



AN ANALYSIS OF HEALTH TOURISM: THE EXAMPLE OF KOŁOBRZEG

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a growing global interest in spa tourism, as well as a significant increase in social awareness of the need to care for health, physical fitness and well-being. Apart from spa tourism, 'spa & wellness' tourism is also very popular. Kołobrzeg, in addition to being a town largely geared towards patients, also attracts tourists who take advantage of 'spa & wellness' treatments. The purpose of this article is to define the essence and characteristics of spa tourism based on the example of Kołobrzeg. Spa activities are carried out in health care entities operating in the zone of the spa, places where patients are undergoing treatment or rehabilitation. These benefit from the healing natural conditions of the areas in which they operate and their microclimates. The main part of the article presents the history of spa tourism in Kołobrzeg along with an analysis of its spa offer and therapeutic profile. In addition, the empirical part discusses the results of an analysis among patients using the survey method; a large proportion of respondents were over 65, mainly female. During the study, the respondents rated various aspects of their spa stay (on a scale from 1 to 5) at a level above 4.0, which indicates the healthy condition of the spa itself and general satisfaction among patients.

KEYWORDS

health resort, spa tourism, tourism, Kołobrzeg

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1. INTRODUCTION

Spa tourism, along with medicinal (medical) and 'spa & wellness' tourism, are kinds of health tourism. According to Wolski, this is understood as "conscious and voluntary going away for a certain period of time outside the place of residence, during free time, in order to regenerate the system by means of active physical and mental recreation" (Wolski, 1970, p. 11).

Similarly, health resort tourism is defined by Gawarecki (2003), and Kornak and Rapacz (2001), as activity carried out in health resorts, connected with treatment (among others rehabilitation, preventive medicine). In their discussion, a health resort is defined

as a defined area where health resort activities are carried out.

Currently, Poland has an aging society (Adamczyk, 2017). Life expectancy is increasing (in 2019 for women it was 81.8 years, and for men 74.1, an increase compared to 2018 by 0.1 years for women and 0.3 for men (GUS, 2020)). Hence, spa tourism is considered very popular among domestic customers. Natural resources with healing properties found in Poland, such as mineral springs, peloid deposits and microclimates, constitute a factor in its growing competitiveness on the international market thanks to their effective use.

In addition to these, the main factors influencing the development of spa tourism include:

- the fashion to lead a healthy lifestyle;
- growing expectations of patients, and tourists who are not patients;
- the great popularity of spas with a rich history;
- the opportunity to shorten the time needed to return to health and fitness as a result of using the treatments offered and the frequency of their performance;
- visible differentiation of the tourist offer in terms of the quality of services provided and prices (Januszewska, 2004).

It should also be noted that more and more people are looking for places close to the natural environment where there has been little human interference. Spa tourism facilities are often located near forests, parks, national or landscape parks and nature reserves.

The status of a health resort or health resort protection area may be granted only to a zone that meets strictly defined conditions resulting from the Act of 28 July 2005 on spa treatment, health resorts and spa protection areas, and on health resort municipalities (*Ustawa*, 2016), e.g.:

- there are deposits of natural resources and a climate with healing properties confirmed by appropriate studies;
- meets all the requirements that have been strictly defined in the environmental protection regulations;
- efficient technical infrastructure is maintained there, mainly in the field of water, sewage and energy management and waste management, as well as public transport;
- there are facilities and appropriate spa treatment devices specialized in the provision of therapeutic treatments (Bernat, Harasimiuk, 2019; Makała, 2016).

In a situation where the first three are met and the fourth is not, the municipal authorities may apply for the status of a spa protection area. There are 45 health resorts throughout Poland (*Uzdrowiska*, 2020; *Wykaz uzdrowisk*, 2020). Spa tourism in Poland is undertaken in zones of health resort protection and in spa communes, where apart from therapeutic, spa and health activities, tourist services are also provided. In the coastal belt of the Zachodnio-pomorski (West Pomeranian) Voivodeship these include Świnoujście, Kamień Pomorski, Dąbki, Kołobrzeg and Połczyn Zdrój. Kołobrzeg is the most popular spa in northern Poland.

2. THE ESSENCE AND FUNCTIONS OF A SPA

The earliest mentions of spa treatment appeared in the 5th century BC and the first physician who became interested in using natural resources in the treatment of the human body was Hippocrates (Trzeciak, 1997). However, trips to spas have been a form of relaxation from earliest times. Areas with warm springs became the destination for Roman magnates to spend a good

time and they were pioneers in the field of bathing. The taste for bathing was later taken up by Muslims, mainly Arabs and Turks, and it was the latter who created the type of bath known to this day as a Turkish bath (Małecka, Marcinkowski, 2007).

