

New sustainable practices in health and wellness tourism destinations focused on the quality of life and wellbeing

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Abstract: This work presents new practices that can be followed in health and wellness tourism destinations, with a greater focus on promoting human wellbeing, based on the strategy presented for the Caldas da Cavaca Thermal Spa Resort in Portugal. In this study, the methodology used was based on empirical data collection. Four techniques were used, namely a benchmarking strategy, complemented by questionnaires to managers of thermal spas, and a questionnaire survey aimed at the clients and managers of Caldas da Cavaca. In this strategy, a set of 40 strategic actions were defined. These actions are in line with the policies and strategies defined by public decision-making international, national, regional and local organizations. In this sense, with regard to the promotion of quality of life and wellbeing, it is possible to highlight 14 measures that strengthen this orientation. Caldas da Cavaca should position itself as an innovative, attractive thermal wellness destination that invites a healthy lifestyle, in a calm and peaceful environment in interaction with nature.

Keywords: Sustainability; Health and wellness tourism; Thermal spas; Quality of life and wellbeing; Destination management; Natural environments.

Prácticas innovadoras en los destinos de salud y bienestar: calidad de vida

Resumen: Este trabajo presenta nuevas prácticas que se pueden seguir en los destinos turísticos de salud y bienestar, con un mayor enfoque en la promoción del bienestar humano, a partir de la estrategia presentada para el Balneario Termal de Caldas da Cavaca en Portugal. En este estudio, la metodología utilizada se basó en la recopilación de datos empíricos, se utilizaron cuatro técnicas, a saber, una estrategia de benchmarking, complementada con cuestionarios a gerentes de balnearios termales, y una encuesta cuestionario dirigida a los clientes y gerente de Caldas da Cavaca. En esta estrategia se definen un conjunto de 40 acciones estratégicas. Estas acciones están en línea con las políticas y estrategias definidas por los organismos públicos de toma de decisiones internacionales, nacionales, regionales y locales. En este sentido, en lo que respecta a la promoción de la calidad de vida y el bienestar, es posible destacar 14 medidas que fortalecen esta orientación. Debe posicionarse como un destino de bienestar termal innovador y atractivo que invita a un estilo de vida saludable, en un entorno tranquilo y pacífico en interacción con la naturaleza.

Palabras Clave: Sostenibilidad; Turismo de salud y bienestar; Spa termales; Calidad de vida y bienestar; Gestión de destinos; Ambientes naturales.

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1. Introduction

Health and wellness tourism is witnessing a new phase of rejuvenation and development of a new range of products and services, both nationally and internationally. In the last years, the trend of indulging in a relaxing environment has turned into a global movement. Although spa tourism still has a great demand for water-based medical therapies, a substantial interest in services and environments that promote relaxation and stress alleviation has grown faster (Hudson, Thal, Cárdenas, & Meng, 2017). Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic context, which has generated anxiety and stress, has boosted this trend in the tourism sector.

The new emphasis lies in preventing disease and maintaining good health instead of curing illness (Hudson et al., 2017; Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2009). Along with the body, mind and soul are a part of a holistic approach to health, aiming to create harmony for those in need throughout natural environments with restorative characteristics. Being exposed to nature can enhance mental wellbeing by providing restoration from stress, mental fatigue, and mood (Hartig, Mang, and Evans, 1991). Contact with nature can generate a state of absorption and positively impact people's affect, generating specific emotional states such as awe (McMahan & Estes, 2015). This positive emotion, triggered by an awareness of something much larger than the self, such as nature, can enhance feelings of happiness, generosity and wellbeing (McMahan & Estes, 2015). Beyond cognitive, affective, and behavioral benefits, performing physical activities in nature promotes a sense of meaning in life, a broadened sense of connectedness to all forms of life, and prosocial tendencies (Ballew & Omoto, 2018). Likewise, the aquatic environments seem to positively influence wellbeing by improving the quality of the restorative process (Depledge & Bird, 2009). Therefore, the development of touristic products involving thermal spa and activities in nature can greatly improve health and wellbeing outcomes in those looking for.

Supported by studies that guide the benefits of the practice of physical activities in nature and inserted in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the expectation of strengthening proximity tourism (Navarro Jurado et al., 2020), biosafety (Seyfi, Hall & Shabani, 2020) and sustainable tourism came out reinforced. Thus, natural areas associated with health and wellbeing are expected to be appropriated by tourism destinations as an alternative to (re)position, consolidate and renew themselves so that they can drive economic recovery based on the goals of sustainable development. This is one of the strategic products of the Portuguese Tourism Strategic Plan (Turismo de Portugal, 2017).

