

Mode of Operation of Greek Spas and their Effect on the Rehabilitation and Improvement of the Quality of Life of People with Musculoskeletal Problems



Ioannidou , M.¹, Malliou , P.², Costa, G.³, Taxildaris , K.⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Democritus University of Thrace, Faculty of Science of Physical Education and Sports, 69100 Komotini

SUMMARY: Purpose: The reference point of this research was the investigation of the structure of the Greek spa towns, the services offered, the perspective of their development in the light of the science of physical education. Method: The sample consisted of thirty-two spa towns from all over the Greek territory. A questionnaire was created which was sent to all the officially organized spa towns in Greece and was addressed to those responsible for the organization and operation of each spa town. Results: The data obtained from the answers to the questionnaires were processed with statistical analysis - SPSS program. It turned out that most spa towns in Greece operate on a five-month basis, have customers aged 50-70 years mainly and the visit to a spa town is for therapeutic purposes. There is no infrastructure to carry out sports activities, physical activities as well as leisure and leisure activities. The specialized staff is not always employed and planning is required to provide quality services to customers, and more and varied services to satisfy more types of customers and tourists. Conclusions: The science of physical education can play a particularly valuable role in the future development of Greek spa towns and rehabilitation centers. Bath therapy as a means of restoring and improving the quality of life can be a challenge for the science of physical education. Planning and appropriate actions are required to upgrade the services provided so that the spa towns can finally take their rightful place on the international stage.

KEYWORDS: thermalism, hydrotherapy, recreation, physical education

INTRODUCTION

This specific research takes on special importance if one considers the absence of relevant research on the specific subject as well as the comparative advantage due to the natural wealth that our country has over other countries in combination with its utilization potential. The reference point of this research was the investigation of the structure of the Greek spa towns, the services offered, the perspective of their development in the light of the science of physical education.

Thermalism includes a set of organized and mutually complementary actions, with the dominant element being the use of Thermal water, to prevent and maintain and restore the physical and mental well-being and health of man. Hydrotherapy in ancient times was based on purely empirical foundations. The great ancient choral poet Pindar praised the warm "baths of the nymphs" because they contributed both to the purity of the body and its toning. Herodotus (484 – 410 BC) is the first observer of the thermal waters, the springs with healing properties. He described certain thermal springs and recommended bath therapy and this should be done at certain times of the year and for 21 continuous days (Sarakiotis, 1999). Also, Herodotus mentions the thermal springs of the Tearos river in Thrace (Evangelopoulos, 1985). "Salus per aquae" are the words whose initial letters make up the word Spa, they are words of the Latin language and mean "Health through water" as the ancient Romans said, justifying the characterization of the spa town as the ideal place for rejuvenation, relaxation, and health. Hydrotherapy, in general, is a fun, enjoyable activity that includes many physical, psychological, mental, and recreational benefits that excite participants, therapists, and trainers (Masiero et al ., 2020, Lepore, Gayle, and Stevens, 1998). Water programs that use medical methods such as hydrotherapy and therapeutic exercises in water often fall under the category of Hydrotherapy. A fully adequate person should have a satisfactory level of performance in a variety of physical activities but also display social adaptability, emotional stability, mental effectiveness, and positive moral and cultural competence. This means psycho-spiritual, social, and physical competence (Cohen et al ., 2006). Bath therapy is the immersion of the whole body or part of it in some material (water, mud) for therapeutic purposes. The method of its application is with baths, strains, wraps, patches, mud baths, hydromassage - whirlpool baths (Karamanis, 2020). Therapeutic exercises in the water are movements in the water that are specifically and personally recommended to each interested party. Therapeutic water exercise protocols must be created by licensed physiologists and conducted under the direction of physical therapists, coaches, and Physical Education teachers as well as physical therapists trained in water activities and hydrotherapy. Water programs that use

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medical methods such as hydrotherapy and therapeutic exercises in water affect effectively the quality of life (Costantino et al, 2021).

QUALITY OF LIFE

The term "Quality of Life" is often used vaguely and without a clear definition (Li, 2020, Faka, 2020). This is not surprising if one considers the wide range covered by a concept, which includes: a) physical functioning (ability to carry out daily activities e.g. self-maintenance, ability to walk), b) psychological functioning (emotional and mental health) & c) social functionality (relationships with others, participation in social activities) (Naughton et . et al ., 1996, Riiser et all ., 2020). The concept of quality of life is closely related to the definition of health by the World Health Organization (WHO), as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not only the absence of disease or disability (Christodoulou et al ., 2018). In 1982, Kaplan and Bush proposed the term "Health-related Quality of Life" (Health-related Quality of Life), to separate from the general term Quality of Life the aspects related to the individual's health status. The specific term incorporates three main areas: the subjective assessment of the person's functional status, the effect of the health status on the person's functioning, and the limitation of functioning in those areas necessary for the person to be able to realize the intended goals of life. The concept "Quality of Life" is identified with the subjective feeling of happiness, which is the result of the balance of the following factors: The functional state of the person, his physical-biological symptoms, his emotional and cognitive state, and his social state. In general, it is widely believed that Quality of Life should include aspects related to a person's physical, psychological, social, and general health status (Mygind et al., 2019).