Traveling to the ‘waters’ on a large scale, however, did not develop until the 18th century. Stays in spas, often with ancient roots, became fashionable among social elites all over Europe. Peak popularity was in the following century when, along with the construction of railway lines, transport and economic accessibility improved. Health resorts have become a favorite place of treatment and relaxation for professionals: writers, painters, singers and actors. In the 20th century, spas were further democratized and members of all social strata appeared among patients at sanatoria (Kaczmarek, Stasiak, Włodarczyk, 2010).

Currently, spas are treated as tourist attractions in the subject literature (Kruczek, 2012). Any element of the tourism product which are defined as specific in terms of their ability to attract tourists and are of key importance in making a decision on the choice of a holiday destination, is considered as such. Together with tourist services, this creates a ready tourist product (Kruczek, 2011). So far, attempts have been made relatively rarely to examine the attractiveness of health resorts in Poland. According to Szromek (2013), when analyzing the attractiveness of an area, research on the values that determine it (mainly tourist attractions) should be focused on.

Polish spas operate according to the Act of 28 July 2005 on spa treatment, health resorts and health resort protection areas, and spa communes (*Ustawa*, 2016). In this document, the term ‘health resort’ was defined as „an area in which spa treatment is carried out, set aside for the purpose of using and protecting its natural healing resources”.

The Polish Committee for Standardization (*Polski Komitet Normalizacyjny*) defines a health resort as an area with deposits of natural resources, access to sea waters and a climate showing healing properties (it is enough for at least one of these three factors to be met), as well as devices and facilities enabling spa treatment (Burzyński 2005).

Spa facilities are located in every landscape area in Poland, but most of them occur in the mountain and coastal belts. Thanks to the direct access to what is of natural, landscape and geographical value, apart from the treatment, it is undoubtedly an opportunity to develop tourism (Gotowt-Jeziorska, Wyrzykowski 2005).

According to Gaworecki (2003), there are three main motives for tourism: the will to explore the world (cognitive); willingness to renew physical and mental strength, including improvement of health and well-being (leisure); the need for active recreation (specialist

themes). These determinants of tourism are applicable in the case of health tourism along with, for example, active tourism.

3. SPA TOURISM IN KOŁOBRZEG

In the 19th century, Kołobrzeg belonged to the Prussian state and bore the German name of Kolberg. The history of the spa here is unusual. In 1802, Hans Heinrich von Held, a customs advisor in Poznań, served a prison sentence in Kołobrzeg fortress. After publishing a book, in which he described that he owed his health to the waves of the Baltic Sea, more and more people started to visit the town but the difficulty in establishing bathing areas was the status of a fortress (Cieślukowski, 1975).

In 1830, Gottlieb Keutel established the first saline bathing establishment. However, it was Dr. Moses Behrend who was hailed as the father of the Kołobrzeg spa resort (Heider, Kierzek, Laber, Kotuła 2019). Behrend, after purchasing the equipment from Keuttel, began to treat people professionally. Afterwards, saline and warm sea baths were set up. The drinking of saline water and ewe's milk was introduced but it was only after losing the status of fortress from 1872 was it transformed into a resort (*Historia uzdrowiska*, 2020).

In 1899 the first cure house, *Pałac Nabrzeżny*, was opened, a sanatorium built in a German Renaissance style. In 1911, during an international congress on spa treatment, Kołobrzeg was granted the rank of first-class health resort (Heider, Kierzek, Laber, Kotuła 2019).

The next period of the health resort's splendor was in interwar times. Kołobrzeg was then called the Pearl of the Baltic and was considered the best among the 125 German health resorts. In 1939, the number of patients in Kołobrzeg was 46,000. After World War II, the city was within the borders of Poland, but as a result of the siege in 1945, 90% of it had been destroyed.

The reconstruction of Kołobrzeg and its spa zone began in the early 1950s but systematic spa activity was resumed only in 1952. The town received the status of a health resort in 1967 (Urząd Miasta Kołobrzeg, 2020).