Thermal spa resorts are usually located in less developed regions and are an important engine for local development, and in many cases, it is even an anchor product that generates other secondary business complementary to the thermal spa offer. The average expenditure of health and wellbeing tourists is higher than the average. They are economically more profitable than conventional tourists, and they are usually more financially wealthy, have greater academic training and stay longer in the destination. Considering the above and articulating it to the context of sustainable development goals (SDGs), it is expected that destinations will guide the local management of tourism to interact and establish synergy with the SDGs.

2. Natural environments, health and wellbeing

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health is defined as “a state of complete physical, social and mental wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization 1996). In the last years, health has been seen as a dynamic and positive state of wellbeing characterized by physical, mental and social potentials, which satisfy life's demands commensurate with age, culture, and personal responsibility (Bircher, 2005). More recently, the experts have considered the spiritual dimension as the fourth dimension of the health concept (Kirsten, Van der Walt, & Viljoen, 2009). Therefore, the contemporary perspective of health interprets humans as bio-psycho-spiritual beings, in which specific attributes can be distinguished but never separated (Kirsten et al., 2009). In addition, individuals interact with ecological (community, social, and natural) and metaphysical (religious, cultural, esthetical, and philosophical) contexts, which also impacts their health. Wellbeing is a more complex concept, but it can be considered the building blocks of health and wellness (Kirsten et al., 2009; Seymour, 2016). It refers to specific aspects or dimensions of health, such as physical, psychological, social, or spiritual (Hermon & Hazler, 1999; Kirsten et al., 2009).

The different domains of wellbeing focus on the whole person and therefore pertain to more than the physical body. Among other facets, it includes the mind, emotions, meaning, behavior, spirit, social

relationships, and inherent interconnectedness with the environment (Camfield & Skevington, 2008; Diener, 1984). Like health, wellbeing also carries a positive valuation and has been related to happiness, positively affecting life satisfaction and quality of life (Diener, 1984; Olivos & Clayton, 2017). Finally, wellness can be defined as an approach to health care and lifestyle choice based on active prevention of illness and active promotion of a wellbeing state (Camfield & Skevington, 2008; Diener, 1984). It serves as an umbrella term that intends to aggregate the optimal wellbeing of the different domains. It represents a proper harmony and balance resulting from promoting all the different facets of wellbeing.

To attain a state of wellness, harmony and balance should be reached concerning all the relationships between mind, body, and spirit, as well as the natural, social and cultural environments (Kirsten et al., 2009). In this sense, the tourism of wellness needs to follow a multidimensional model by incorporating experiences across wellbeing dimensions and promoting interaction with unique natural environments around the facilities. Not only are many people increasingly concerned about their physical, social, and psychological wellbeing in their everyday lives, but they are also prepared to travel long distances to experience different forms of health, wellbeing, and life satisfaction.

It is indubitable that the environment influences health and wellbeing facets (Kellert, 2008; Kirsten et al., 2009). Studies carried out in environmental psychology have shown the impact of different environmental stimuli on health and wellbeing (Depledge & Bird, 2009; Focht, 2009; Pasanen, Tyrväinen, & Korpela, 2014).

The impact of natural environments on psychological wellbeing was first being described. Early research into the nature exposure-health mediators and wellness relationship revealed that natural environments facilitate emotional and attention restoration (S. Kaplan, 1995; Wilson, 1984). Restoration means the renewal of recovery of adaptive resources or capabilities that become depleted to accomplish everyday life demands (Collado, Staats, Corraliza, & Hartig, 2017). Moreover, a discrete and short experience can be sufficient to restore attentional levels and evoke positive emotional feelings. For instance, short-term walking interventions in nature induced greater positive effects on self-esteem, engagement, subjective vitality, feeling of energy, and delight than indoor walking interventions (Focht, 2009; MacKerron & Mourato, 2013; Pretty, 2004). Walking in green spaces also decreases feelings of frustration, worry, confusion, depression, tension, and tiredness (Pretty, 2004; Shanahan, Franco, Lin, Gaston, & Fuller, 2016; Triguero-Mas et al., 2015; Twohig-Bennett & Jones, 2018). Only five minutes of exposure to nature is enough to experience mood and self-esteem improvements (Barton & Pretty, 2010). Nonetheless, the more contact with nature, the better the health outcome (Kuo, 2015).

