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Research on the improvement of rural resorts in Ukraine

Abstract. The development of resort services is an integral part of the complex socio-economic development of the rural territories in Ukraine. The country has huge potential for developing different kinds of resorts. To attract consumers of tourist services to rural holiday homes and estates and to improve the quality of rural green tourism (rural hospitality) services in the post-COVID period, taking into account sanitary and hygienic requirements is desirable, by using the recommendations of the "Safe travel" protocol and from EU project "Supporting the development of the system of geographical indications in Ukraine" results. The creation of a legislative framework and strengthening administrative capacity, marketing activities for the rebranding of "sensitive" products, registration of Ukrainian products under Geographical Indication (GI) sign and promotion of their availability on the market, planning projects for the development of rural areas to attract tourism to the regions can benefit in the development of tourist infrastructure in rural areas.

Key words: Ukraine, rural areas, spa facilities, services, "Safe travel" protocol, EU "Supporting the development of the system of geographical indications in Ukraine" project

Introduction

The prerequisite for increasing the average life expectancy in Ukraine and assessing sustainable rural development is the improvement of health-centered services, and the sanatorium-and-spa business in the structure of the recreational industry in particular. The socio-economic significance of therapeutic, preventive and rehabilitation services is highlighted in almost all national program documents of a strategic nature. In the Strategy for the Development of Tourism and Resorts for the period up to 2026, the determining conditions for the sustainable development of such services include the concentration of public resources on the development of the sanatorium-and-spa service sector, improving its regulatory and legislative framework, the integration into the world space of information flows and business processes in this area. This predetermines the actualization of scientific research in the field of sanatorium-and-spa activity.

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Currently, tourism accounts only for 1.4% of Ukraine's GDP, which presents enormous potential for the tourism sector and the economy. The tourism industry in Ukraine is gaining increasing popularity not only among domestic consumers, which is an alternative to expensive foreign resorts, but also among the external consumer since our national tourism is new, interesting and has not been studied by a foreign tourist yet.

Ukraine is overflowing with a great number of both widely known and completely unknown, but yet of great beauty, tourist attractions: from the cozy old-fashioned medieval streets of Lviv to industrial architecture and breathtaking landscapes in the South Ukraine. In the Ukrainian village, you can find environmentally friendly areas where you can get tourists, a sanatorium and resort services. The implementation of tourist and sanatorium services provides residents of the local territories with jobs, promotes infrastructure development and fills the local budget.

Literature review

At present, the issue of rural development has become the focus of scientific research. The novelty, complexity, and interdisciplinary nature of the sanatorium-resort management justify, on the one hand, the participation of scientific schools and specialists of various profiles in its development, and, on the other hand, determines the diversity of views on this issue. The latest publications of Mazaraki and Vedmid (2013), Kovalenko (2015), Dudziak (2019), consider the theoretical background of sanatorium-resort management, regarding the parameters of development of sanatorium-resort and health-improving enterprises and their typology, social and economic stages of rural development in different periods of Ukrainian history. Such research on studying domestic and foreign experience and strategies for its implementation into modern conditions in Ukraine are of great theoretical and practical importance. But despite the value of the researches, certain issues related to the identification of the impact of sanatorium-and-spa activities on rural area development in the context of Ukraine require further study.

The purpose of the article is to examine natural recreational resources in Ukraine, analyze the resource potential of the regions and identify so-called "resort regions", what will allow to propose strategies for expanding spa services in rural territories of Ukraine for further development of the village infrastructure.

Rehabilitation and recreation of people are provided by sanatoriums, boarding houses, dispensaries, children's health camps, holiday homes, tourist bases and shelters. Recreational tourist centers are located in rural areas in environmentally friendly regions that meet all the standards for the treatment and recreation of different groups of the population (Dudziak, Slavina, Humenyuk, 2018).