In the 1980s the economic and investment crisis in centrally-controlled Poland meant that all tourism and spa investments and renovations were suspended. In 1989, the period of great political changes began. The town of Kołobrzeg and the tourism facilities operating within it had to be in line with the requirements of the capitalist free market economy. The changes that took place in Kołobrzeg in terms of structure and ownership form along with the diversification of spa facilities can be described as a breakthrough and revolutionary (Miedziński, 2011). Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 coincided with the commercialization of spa enterprises and the introduction of a new spa act.

This was a period of opportunities for the economy, through EU subsidies to local authorities and spa companies, and the use made of them. At that time, great progress was made in the promotion of health resorts, development of communication, sanitary conditions, and the improvement in the quality of public space (Wójcikowski, 2015).

Kołobrzeg, after 20 years of systemic changes and the development of the free market economy, is now the largest, most modern center for spa and leisure tourism in Poland (Miedziński, 2011). Stays at the spa are associated with the treatment of diseases of the nervous, respiratory and skin systems, as well as in the field of orthopedics, cardiology, rheumatology, endocrinology, diabetes, obesity and osteoporosis, as well as for recovery from injuries (Kołobrzeg, 2020).

Among the health resorts in Poland, Kołobrzeg is distinguished by its climate and large deposits of brine and mud (Gillert, 1964). In the zone of this most popular health resort there are healing waters whose use includes treatments for rheumatism, sciatica, inflammation of joints, muscles and bones, as well as atherosclerosis and many other diseases. Mud treatments are a great asset from the point of view of spa tourism. In addition, natural features undoubtedly include the microclimate of the coastal area, its beautiful natural environment and its vegetation. The Parsęta river flows through the town (Kroczyński 1969), with 27 species of fish living in its waters, while its valley, due to its ecological character, is included in the 'Natura 2000' program (*Przyroda Kołobrzegu i okolic*, 2020). The most important human features include the pier, the lighthouse, the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Polish Museum of Armaments, the Museum of Amber, the Powder Tower and the Monument to the Wedding of Poland with the Sea (*Atrakcje w Kołobrzegu*, 2020).

Healing treatments are carried out by institutions of various types. Table 1 lists the accommodation facilities, where spa and treatment services are provided, along with their treatment profiles. A wide range of spa treatments are carried out in a large number of the facilities in Kołobrzeg. An interesting example is Magnolia SPA, which although it offers only general rehabilitation has the possibility of PFRON co-financing and a week-long therapeutic stay including rehabilitation treatments.

During a stay in the facilities listed in Table 1, patients benefit from a wide treatment base. They also have at their disposal many additional recreational and leisure facilities which include swimming pools, saunas, salt and iodine caves, iodine sessions and Nordic walking paths.

Most institutions listed in Table 1 deal with treatment and rehabilitation related to asthma (19), sinusitis (18) and post-traumatic conditions of joints and bones (17). Only one center deals with the treatment of skin allergies.

Table 1. Profile of treatments at curative and spa facilities in Kołobrzeg

No.	Center name / facility type	Breathing allergy	Skin allergy	Food allergy	Psoriasis	Asthma	Infertility	Sinusitis	After myocardial infarction	Thyroid gland	Post-traumatic conditions of joints and bones	Rheumatoid arthritis	Neuralgia	Other
1.	Arka Medical Spa Hotel****	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
2.	Centrum Rehabilitacji Rolników KRUS Niwa	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	history of strokes
3.	Centrum Zdrowia i Wypoczynku Ikar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	migraines, diseases of the venous system
4.	Centrum Zdrowia i Relaksu VERANO	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	cerebral palsy in children
5.	Jantar Hotel & Spa	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	chronic bronchitis, rehabilitation after arthroplasty
6.	Kurhotel Etna	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	chronic bronchitis, migraine, arterial hypertension
7.	Magnolia SPA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8.	Mona Lisa Boutique Wellness & Spa	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	sciatica, diabetes
9.	Olymp II	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	chronic bronchitis
10.	Ośrodek Lecznico-Wypoczynkowy Kormoran Sp. z o.o.	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-
11.	Ośrodek Phoenix – Obiekt Sanatoryjno-Wczasowy	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	migraine, root syndromes
12.	Ośrodek Rehabilitacyjno-Sanatoryjny Perełka	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	catarrh of the respiratory tract
13.	Ośrodek Sanatoryjno-Wczasowy Poznanianka	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	chronic bronchitis, rehabilitation after arthroplasty, degeneration of the spine
14.	Ośrodek Sanatoryjno-Wypoczynkowy Bursztyn	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	chronic bronchitis, migraine, obesity
15.	Ośrodek Sanatoryjno-Wypoczynkowy Olymp	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	migraine
16.	Sanatorium Mewa 1, Pawilon A – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
17.	Sanatorium Mewa 1, Pawilon B – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
18.	Sanatorium Mewa 2 – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
19.	Sanatorium Mewa 3 – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-