The restorative effects of natural environments seem to be related to visual stimulus characteristics and contents that people have been biologically prepared to appreciate through evolution, spending time in a natural environment, or viewing natural scenes (Ulrich, 1993; Wilson, 1984). Certain natural environments possess characteristics that are perceived in an automatic, almost unconscious way, which rapidly induce emotions, capture non-vigilant attention and block negative thoughts (S. Kaplan, 1995; Ulrich, 1993). Thus, nature exposure encourages effortless brain function, facilitating recovery from fatigue and positively-toned emotional reactions, which have a restorative effect (Collado et al., 2017; S. Kaplan, 1995; Pretty, 2004). Environments that include the presence of survival-relevant contents, such as water, and particular configurations of vegetation that provide a focal point, a moderate degree of depth in the scene, and a moderate level of visual richness seem to produce even greater effects (Ulrich, 1993). Interaction with nature, such as walks and hiking, provides cognitive, affective, and behavioral benefits, as well as a sense of meaning in life, a broadened sense of connectedness to all forms of life, and prosocial tendencies (Ballew & Omoto, 2018). Nature has a positive impact on people's affect and in more specific emotional states such as awe (Bethelmy & Corraliza, 2019; McMahan & Estes, 2015). This positive emotion, triggered by an awareness of something much larger than the self, such as nature, can enhance feelings of humility, happiness, generosity and wellbeing (McMahan & Estes, 2015). Contact with nature can also generate a state of absorption, and captivated by nature's features seems to be a key mechanism responsible for nature's emotional effects (Stellar et al., 2015).

From the physical and physiological perspective, contact with natural environments also provides several benefits. The therapeutic effects of nature appear to operate through psycho-neuro-endocrine mechanisms triggered by the brain's perception of a natural environment. Such psychological and physiological alterations positively influence the immune system by raising positive indicators and lowering negative ones (Li et al., 2010, 2008). For instance, two hours of forest walks on consecutive days increased the number and activity of anti-cancer NK cells up to 56%, and activity persisted significantly boosted even a month after returning to urban life (Li et al, 2010). Contact with nature has also been tied to other positive impacts in health, including decreased risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus, cancer, urinary tract infections, upper respiratory tract infections, musculoskeletal symptoms

(Kuo, 2015; Yeager et al., 2020). Changes in the immune system likely regulate several of these positive impacts on health that has been observed following exposure to nature. Besides, in nature, other factors might interact, providing an additional boost to the immune system. Some of these factors are reduced air pollution (Nadeau et al., 2010), relaxation and reduced stress (Bhasin et al., 2013), sense of awe (Stellar et al., 2015) and physical activity (Mitchell, 2013).

The benefits of physical activity on health are well-established. Nonetheless, when performed in nature, it can provide a greater impact on the immune system and on several mental health outcomes than practiced elsewhere (Kuo, 2015). For instance, regular users of woods/forest for physical activity were at about half the risk of poor mental health of non-users (Mitchell, 2013). In addition, the individuals or groups who consciously engage with nature, simply for viewing or for practicing physical activity, can see the impact of the natural environment on their health and wellbeing improved at medium and long-term. Contact with nature can provide an additional boost to increase physical activity levels (walking for recreation and relaxation in natural environments), reduces sedentary behavior, and increase social interaction (e.g., interacting with neighbors and a sense of community) (Shanahan et al., 2016; Twohig-Bennett & Jones, 2018). Evidence suggests that exposure to nature also promotes healthy and environmentally relevant decision-making (Berry, Repke, Metcalf, & Jordan, 2020).

Attenuating unhealthy and impulsive decision-making, such as smoking, fast-food diet, physical inactivity is of extreme importance to public health since it can prevent millions of deaths. In addition, changes in human decision-making related to the environment and climate change are urgently needed. Thus, the knowledge of human affinity to nature and all the multidimensional benefits that such interaction produces need to be used to create experiences that promote health, wellness, and the relevant decision to the environment. Within this perspective, thermal spaces are privileged locals since enriched natural environments involve them. Thus, touristic health and wellness experiences need to be designed to take advantage of such environments and to promote human connection to nature.

3. Sustainable destination management for health and wellness tourism

Many factors affect the scope of destination management and despite three decades of promoting sustainable tourism, it is common to identify destination management organizations that focus their actions on providing infrastructure, promotion and marketing and economic growth, to the detriment of development sustainable tourism.

Contemplating sustainable tourism and its principles in policies directs a paradigm shift based on actions and strategies that incorporate new values that make tourism more sustainable and sustained.

New values related to sustainable development have been incorporated into public and private policies since World War II (Pena Traperó, 2004), mainly with the holding of conferences that have become a landmark in the environmental issue (Stockholm 1972 and Rio de Janeiro 1992), for questioning the fundamentals that lead to economic growth rather than human development, exclusion at the expense of inclusion, concentration in urban centers and the abandonment of rural spaces, the impacts of urban life on people's health, healthy eating, physical exercise, spirituality and appreciation of natural areas and their attributes to improve the wellbeing and quality of life.