Leisure is recorded a) as a tendency of the individual to satisfy some inner desire, b) it is defined within the framework of free time, c) it is important for the individual personally but also society, d) it is a type of physical and spiritual upliftment and e) is generally a pleasant experience (Liu et all, 2022, Torkildsen, 1999). Recreation includes not only outdoor activities but also a set of physical and mental activities, where engaging in them can lead to physical, mental, and spiritual benefits for the participants (Scherl, 1989, Mufid et al., 2021). According to Carpenter & Howe (1985), its main characteristics are that a) it is active and b) it takes place during free time. While according to Hurd et al., (2021), recreation is voluntary, its outcomes are positive, and there is no financial or professional pursuit for the participant. The categorization of "recreational" activities depends on criteria such as j) the mode of involvement of the participant (active or passive), ii) the participant's contribution to the production or consumption of the activity, iii) the control they exercise over the outcome (games of chance or games of knowledge/skills), v) whether the activities involved are of the free choice of each citizen or are held under social or state control, or even prohibited by law (Kouthouris, 2001). According to Parker (2021), the reasons for participating in a leisure activity are the need for physical exercise and health, the need for mental and physical balance, the need for new acquaintances, and establishing interpersonal relationships. While, for some, physical fatigue, the achievement of personal goals, personal satisfaction, and pleasure are important reasons for participating in sport-leisure activities. Throughout time, but especially in recent years, a global campaign has been carried out for the promotion and development of sports as a means of entertainment and recreation (recreational sports) (Dirzyte et al., 2022, Alexandris, Carroll, 2000). The development of recreational sports is based on the scientifically documented physiological, psychological, and social benefits that participants derive and the fact that these benefits are accompanied by increased work performance and reduced medical care costs (Chelladurai & Kim, 2022).

METHOD

The sample of this research was 32 Baths in Greece. All those spas were selected, which were registered members of the Hellenic Thermal Society (HSE), from whose magazines the official data was collected, regarding the officially organized Greek Spas, which can accept clients and provide at least basic services to the interested public. The data were collected using the questionnaire method. The survey was based on the information collected from the responses to the questionnaires. The data were analyzed using the statistical package S.P.S.S. Factor analysis was done (Factor Analysis) of the data as well as recording the frequencies of the data.

RESULTS

Of all the Greek spa towns in this survey, only 17% operate all year round without interrupting their operation at all. Only 4% operate seven months a year, while 17% of the total operate six months. The largest percentage of baths, 31%, operate for just five months, while an also respectable percentage of 23% provides its services four months a year. There is also a 4% rate that operates three months of the year and another 4% that operates only two months. The most frequent and regular visitors and users of the baths are those between the ages of 50 and 70. This age group visits spa very often. The thermal baths are quite often visited by people over the age of 70, while visitors from 30 to 50 years old are just often "bathed". People under the age of 30 visits the organized areas of the Greek thermal baths very rarely today.

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PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER EMPLOYMENT

The 83% of the respondents in charge of whether they employ a Physical Education teacher in spa, answered negatively and only the 17% answered that they already employ a Physical Education specialist on their staff. Regarding the question of whether in the future they would be interested in employing a Physical Education scientist in the Greek Spas, 74% responded positively, while 26% would not express any interest in employing a specialized Physical Education Teacher in the future. The reasons why this might be the case could be explored and taken seriously by physical education scientists.

The majority of people who visit the Greek spa towns suffer from various health problems, which are the main reason for their visit there. Thus, the first reason for a visit is the treatment that bathers seek in the baths. The second main reason for visiting is the search - maintaining or improving the general health of the bathers, whether physical or mental without necessarily having an established health problem. A third reason emerges through the processing of the questionnaires, prevention. In other words, the visitors combine "the terpon after the useful " in order, through a pleasant process, to simultaneously prevent unpleasant developments in health, to prevent unpleasant developments in aesthetics, and to maintain their general physical condition at the desired levels. Following are reasons for visiting the baths such as recreation, relaxation, and a change of environment, which equally motivate many to visit the site of a spa town to achieve at least one of them. The process is also a reason for visiting a spa, but the last one in the hierarchy, as the research shows

CONCLUSIONS - DISCUSSION

Greece, having a long history in thermalism, tries to promote its therapeutic and medicinal form, through traditional but also modern standards, which provide services for medical purposes, for physical condition and well-being, and for recovery and rehabilitation (Stathi and Avgerinos, 2001). It has therefore been linked to the consciousness of most that they visit a Spa when they seek treatment or improvement of their health or simply prevention to avoid future health problems.

