraffin and mud wraps (offered, e.g., in Sovata Hotel etc.)	Treatment services: salt water baths, medical massage, electrotherapy, paraffin and mud wraps (offered, e.g., in Sovata Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: fitness etc.	Treatment services: salt water baths, mud and paraffin wraps (offered, e.g., atSovata Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, kinetotherapy, therapeutic massage, plant baths, saline therapy etc.	Treatment services: saltwater baths, partial mud wraps (offered, e.g., at Aluniș Hotel etc.) Auxilliary services: hydrotherapy, relaxing massage, saline therapy etc.
Level III	Nature-based activities (visiting the salt mountain, Praid salt works, trip with "Mocănița")	Nature-based activities (visiting the salt mountain, Praid saltworks, trip with "Mocănița")	Nature-based activities (visiting the salt mountain, Praid salt works, trekking to Cireșelu Peak or Saca Hill, trip with "Mocănița") Agrotouristic activities (at the rural-specific guesthouses)	Nature-based activities (visiting the salt mountain, Praid salt works, trip with "Mocănița") Agrotouristic activities (at the rural-specific guesthouses)

Within marketing planning for balneotherapy tourism, setting objectives, respectively, coordinating individual marketing strategies (for each balneotherapy destination) should be translated into common actions for each targeted market/market segment, consistent with the strategic directions which have been set for the Balkan area.

Subsequent to the establishment of clearly-defined national balneotherapy products, there can be created structures – “balneotherapy cluster” type – according to certain common characteristics of countries that can provide products with the same structure (in which the component elements of the destination are placed on multiple “layers”), in a common product strategy. The essence of baleotherapy tourism products shall invariably have, as a key element, the therapeutic procedures with natural cure factors, which is the main benefit of the potential consumers, in relation to the identity of the destination. Basically, these shall be “transformed” in criteria for the basic balneotherapy product, necessary to

be accepted and shared as common values (with a Balkan identity) of all member countries, which shall act as “security boundaries” of the traditional balneotherapy product, the main benefit of the consumer being the prevention/recovery/preservation of health by natural factors.

The destination ambient, created around the balneotherapy services, needs to comply, according to the Balkan culture, to the traditional style, with the establishment of rules regarding the preservation of the natural environment (especially the air) and the rural traditions, where appropriate, fact which implicitly assumes the creation of “cultural alliances”, revolving around common elements (e.g., the balneotherapy resorts built by the Romans, a common chapter in the history and development of the Balkans). Along with the immobile components of the destination (e.g., treatment procedures, accommodation, food, tourist attractions), whose consumption is strictly related to the presence in the destination, the existence of mobile products (e.g., associated natural products, herbal, that can be commercialised outside the destination or national-specific health products) may constitute a part of a new Balkan tourism product, keeping the elements of place identity (e.g., the use of Ana Aslan products which have rejuvenation programs, the use of Croatian bee products in Romanian resorts that have a metabolic and nutritional disease profile etc.).

In this context, the product structure may be modified depending on the target market segment, proportionally developing with the segmentation criteria, starting with age (Table 7), lifestyle, personality, sex etc., making an attempt for a combination between the rational component, in terms of specific diseases, admitted as necessities of each age group and the emotional component, in terms of “resort personality” and attributes related to their condition.

**Table 7.** *Balneotherapy product(products)/market (markets) matrix*

Market	YOUNG			ADULT			SENIOR		
Product	Treat-ment	Pre-ven-tion	Rela-xation	Treat-ment	Pre-ven-tion	Rela-xation	Treat-ment	Pre-ven-tion	Rela-xation
Product level									
Product essence									
Tangible product									
Developed product									

In order to identify “Balkan-widespread solutions” it is necessary to elaborate the product/market matrix, according to which the constitutive elements of the Balkan brand could be established.



## Conclusions

In tourism (in this case, for the Balkans), an identity product should have the essence formed of identity resources and can be distinguished by the natural therapeutic factors used in balneotherapy, hence the very essence of the main tourist product. Therefore, the Balkan balneotherapy product (*sui generis*) can take multiple shapes, depending on the existing/treatable conditions, and, subsequently, on the services that are suitable to be developed within the tangible product, respectively, of the developed product, along with cultural, rural etc. activities, by and for the aggregation forces of the member countries, in order to create alliances and/or joint strategic levels, so as to add value and coherence to the balneotherapy phenomenon.

Therefore, through a common product strategy, addressed to a “relatively homogeneous market segment”, with clear and specific balneotherapy needs, various external activities would be integrated. They have the role of completing/enriching the undeniable essence, specific to the balneotherapy product of every country (represented by the natural factors and their use), with procedures and activities related not only to the physical health, but also to the tourists’ state of wellness, in general.

The optimal modality to implement this approach, of an “undisputed health”, of medical-scientific nature, in all countries where balneotherapy resources represent differentiation elements, is their comprehension and all the related elements (inseparable, concerning destinations), in a common construct, an umbrella-brand, starting from the standards set at each level of the tourism product, that transforms these differentiation elements into unique elements (compared to other regions with tradition in health tourism).

Considering the double, solid structure, regarding the common resources background (balneotherapy, natural, cultural, historical, artistic etc., that may be the basis of a Balkan brand) and the profile of potential consumers constituting the domestic Balkan tourism market, which mainly have the same motivations for choosing the type of balneotherapy destination resort, the development direction of the “historical spas” is to meet the need of each and everyone – to benefit from health services.

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