Based on socially constructed values and their incorporation into public policies, we observe that, especially in the context of the pandemic, the need for integration between sustainable tourism and health and wellbeing tourism is growing stronger (Nahrstedt, 2004; Smith & Puczkó, 2008; Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Voigt, 2010; UNWTO, 2019), as together they can contribute to: i) Political-institutional interactions that include actions for the preparation and development of people through qualification, training and education of human resources, certification programs, incentives to entrepreneurship and innovation, collaboration between associations and the public sector for the development of the productive chain of health and wellness tourism and the establishment of policies for monitoring and evaluating experiences of wellbeing and sustainability; ii) Exclusive wellness resources and attractions associated with nature, culture and traditional healing, therapy and wellness resources; iii) Health and wellness tourism infrastructure, superstructure and knowledge of healing practices and destination atmosphere (a sense of place); iv) Inclusion of residents not only as hospitable hosts, but as co-creators in the context of the health and wellness tourism production chain (Sheldon & Park, 2008).

The association of natural attributes stands out for this work, since the health and wellness tourism in question is associated with nature tourism, both are guided by the principles of sustainable tourism.

Although sustainability actions have been primarily thought to halt climate changes, loss of biodiversity and environmental pollution, the interest in the positive health benefits that might be gained from interaction with natural environments has grown in the last years. Being exposed to nature, whether by observing natural landscapes or performing physical activity in the wild, has been found to have several health benefits (Pasanen, Tyrväinen, and Korpela, 2014).

In this perspective, it is essential to incorporate the principles of sustainable tourism in destination management and public policies. Through public tourism policies, DMOs (Destination Management Organizations) can introduce values related to sustainable tourism in order to consolidate and express them concretely in the implementation of actions. Governance and local actors must have an understanding, not just of the importance, but of the meaning of health and wellness tourism to act on the destination's development in a way that integrates resources and possibilities.

Destinations that intend to consolidate tourism in the health and wellbeing segment should consider the coordination of policies and actors (Trentin & Fonseca Filho, 2020) for the integration of multi-level strategies in the geographic scope (national, regional and local) in a way to fortify the destination and facilitate, by joining efforts, the quality of services and products (Smith & Puczko, 2008; Gonçalves & Guerra, 2019), with the objective of strengthening the commitment and consolidating sustainability considering innovation and entrepreneurship place to enhance the diversity of possibilities associated with health and wellness tourism.

Producing a relaxing, calm and clean atmosphere associated with health safety and valuing the health of customers are essential elements to establish user confidence (resident or visitor), offer unique and memorable experiences, and manage the experiences and expectations of visitors. Therefore, basic training and continuous training, the regulation of activities and services and the protection and preservation of natural resources and also their specific/unique characteristics become necessary (Smith & Puczko, 2008).

With regard to the coordination and integration of public policies, it is noteworthy that the Government of Portugal has adopted integrated strategies that are registered in programmatic instruments that guide economic, environmental and social development in line with the 17 United Nations SDGs, namely: Action Plan for the Circular Economy in Portugal: 2017-2020, Agenda for the Circular Economy in the Tourism Sector, Tourism Strategy 2027, Tourism + Sustainable Plan 2020-2023 and the Thematic Agenda of Research and Innovation in Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality.

In this sense, it is understood that there is coordination by the Portuguese Government, as to what is expected from the future of tourism, making clear to the public and private management of tourism destinations and actors in general, the guidelines to be followed. Quality of life, wellbeing, competitiveness, innovation and sustainability are supported by several strategic documents of international and national scope that guide the national tourism policy.

4. Method

In this study, the methodology used was based on various research strategies. It is necessary to apply specific data collection techniques that are appropriate to the thematic, problematic and the territory under study. This collection is vital if it is to be successful in contributing to a scientific knowledge of reality (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1998).

In the empirical data collection, four techniques were used, taking into account the different sources of information chosen. Questionnaire surveys and interviews are of great importance in tourism research, especially when seeking to know the perceptions, motivations, opinions and behaviors of tourists and tourism agents.

In order to aim the main objective of identifying new sustainable practices in health and wellness tourism focused on the quality of life and wellbeing for the case study chosen, first a benchmarking strategy was applied to best practices of health and wellness tourism in seven European countries. The selection criteria had to do with the experience, innovation and diversity of the offer presented. In this sense, Carcalla Spa and Friedrichsbad Baden Baden were chosen in Germany, Evian Les Thermes in France, Aqua Dome Tirol Therme in Austria, Terme di Saturnia Spa and Golf Resort in Italy, Leukerbad Therme in Switzerland, Thermae Bath Spa in the United Kingdom and finally Las Caldas Villa Termal were chosen in Spain.