No.	Center name / facility type	Breathing allergy	Skin allergy	Food allergy	Psoriasis	Asthma	Infertility	Sinusitis	After myocardial infarction	Thyroid gland	Post-traumatic conditions of joints and bones	Rheumatoid arthritis	Neuralgia	Other
20.	Sanatorium Mewa 4 – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
21.	Sanatorium MSW w Kołobrzegu	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	diabetes
22.	Sanatorium Perła Bałtyku (Kombatant)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	tuberculosis, degeneration of the spine, rehabilitation after mastectomy
23.	Sanatorium SAN	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
24.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Bałtyk	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
25.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Kielczanka-Albax	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-
26.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Koral-Live	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	sciatica, hypertension
27.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Lech	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	chronic catarrh of the respiratory system
28.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Mesko	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-
29.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Posejdon	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	rehabilitation after mastectomy, diabetes
30.	Sanatorium Uzdrowskie Wistom	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	+	-
31.	Szpital Uzdrowski Muszelka – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-
32.	Szpital Uzdrowski Słoneczko – Uzdrowisko Kołobrzeg S.A.	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	treatment after thoracic surgery
33.	Willa Fortuna	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	rehabilitation after arthroplasty

Source: authors based on Sanatoria.org (2020).

It should be remembered that spa treatment is a continuation of outpatient or inpatient treatment to help a patient regain fitness after an accident or illness using natural medicinal resources and the properties of the microclimate. At the spa, patients also attend physiotherapeutic treatments and during their stay each participant can take advantage of free diagnostic tests as well as medicines and medical devices that are necessary for the treatment (Spa Treatment, 2020).

4. METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the study was to determine the most common reasons for patients to come to Kołobrzeg (including their health problems), as well as their expectations regarding their stay at the spa. In the empirical part, a questionnaire was used, carried out personally by both authors in Kołobrzeg in 2019. The selection of the sample for study was random

and 118 people from Poland staying there took part. The research was exploratory in nature. The respondents answered closed questions including the purpose of coming to Kołobrzeg, their main diseases and the tourist attractions that they want to make use of during their stay. The survey also provided information on patient evaluations (e.g. price of stay and food), as well as sources of finance for the trip. The results are presented in tabular form and on a graph.

5. ACADEMIC RESEARCH RESULTS

More women (69%) than men (31%) took part in the research. Those aged 55–65 and over-65 accounted for almost 86% of the respondents with the smallest under-45 (6%) and aged 45–55 (8%). The respondents most often answered that they go to a sanatorium every two years (28%). Over 50% of respondents choose 21-day stays, with less than 8% 7 days. Most of the respondents had higher education (50.8%) and their monthly income exceeded PLN 2,000. The vast majority

of patients who come to Kołobrzeg live in cities (66%). More than half had already been to Kołobrzeg before (52.5%).

The first question in the survey concerned the main motive for the trip (Table 2). The most frequently indicated reason was the desire to improve their general health, the need to treat illnesses or to improve their physical and mental condition. Willingness to make new friends was the least frequently considered main reason (18 responses, only 17.1% of women).

The respondents were also asked about the health problems that caused them to come to Kołobrzeg. They most often mentioned rheumatoid arthritis (36%), respiratory diseases (30%) and diabetes (29%). It should be noted that neuralgia appeared only in responses given by women. The disease most frequently mentioned by men was cardiovascular, while women most often indicated rheumatoid arthritis and bone inflammation.

The next question concerned the procedures in which the respondents participated during their stay (Table 3). The answers provided show that patients most often used massages (51%), baths in a brine pool (32%), kinesitherapy (32%) and inhalation (31%), and

Table 2. Main theme of the trip

Main theme of the trip	Whole		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Improving health	35	30	27	32.9	8	22.2
Treatment of medical conditions as prescribed by a doctor	23	19	13	15.9	10	27.8
General improvement of physical and mental condition	22	19	16	19.5	6	16.7
General rest	20	17	12	14.6	8	22.2
Willingness to make new friends	18	15	14	17.1	4	11.1

Source: authors based on questionnaire research

Table 3. Treatments used by patients during their stay in Kołobrzeg

Treatment	Whole		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Massages	60	51	52	63.4	8	22.2
Brine pool	38	32	26	31.7	12	33.3
Kinesitherapy	38	32	27	32.9	11	30.6
Inhalations	37	31	20	24.4	17	47.2
Cryotherapy	37	31	26	31.7	11	30.6
Laser-therapy	35	30	24	29.3	11	30.6
Electrotherapy	30	25	17	20.7	13	36.1
Brine baths	29	25	19	23.2	10	27.8
Mud treatment	24	20	19	23.2	5	13.9
Mud pool	18	15	11	13.4	7	19.4

Source: authors based on questionnaire research.

least frequently used peloid treatments (13.9% of men and 23.2% of women).