The core of the sanatorium complex is occupied by business entities that produce services aimed at preventing the loss of the recreational component of human capital. The subjects of sanatorium-resort activity are characterized by the following properties:

- orientation: aimed at providing both treatment and recreation of the population;
- nature of belonging: belonging to both medicine and tourism;

- socio-economic effect: both prevention of loss of human capital and replenishment of the country's budget;
- impact on related areas: manifested both indirect effects (contributing to the development of entrepreneurship in the field of construction, financial services, food, etc.) and an induced effect (providing income to residents in the form of wages, dividends, rent etc.);
- global role: contribute both to the recognition of Ukraine's special importance in the world recreational process and the cultural and historical development of world society.

Methods

To successfully study the issue of the sanatorium-resort sphere improvement in rural areas, it is necessary to apply various methods of studying and cognition of this topic. Therefore such methods of study as statistical, methods of analysis and comparison have been used in the presented research.

Results

In each country, medical and health tourism development depends on the specifics of the natural healing resources available there. It is customary to identify climatic, mud and balneological (*balneum* – bathing) resort resources, but resorts may have one or several natural healing resources at once. Depending on the healing properties of natural resources, resorts can specialize in a certain profile (musculoskeletal, cardiological etc.; Fomenko, 2007).

Recently, medical and health tourism started to become object of interest of new consumers. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle has become fashionable all over the world. This is especially true for middle-aged people, who want to stay in good physical shape, who are interested in popular and up-to-date procedures and who want to relax in “environmentally friendly” natural areas (Ustymenko, 2013).

As a result, traditional sanatorium resorts began to turn into multifunctional health centers. It should be noted that in recent years “spa & wellness” tourism has attracted more and more young people (under the age of 30). In 2008, the share of this segment was about 15% of visitors to resorts, and in 2016 – already 24%. The vast majority in this group belongs to women (up to 74%).

Resorts are divided into resorts of state and local importance. This takes into account the uniqueness and value of the available natural medical and resort-recreational resources, and the level of many other elements, such as available resort potential, resort services, resort facilities, staff training etc.

The specific properties of the available resort and recreational resources determine the medical profile (specialization) of resorts. According to this criterion, resorts are divided into general-purpose resorts and specialized resorts (for the treatment of specific groups of diseases).

By the nature of the leading therapeutic factors, resorts are divided into:

- balneological, where the leading therapeutic factor is the use of natural mineral waters;
- mud (use of therapeutic mud as the main therapeutic agent);
- climatic, where the main therapeutic and prophylactic agent is climate.

Natural recreational resources are the basis for the functioning of the resort sector (conducting resort activities) by supporting the development of specialized medical and preventive institutions to meet the recreational needs of consumers. Natural recreational resources are, first of all, complex natural and natural-technical geosystems, objects, and natural phenomena that have comfortable (attractive) properties for organizing and conducting resort and recreational activities, can be used for its organization for a certain time, as well as ensure the achievement of economic and social effects.

The resort complex is usually a combination of several types of natural resources, very rarely none such resource is present. The resorts provide mainly comprehensive treatment with the use of all available resources. These are balneological cells, wells and springs with mineral waters, therapeutic salt mines and lakes.

Ukraine has significant opportunities for the development of this industry. Recreational resources include mineral waters, therapeutic mud, sea coasts, inland water bodies (lakes, rivers), forest and mountain landscapes with favorable climatic and microclimatic conditions, as well as interesting natural objects and complexes and objects created by man (historical and cultural centers and monuments).

The territory of Ukraine is located in four climatic zones (subtropics, steppe, forest-steppe, and mixed forests), which are the most attractive for consumers of resort services. Ukrainian resort potential is based on the sea coasts of the Black and Azov Seas, the properties of mineral drinking waters, therapeutic mud, unique lakes, the healing climate of forests, etc. Our country, according to the conclusions of balneologists, has unique resort resources (in particular, in the country there are all types of mineral waters known to world science, and individual samples of Ukrainian mineral waters are considered reference). There are mineral waters on the whole territory of Ukraine, and most of them are located in the Carpathians, Podillia, the Crimea.