There were also applied questionnaires to the managers of all the national thermal spas in activity in Portugal, showing a very useful tool to identify and understand the models of organization, management and promotion of the Portuguese thermal spas and their perception of the thermal spa sector. In 2014,

there were a total of 38 thermal spas in operation (DGEG, 2021). Application of the data collection tool covered all of that universe. Distribution of the questionnaires involved the cooperation of the Portuguese Thermal Spa Association and was sent to the relevant spa manager's email addresses. Twenty-four answers were received, corresponding to 63% of those who were sent.

The importance of outlining the profile of the client of Caldas da Cavaca, their motivations, behaviors, perceptions, satisfaction, service evaluation and recommendations, lead to another questionnaire survey aimed at Caldas da Cavaca customers in 2014. Due to the impossibility of inquiring the totality of clients, a sample that was statistically acceptable (133 inquiries - 15% of the total universe) was defined.

An interview was also conducted to the manager of Caldas da Cavaca thermal spa resort in order to understand the management model and strategy followed by this thermal spa, as well as its prospects and future projects. This technique was important and allowed a direct interaction with the interviewee. Direct observation was also important to better understand the characteristics of Caldas da Cavaca and its operating model, as well as its customers and their behaviors (Guerra, 2016).

The results of the data collection were analyzed using statistical tests in SPSS and content analysis techniques, in order to guarantee the validation of the problem and the categorization of the data, making them understandable and interpretable. These instruments proved to be quite complete and effective in gathering information that will support the definition of the sustainable development strategy for Caldas da Cavaca focused on the quality of life and wellbeing.

5. Quality of life and wellbeing practices in european thermal spas

A benchmarking technique provides several benefits for the structuring of a sustainable development strategy in tourism destinations. Therefore, we sought to apply this technique in thermal spa resorts in Europe and also in Portugal.

In the analysis of best European practices, as it can be seen in Table 1, an important and distinguished thermal spa was chosen in each of the seven most important European destinations of health and wellness tourism, according to a report of the Global Wellness Institute in 2015. The selection criterion had to do with the experience, innovation and diversity of the offer presented in the health and wellness tourism sector.

Table 1: List of international best practices in health and wellness tourism

Countries	Thermal spa resorts
Germany	Carcalla Spa and Friedrichsbad Baden Baden
France	Evian Les Thermes
Austria	Aqua Dome Tirol Therme
Italy	Terme di Saturnia Spa e Golf Resort
Switzerland	Leukerbad Therme
Great Britain	Thermae Bath Spa
Spain	Las Caldas Villa Termal

Source: Self elaboration

The purpose of this benchmarking analysis is to present in this article best practices and examples of international thermal development projects. It is intended, therefore, to analyze and systematize the main and differential features and services available in these resorts and also in the research of the management models and other methods used and their performance, by these distinguished companies and competitors, with a view to ensuring competitive advantages that can be applied in the new strategy for Caldas da Cavaca Thermal Resort. Models of organization, management and promotion of international and Portuguese thermal spas and their perception of the current and future of the thermal spa sector were identified and perceived, thus fulfilling another main objective of this article.

Regarding the analysis of European best practices, several examples of supply and demand management models, the positioning and the trends that are currently developing, which are of interest, are highlighted: i) Organization of the thermal space and creation of complementary services to the thermal activity; ii) Diversified offer taking into account the current needs of the markets (wellbeing); iii)

Creation of various leisure spaces; iv) Spaces for fitness and balance of body and mind; v) Enhancement of the natural resource (water); vi) Incorporation of beauty and aesthetic services; vii) Offer for family holidays (wellness for all); viii) Concern with a healthy diet; ix) Creation of a medical spa with several professionals in the sector; x) Definition of different thermal experiences. It is clear that the wellbeing and quality of life practices are very common and relevant.

In the approach taken to the Portuguese thermal spas, a consultation was made with their managers/administrators in order to understand the management model(s) and strategy(ies), its products and services. It becomes important to assess the most important competitiveness factors for health and wellness tourism, identifying the strengths and weaknesses, both of the spa itself, and at the level of national spa. It is also interesting to understand the perception of managers/administrators about the future trends and perspectives of their resort and the sector, pointing out ways and solutions.

Before analyzing the management models, it is important to understand the therapeutic indications of the natural mineral waters of the spa resorts surveyed. The thermal waters are great in proposing wellbeing to all of those who enjoy them.

When the thermal spa managers are asked about the points to improve in their thermal spas, the three main points were the requalification of infrastructures (37,5%), promotion and communication (33,3%) and new offer of spa and wellbeing programs (29,2%). Thus, the concern for the development of a more diversified and innovative offer of wellness programs is an increasing trend in the management of thermal spa resorts. According to them, the competitiveness factors that most influence the choice of health and wellness destinations are the therapeutic quality of the thermal water, the medical indication, the previous experience, the geographical proximity, the quality and diversity of the service, advice from family and friends and competitive prices.