Determining the reason for coming to Kołobrzeg (Table 4), the respondents mentioned its location in the coastal belt as the most important factor influencing their decision, as well as recommendations from friends and family. Neither distance from home nor the ease of getting there mattered very much.

In response to the question about expected health benefits (Table 5), the respondents primarily mentioned changes in eating habits, as well as improving general health and physical fitness. They least often expected

a reduction in inflammation (17%) or an improvement in mental condition (14%).

The respondents were also asked to define their preferences regarding the additional attractions that they want to use in Kołobrzeg. The respondents most often chose walks (25.4%) and concerts (26.3%) with a willingness to use spa & wellness treatments the least frequently indicated. This is probably due to the fact that such services are quite expensive, but also available all over Poland and not only in this particular spa.

The respondents, when asked about their source of financing (Table 6), indicated that these trips were

Table 4. Main reasons for coming to Kołobrzeg

Main reasons for coming to Kołobrzeg	Total		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Seaside location	29	25	20	24.4	9	25.0
Recommendation by friends/family	25	21	21	25.6	4	11.1
Price for spa stay	21	18	12	14.6	9	25.0
Tourist attractiveness	18	15	9	11.0	9	25.0
Ease of journey	13	11	11	13.4	2	5.6
Distance from home	11	9	8	9.8	3	8.3

Source: authors based on questionnaire research.

Table 5. Health expectations of respondents after a sanatorium visit

Expectations of spa guests	Whole		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Change of diet adapted to the disease	49	42	33	40.2	16	44.4
Improving overall health	35	30	27	33.0	8	22.2
Improving circulation	31	26	15	18.3	16	44.4
Improvement in physical condition	28	24	17	20.7	11	30.6
Improvement in immunity	26	22	20	24.4	6	16.7
Pain relief	26	22	22	26.8	4	1.1
Reduction of inflammation in joints and bones	20	17	15	18.3	5	13.9
Improvement of mental condition	16	14	11	13.4	5	13.9

Source: authors based on questionnaire research.

Table 6. Source of financing a stay in Kołobrzeg

Source of financing	Whole		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Private	43	36	27	32.9	16	44.4
NFZ referral	41	35	33	40.2	8	22.2
ZUS referral	14	12	12	14.6	2	5.6
PFRON	10	8	4	4.9	6	16.7
KRUS referral	8	7	5	6.1	3	8.3

Source: authors based on questionnaire research.

Table 7. Place of accommodation in Kołobrzeg

Type of tourist resort	Total		Female		Male	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Sanatorium and holiday resort	47	40	35	42.7	12	33.3
Spa sanatorium	36	31	20	24.4	16	44.4
Rehabilitation center	16	14	13	15.9	3	8.3
Spa hospital	10	8	6	7.3	4	11.1
Hotel with spa & wellness treatments	8	7	7	8.5	1	2.8

Source: authors based on questionnaire research.

financed entirely from private funds (36%) or from the Narodowy Fundusz Zdrowia (National Health Fund) (35%). Only eight had had a KRUS referral.

The information on accommodation in Kołobrzeg for spa stays (Table 7) shows that patients most often stayed in sanatorium-recreational centers and spa sanatoria. The spa hospital was indicated by ten respondents while 88% of the women surveyed were accommodated in spa sanatoria.

The last question concerned an assessment of patient satisfaction (on a scale of 1 – very bad to 5 – very good) – Figure 1. In their responses men rated much higher. The exception was the question about the attitudes of medical personnel (4.03) which was perceived as worse than by female patients.