Therapeutic mud is common in the Black Sea region and the Azov Sea (estuaries), the Crimea and the Carpathian region. Most balneological resorts were created in these areas: Nemyriv, Shklo, Velykyi Lubin, Cherche, Morshyn, Truskavets, Skhidnytsia – in Prykarpattia; Polyana, Syniak, Shayan, Kvasy – in the Carpathians; Husiatyn, Satanov, Khmilnyk – in Podillia; Odesa, Hola Prystan, Yevpatoria, Saky, Feodosia, Berdyansk – on the Black Sea-Azov coast.

The most famous balneological resorts in other regions of the country are Mirhorod and Sloviansk. Climatic resources are most favorable for health improvement and recreation in forest areas (resorts of Vorzel and Pushcha Voditsa near Kyiv, Slovanohorsk in the Donbas), in the mountainous and forest regions of the Carpathians (Yaremche, Vorokhta), on the sea coasts (the above resorts, as well as Zatoka, Ochakov, Skadovsk, Alupka, Yalta, Alushta, Sudak etc.).

The development of medical and health tourism depends on the state and development of the sanatorium and resort base (Novikova, 2011).

In the regional context, the largest number of sanatorium-and-spa institutions is typical for Odesa, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Kherson and Dnipropetrovsk regions (more than 100 institutions). The smallest number of relevant institutions is concentrated in Zhytomyr, Rivne, Ternopil, Chernivtsi and Luhansk (data on the territory controlled by Ukraine are taken for analysis) regions. In general, with the help of recreational resources of all kinds, almost 48 million people can simultaneously improve their health in Ukraine. The recreational resources of Ukraine are represented by flat and mountain recreational fields.

Resort resources in the regional context are placed quite unevenly. Some regions have significant resort potential (“resort regions”), and there are regions with little resort potential. Most of the sanatorium-resort establishments of Ukraine are concentrated in the Crimea, Donetsk, Odesa, and Dnipropetrovsk regions. These regions account for almost half of all sanatoriums and resorts in the country. In the Crimea and Odesa region the largest number of resort resources is concentrated, and in Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk – the largest number of population (that is, potential consumers of resort services).

For the period from 2011–2021, the number of institutions in the sanatorium-resort base decreased by 25.8%. Moreover, the reduction was characteristic for all institutions, only with a different scale. The largest reduction, for the study period, was characteristic for sanatoriums-dispensaries, namely 72%. The second place in terms of the share of reduction is occupied by boarding houses with treatment (40%).

In terms of regions of Ukraine, the negative dynamics, namely the rapid reduction in the number of sanatorium-resort facilities for the studied period, was typical for the Luhansk and Donetsk regions (associated with the anti-terrorist operation on the territory of these regions), as well as Chernivtsi, Rivne, Chernihiv regions and the city of Kyiv (more than 50% of reduction). On the territory of Mykolaiv, there was a slight decrease in the number of relevant institutions (less than 10%), similar situation was in the Ivano-Frankivsk and Kherson regions. And Zaporizhzhia and Odesa regions were characterized by an increase in the corresponding indicator of 24.0% and 14.6%, respectively.

However, according to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, about 3 million people recover annually in the country, including more than 3,000 foreign tourists. At the same time, the country has a significant health potential, since the capacity of health facilities is used only in 30%. The biggest problem is the lack of technical capabilities for the year-round work of such institutions. Accordingly, resort establishments are potentially able to receive 2.5–3 times more tourists and thus increase the efficiency of their activities by 2–3 times, promote employment of the local population, send more contributions to the budget (Sanatorium and spa..., 2022).

According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine between the level of income of tourists and the incomes of tourist enterprises there is a direct relationship, which is reflected in the fact that with an increase in tourist income by 2.5%, tourism costs will increase by 4.0% (Sanatorium and spa..., 2022).