Most of the thermal spas have a uniquely private management model, in terms of annual operating period more than half work for nine or less months, have a very variable number in terms of employees and a large part has, in addition to the management of the resorts, management responsibility for other tourism services, such as, accommodation, restaurants and tourist entertainment. The typology of accommodation is mostly between three and four stars. In terms of offer maintains, with rare exceptions, therapeutic thermalism as the main bet, however, also combined with thermal wellbeing programs.

The current pandemic and economic crisis are factors that force thermal spas to rethink their strategy. In terms of the strategies pointed out, the focus on scientific studies on the therapeutic quality of mineral waters, the capacity for synergies and networking, the focus on high quality services/certification, improving communication strategies, diversifying the offer with greater focus on wellness programs and modernization of facilities.

6. Profile, motivations and behaviors of the clients of caldas da cavaca thermal spa resort (portugal)

Another objective of this work is to understand the motivations and behaviors of clients of Caldas da Cavaca Thermal SPA Resort, as well as their perception and satisfaction with this spa. The profile of the current consumer was traced, which tends to have the following socioeconomic characteristics: mostly aged between 45 and 74 years (54,8%), in terms of sex the majority is female (52,6%), the level of education is mostly between basic and secondary (69,1%), most are retired (52,6%) and almost all have their main residence in Portugal, in the municipality of Aguiar da Beira and bordering (38,5%) or in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto (27,9%). In terms of net monthly income, most earn income up to 853 euros (39,3%), however, there is still an important range with income between 853 and 1706 euros (34,4%).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by the way they describe their health

		N	%
How do you currently describe your health?	2	3	2,2%
	3	57	42,9%
	4	57	42,9%
	5	16	12,0%
	Total	133	100,0%

In Table 2, respondents were asked to describe their health status, on a scale between 1 (very poor) and 5 (very good). From the answers, two conclusions can be drawn, one that almost half of the respondents (45.1%) seek the thermal spa to improve their health, as they do not consider it to be in a positive state, while the majority (54.9%) he looks for the thermal springs in order to maintain his health or prevent the beginning of diseases.

When asked about the motivation for attending Caldas da Cavaca, it appears that the three main motivations are clearly physical/medical recovery, relaxation and rest, and also prevention. Analyzing all the answers as a whole, it can also be concluded that the psychological/wellbeing and prevention aspects are two important concerns for the respondents.

Also, in this study, the clients of Caldas da Cavaca were asked to evaluate 28 factors of competitiveness for health and wellness destinations, adapted to the reality of this thermal spa. The most valued competitiveness factor was undoubtedly the therapeutic quality of mineral water, an anchor element of Caldas da Cavaca, also confirmed with an average response of 4.70 out of 5. Cleanliness/hygiene and hospitality and friendliness of employees emerge as strengths. Among the most valued, is still the quality of service in average values very close to 4.50. In terms of less punctuated factors, the list is led by the availability of entertainment activities at the spa, followed by partner accommodation companies, the restaurants and drinks establishments close to the spas, and also by the surrounding zone of the spa.

In terms of motivations and behaviors, interesting data were recorded to better understand the reasons for choosing Caldas da Cavaca. Approximately 80% of respondents sought therapeutic thermal treatments and 20% thermal wellness programs, and more than half, habitually visit spas three or more times a year. The average spending per client is between 201 and 300 euros, and about half, had some kind of contribution. When asked about the spas they had previously visited, the vast majority were repeated in Caldas da Cavaca and the most mentioned spas are some that are closer geographically to Caldas da Cavaca, and also, spas whose thermal water has similar therapeutic indications.

Respondents who chose wellness programs are younger than those seeking therapeutic treatments. In view of the data collected, in addition to age, some characteristics of these two types of customers can be identified. The therapeutic spa client tends to be at an older age, in terms of sex there are no significant differences, lower educational qualifications, their health status is more at an intermediate level, the net monthly income is lower, the average expenditure has a high value, focusing on an average between 200 and 500 euros and make a greater number of treatments per day. On the other hand, the wellness client tends to be of a younger age, female, with a secondary education level, excellent health, a net monthly income between 853 and 1706 euros, an average expenditure that is between 20 and 100 euros and they make a smaller number of treatments per day, with two on average. These data are very important for the definition of the differentiated strategy to be applied to these two types of customers.

Due to the lack of accommodation in the thermal resort, current clients have their primary or secondary residence as the dominant means of accommodation. It was also noted that clients often travel in groups and almost all of their members undergo treatments. The sources of information about the products and services of Caldas da Cavaca are essentially references of family and friends and previous experiences. Here it is noted that there is an insufficiency with regard to promotion and communication in various media and little importance for medical indication, which should be a challenge to be improved. In terms of satisfaction, about 70% evaluate the results obtained in the treatments as very positive. In terms of overall satisfaction, the registered values are even higher with an encouraging result, with no one in this case having given a negative score. The intention to recommend and return to Caldas da Cavaca also registered very positive values.