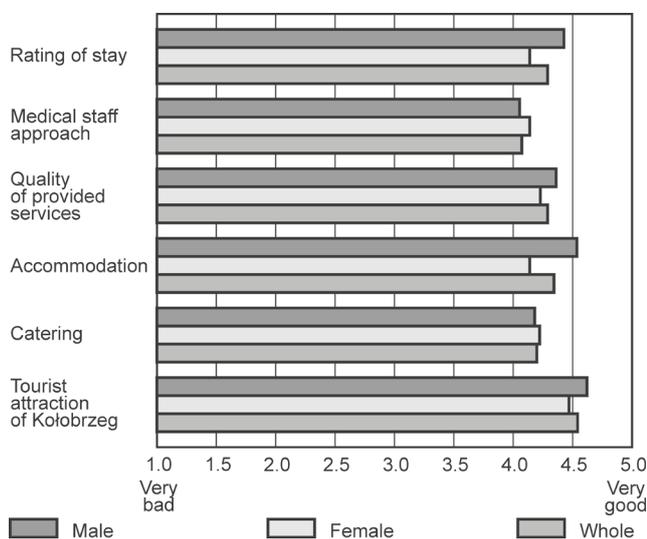


Figure 1. Average rating for patient satisfaction
Source: authors based on questionnaire research

On the basis of the research, it can be seen that spa tourism in Kołobrzeg is popular among people over 55 years old. Patients assessed their stays positively, not only in terms of accommodation and cleanliness in the rooms, but also the prices. They were least satisfied with the medical staff which resulted from incomplete

matching of the treatment procedures to the type of disease. The survey results show that Kołobrzeg, due to its tourist attractiveness, is a popular destination and is often visited for other purposes than health.

6. DISCUSSION

Krzyżanowska (2016) conducted similar research on a national scale a few years before. The results she obtained demonstrated that the main goals of spa trips are the desire to improve health, the need to treat diseases and to rest. The most common diseases are rheumatological, and the rarest are ailments related to the digestive system and respiratory tract. The most important benefits for the respondents turned out to be improved well-being and physical fitness. The respondents, when assessing the services related to spa stays in Poland, perceived the quality of the treatments offered and the professional approach of medical personnel as the best.

Similar conclusions were also reached by, among others, by Środa-Murawska, Grzelak-Kostulska, Biegalska (2015) and Parzych (2015). The research conducted by these authors shows that spa services and professionalism were highly appreciated by tourists. On the other hand, the research carried out by Parzych in Dąbki (a seaside village in Pobrżeże Koszalińskiego with the status of a health resort since 2007) revealed that tourists indicated that the main purpose of visiting the town was its spa activities: care treatments, walks, regeneration and rest.

The results of the preliminary research presented in this article fully correspond to the results of the studies by Krzyżanowska (2016) and Parzych (2015). However, the authors have identified additional factors that determine the choice of Kołobrzeg as a health resort. In addition to highly-rated benefits of access to natural healing resources, the respondents also emphasized their interest in sports and recreation facilities. Pro-health services however were rated lower.

7. CONCLUSION

The article presents the results of an exploratory questionnaire preceding actual research which will be conducted among patients in health resorts throughout Poland in the coming years. The results obtained so far demonstrate that Kołobrzeg is a destination eagerly chosen by spa tourists and most of the respondents had visited before.

Kołobrzeg is widely recognized as one of the most beautiful and largest health resorts in Poland, which has a rich history and valuable healing resources including peloid deposits. Typical treatment and rehabilitation programs as part of spa tourism are determined individually and adjusted to the needs of each patient. Trips to a sanatorium are organized so that they are tailored in terms of specialization in treatment of ailments.

The development of modern spas, therapeutic (medical) tourism, as well as spa & wellness is due to the fact that guests are not only patients with specific ailments, but also those without major problems who want to lead a healthy lifestyle and take care of their bodies, using various beauty treatments. Therefore, in many facilities, tourists and patients have the opportunity to take advantage of spa and wellness stays. Undoubtedly, apart from the attractive offer of curative and spa visits, tourists who go to Kołobrzeg are also attracted by unique tourist attractions (including the pier, sea port and lighthouse) and numerous cultural festivals and outdoor events taking place in the summer (e.g. on the beach).

To sum up, today's Kołobrzeg should be seen as a thriving health resort, not only stimulating local development, but also supporting the economy of the region and Poland as a whole. It is a destination of varied tourist attractions (sightseeing, recreation, spa), has well-developed tourism and a high attractiveness rating among patients. This allows us to forecast further dynamic development in spa tourism. It is important that the offer meets the constantly changing expectations and requirements of visitors. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly invest in development, modernize the tourist and para-tourist infrastructure so that it can satisfy the comprehensive needs of its visitors.

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