Economic indicators of the development of resort establishments in rural territories in Ukraine indicate a positive trend that has developed in this sector. However, it is obvious that due to the COVID and Russian-Ukrainian war, the size of the domestic tourist flow and the number of foreign tourists may significantly decrease. To avoid such situation, we propose to expand the content of spa services and form a strategy for regulations of sanatorium-resort service at the local level.

The centralized development and regulations of this service will contribute to the development of all types of tourism in a certain territory. For example, in the Lviv region, where the concentration of recreational areas is quite high, a certain catalogue of requirements for tourism in rural areas has been developed. Compliance with certain rules gives the right to receive and use a special award, all these requirements are posted on the site in the section "Safe travel". When developing the protocol, the main task was to find constructive solutions for the restoration of rural green tourism (rural hospitality) and to increase the safety of owners of rural estates and tourists in the conditions of COVID and post-COVID reality.

The Department of Tourism and Resorts of the Regional State Administration encourages representatives of rural green tourism in the Lviv region to adhere to the "Safe travel" protocol or methodical recommendations for the provision of rural hospitality services in the COVID and post-COVID period. This protocol was developed taking into account the best world practices for the resumption of tourism in rural areas. The working group on the development of methodical recommendations for the provision of rural hospitality services in the COVID and post-COVID period was established based on the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Ukraine, with the support of the EU project "Supporting the development of the system of geographical indications in Ukraine". It should be mentioned that the representatives of the local government administration, headed by the director of the tourism and resorts department of the regional state administration also participated in the development of the "Safe travel" protocol. This made it possible to create recommendations corresponding to the realities of the country for which they were developed.

The project also aimed to bring the system of geographical indications in Ukraine closer to the corresponding EU system following the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement. To achieve its overall goal of developing the Ukrainian system of registration, control and protection of geographical indications, the project includes four components (Ukrainian hospitable..., 2022):

- creation of a legislative framework and strengthening administrative capacity;
- marketing activities for the rebranding of "sensitive" products;
- registration of Ukrainian products as Geographical Indication (GI) and promotion of their availability on the market;
- planning projects for the development of rural areas to attract tourism to the regions.

The implementation of the "Safe travel" protocol will allow owners of rural estates that provide services of rural green tourism (rural hospitality):

- to take effective practical measures to reduce the risk of COVID and post-COVID period for owners of a rural estate, their family members, and tourists;
- to get an additional competitive advantage, guaranteeing the tourist increased attention to the protection of his health;
- to improve the quality of rural green tourism (rural hospitality) services, taking into account sanitary and hygienic requirements and social distancing requirements.

For example, to receive an official mark, the owner of the estate must confirm the signing of the “Safe travel” protocol by filling out an electronic form on the website of the Union for the Promotion of Rural Green Tourism in Ukraine and entering the official electronic register of participants of the program “Safe travel”.

In compliance with all the requirements specified in the “Safe travel” protocol, sanitary resort activities in rural areas will contribute to the development of tourism infrastructure.

Conclusions

To conclude, there is a sufficiently powerful potential for creating a tourist infrastructure in Ukraine. First of all, due to unique resort resources and favourable climate conditions available on the territory of Ukraine. Resort resources in the regional context are placed quite unevenly. Most of the sanatorium-resort establishments of Ukraine are concentrated in the Crimea, Donetsk, Odesa, and Dnipropetrovsk regions. The decrease in spa services in the last five years is explained by the impact of COVID, the Russian-Ukrainian war and poor strategy for regulations of sanatorium-resort services. It is advisable to use the recommendations of the “Safe travel” protocol for the resumption of tourism in rural areas in the post-COVID period. Taking into account the popularity of rural estates and holiday homes among families and companies in Ukraine, the document focuses on this types of resorts. These recommendations will help not only to go through the process of rural estate adapting in the context of the pandemic, but also improve the resort services at rural territories in general through the creation of a legislative framework and strengthening administrative capacity, marketing activities for the rebranding of “sensitive” products and registration of Ukrainian products as GI’s and promotion of their availability on the market.

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