At the organizational level, Caldas da Cavaca is managed by a public (15%) /private (85%) partnership. Caldas da Cavaca can take advantage and highlight the fact that they belong to a group of companies with experience in the field of health and wellness tourism, promoting networking. In future terms, from the result of the interview of the manager, he foresees the conclusion of the hotel and new thermal spa next to it, expansion of the current spa, the extension of the thermal season and the requalification of the complex in general terms. It is also the intention to seek to develop a diversification of accommodation in the complex, seeking to meet the needs of various markets. There should be further development in terms of the provision of therapeutic treatments and wellness services.

In resume, the following strengths stand out with regard to wellbeing and quality of life are: i) Diversity and therapeutic potential of thermal water; ii) Physical, psychological and emotional results obtained in the treatments and satisfaction with the quality of service; iii) Competitive prices; iv) Hospitality and service; v) Competent clinical staff; vi) Nature, climate, light and landscape surroundings; vii) Presence of a maintenance circuit and a chapel; viii) Proximity to a small river, lagoon and waterfall; ix) Classic thermalism complemented with thermal wellness programs; x) Quiet, safe and revitalizing space with the potential for treatment or prevention of psychological, physical and wellbeing (holistic tourism). With regard to the weaknesses, the following stand out: i) Inexistence of services associated with tourism in the thermal offer, such as restaurants, thermal entertainment and traditional commerce; ii) Reduced and seasonal tourist flow; iii) Thermal space and surroundings in need of requalification; iv) Lack of spaces for leisure and rest; v) Offer too concentrated in classic thermal treatments; vi) Absence of a thermal spa, aesthetics, saunas, gym/fitness area; vii) Lack of programs and spaces for family holidays, namely leisure areas and spaces for children (wellness for all).

7. Sustainable development strategies in a thermal spa destination focused on quality of life and wellbeing: the study case of caldas da cavaca

There are several dimensions that a strategic vision for Caldas da Cavaca must take. These dimensions represent the health, the balance and wellbeing of the individual, according to current trends in demand. Today's consumers are, in many cases, oriented towards wellness, with a concern for health habits, whether preventive or curative, and activities that make them enjoy a healthy lifestyle.

The strategy defined for Caldas da Cavaca should be in accordance with the new trends and quality standards of the health and wellness tourism sector, in order to be able to position itself as an attractive thermal wellness spa destination. For this, its offer will have to be varied and of quality to be recognized nationally and internationally. Caldas da Cavaca's commitment should include the implementation of a competitive, collaborative and professional management model oriented towards the provision of a quality, integrated and complementary service, and also focused on the principles of social, environmental and economic sustainability. It must also be aligned with national and international policies defined for this specific development area.

Caldas da Cavaca, integrated in the thermal spa region of Viseu Dão Lafões (Portugal), is located in an airy valley next to the thermal hot spring that has therapeutic indications for the prevention and cure of digestive, respiratory, musculoskeletal and rheumatic and skin diseases. The quality of the thermal water is identified as a key competitive factor for this spa to be able to obtain a strong position in relation to its most direct competitors and should serve as a basis for the development strategy. This data must be enhanced by the clinical staff and other collaborators and transmitted to customers, as well as to potential markets to be reached.

Throughout its history, Caldas da Cavaca has already undergone various stages of development, ones more positive and others less. The attractiveness of this spa resort has always had as its main motivation the curative and preventive capacity of its thermal water, allied at times to entertainment and quality infrastructure for relaxation and health and wellbeing holidays.

Existing infrastructure currently needs urgent intervention due to its state of degradation. The lack of accommodation in the complex, and the degradation of buildings and other infrastructure, significantly limit the evolution of demand for Caldas da Cavaca. The new hotel and thermal spa under construction will be the starting points for a new development strategy, as well as the extension of the current spa. The complex's natural surroundings should also be valued and be part of Caldas da Cavaca's offer. The management company has also been experiencing difficulties at various levels lately. These aspects reinforce the need for a new strategy for the thermal spa resort that is expected to be able to project Caldas da Cavaca to a higher and competitive level.

As shown in figure 1, there are several dimensions that the strategic vision defined for Caldas da Cavaca must consider, such as: social, physical, mental, spiritual, emotional and eco-friendly. These dimensions represent the individual's health, balance and wellbeing, according to current demand trends. Current consumers are, in many cases, oriented towards wellness, concerned with health habits, whether preventive or curative, and activities that make them enjoy a healthy lifestyle. The development of holistic tourism is another one of the opportunities that Caldas da Cavaca should bet on.