Hydrotherapy is a science that was lost along with the ancient world and the priest doctors. In Europe from the 18th to the middle of the 21st century, when many people began to appreciate mineral waters, several scientists dealt with the healing properties of the springs. Studies, measurements, and observations were made, theories were formulated and one can say that the foundations were laid for the rebirth of hydrotherapy as a science.

Successful (hydrotherapy) programs do not necessarily depend only on excellent facilities. Human resources are much more important than the environment. Physical education teachers should take this seriously. Skilled managers can use both in-service training and the creation of large programs as they are required to calculate the effectiveness of this practice very much.

In addition, the economic impact of the development of therapeutic tourism, both in terms of revenue and the creation of new jobs for specialized personnel, intensifies the need for long-term policies regarding the development of therapeutic tourism in Greece (Stathi & Avgerinos, 2001). Besides, the research shows that up to now Greek Baths do not necessarily employ specialized staff for the specific services they provide. There is also not the necessary planning (long-term) to introduce new services, which will automatically make them more competitive against Spas of other countries, which gather a respectable number of customers, and by extension to employ specialized staff, such as Physical Education teachers, for the which a significant percentage of Loutropolis has expressed a strong interest in hiring. The thermal baths in Greece attract mainly Greek customers, as they are not particularly well-known and prominent outside the Greek borders. The "tired" image presented by the recent health reforms makes their orientation to other market sectors the only way to survive. In particular, the Baths have sufficient infrastructure for current basic needs but the planning for their further development and expansion requires the modernization of their facilities, new building facilities, provision of new services, and the creation of a young and intense profile

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concentration of radioactive elements, so some of the Greek thermal waters can be characterized as weakly radioactive, others as moderately radioactive, others as strongly radioactive, and others as very strongly radioactive, therefore they can satisfy any need and requirement of customers.

Of great importance and worthy of mention is the fact that Greece has Spas whose surrounding area, i.e. their geographical location and their natural environment, vary, with the result that the visitor can choose either a spa in a mountainous area or in a coastal area, whether in a lakeside or riverside area, in a wooded area or near a habitat, for those with ecological concerns.

Estimates for the image of the Spas are very positive and indicate an upward trend and development in the future. The visitors have knowledge of the therapeutic results and the services that these centers have to provide and thus can distinguish the excellent quality that they require, therefore careful planning and successful provision of their services is required. However, it seems that the organization and administration, the management, has until now focused exclusively on the medical-therapeutic side of the Baths, underestimating the side of recreation and free time. This is proven by the image that the Baths present about their social environment. The answers of the directors of these centers precisely prove the truth of the aforementioned. The first reason for visiting a Spa is health, followed by prevention and treatment. It has therefore been linked to the consciousness of most that they visit a Spa when they seek treatment or improvement of their health or simply prevention to avoid future health problems. In cultivating this impression, of course, the greatest share of responsibility lies with those responsible for the organizational issues and advertising of these centers, who clearly state that until today the services provided by the Baths are mainly therapeutic and show a great interest in expanding the services provided with leisure and leisure activities, to attract younger customers, to expand their relationships with other forms of tourism beyond therapeutic and above all to attract the foreign market.

In addition, the officials emphasize the lack of opportunities for parallel activities in the Baths and of course the need for more social events in them. Because most bathers choose Loutra as their annual holiday destination and the fact that leisure and leisure activities as well as sports activities contribute to the well-being of mature adults, there is a strong need for the promotion of these activities and their inclusion in the programs of the Baths to achieve social interactions between the visitors. The sedentary lifestyle and the lack of knowledge about fitness and nutrition present a big gap that needs to be filled to improve this lifestyle. Considering the benefits of physical activity and exercise in the physiological and biomedical fields and regarding the health of adults who make up the majority of Spa visitors, it is important to find ways for older visitors to gain the experience of participating in various physical activities (Stathi and Avgerinos, 2001). Besides, from the results of this research, the conclusion is drawn that the administrations of the Greek Baths show a great interest in the inclusion of physical activities in their program in practice, as they already have sports fields. Some Spas also have swimming pools, open or closed, as well as gymnasiums, they are simply lame in practice because the planning and implementation of such programs are required by specialized staff, which they do not have.

Finally, it is worth noting that the majority of Greek Spas operate on a five-month basis, while a small percentage of them operate on a twelve-month basis so far. Therefore, it is required that the authorities should educate themselves on this issue and enrich their services so that there are rich programs for interested customers, that they can follow at any time. Because most spa towns that operate for certain months of the year, i.e. the summer months, do not have the necessary facilities to organize and integrate services that could provide them at other times of the year and thus operate for more months or even the whole year.

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