Figure 1: Dimensions to consider in the thermal wellness strategy for Caldas da Cavaca

This strategic development proposal has as its main purpose to promote a healthy lifestyle in the Caldas da Cavaca resort, taking into account a new restructured, diversified, organized and qualified offer. It is based on the enhancement of the main endogenous resources combined with secondary and complementary resources.

In the strategy outlined for Caldas da Cavaca (Guerra, 2016), a set of 40 strategic actions were defined, divided between anchor (priority) and complementary projects. These actions must be in line with the policies and strategies defined by public decision-making international, national, regional and local organizations. In this sense, with regard to the promotion of quality of life and wellbeing, it is possible to highlight 14 measures that strengthen this orientation, as presented in table 3.

Table 3: Sustainable development strategies focused on quality of life and wellbeing for Caldas da Cavaca

Sustainable strategies focused on quality of life and wellbeing
1 - Construction of a four-star hotel with a thermal spa, gym and a restaurant whose focus will be clearly on healthy eating
2 - Requalification and organization of the thermal spa resort with several green and leisure spaces
3 - Creation of an outdoor sports park and enhancement of the river, lagoon and waterfall
4 - Development of focused therapeutic programs and investment in partnerships for medical tourism
5 - Creation of wellness programs (healthy life) – spa, fitness, healthy eating, sport and nature
6 - Development of an offer oriented towards holistic tourism, such as “brain fitness” and dealing with stress
7 - Creation of a thermal animation agenda and events oriented to happiness and wellbeing
8 - Obtaining quality certification
9 - Development of an inclusive mobility project “tourism for all”
10 - Reforestation of the thermal spa resort
11 - Investment in beauty, aesthetics and cosmetics services
12 - Creation of a pedestrian route
13 - Real estate project for second homes at the thermal resort
14 - Organization of sports events and other events to promote healthy living

8. Conclusion

The paradigm shift in relation to sustainable development, quality of life and wellbeing permeates the ethical values of the society that absorb them while re-elaborating them in a constant dialogue. In tourism, such values are also absorbed and re-elaborated. The behavior of the tourist is altered by numerous factors from generation to generation, imposing challenges for public and private management to reconcile or not, depending on the position they expect for the destination, the interests in health and/or wellbeing, and according to the needs that each age group imposes.

In general terms, we can denote that the spaces where the thermal spas are located are conducive to obtaining gains in terms of health and wellbeing, as the interaction with the natural environment, whether through relaxation or even through physical activity, promotes the reduction of risks related to health problems. Today, there is a strong demand for relaxing environments.

Although sustainability actions have been primarily thought to halt climate changes, loss of biodiversity and environmental pollution, the interest in the positive health benefits that might be gained from interaction with natural environments has been growing in the last years. Being exposed to nature, whether by observing natural landscapes or performing physical activity in the wild, has been found to have several benefits for mental health and wellbeing by providing restoration from stress, mental fatigue, and mood. Thus, the trend of being in a relaxing environment has turned into a global movement.

In terms of knowledge, this work aims to present new practices that can be followed in health and wellness tourist destinations, with a greater focus on promoting human happiness and wellbeing, based on the strategy presented for Caldas da Cavaca Thermal Spa Resort in Portugal.

The national scenario, through the various national plans, converges towards sustainable development and emerging and priority themes such as wellbeing and quality of life, increasing the possibility of success of the strategy defined for Caldas da Cavaca.

The strategy is based on the core and distinctive resource that is thermal water, in a concept that is very present in *healing water* (healing, rejuvenating and preventive waters). The thermal water of Caldas da Cavaca has its own and differentiating characteristics that should be valued and enhanced in order to requalify the offer to improve the competitiveness and positioning of this thermal spa resort. Caldas da Cavaca should be an important element of local development and enhancer of various local businesses that complement the offer of health and wellness tourism. The nature and tranquillity of the place will also be elements to enhance and develop in the offer.

There are several dimensions that the strategic vision defined for Caldas da Cavaca must consider, such as: social, physical, mental, spiritual, emotional and eco-friendly. These dimensions represent the health, the balance and wellbeing of the individual, according to current trends in demand. Today's consumers are, in many cases, oriented towards wellness, with a concern for health habits, whether preventive or curative, and activities that make them enjoy a healthy lifestyle. These measures and actions has been structured to provide Caldas da Cavaca with competitive arguments within health and wellness tourism, in particular, and tourism in general. These measures will also concede Caldas da Cavaca a new position in this sector.

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Recibido: 11/08/2021

Reenviado: 12/10/2021

Aceptado: 02/11/2021

Sometido a evaluación por pares anónimos