

THE POSITION OF NIŠKA BANJA (NIŠ SPA) IN SERBIAN SPA TOURISM

UDC 338.48:615.838 (497.11 Niška Banja)

Živorad Gligorijević¹, Jelena Petrović²

¹Faculty of Economics, University of Niš, 18000 Niš, Serbia
zivorad.gligorijevic@eknfak.ni.ac.rs

²Faculty of Natural and Mathematical Sciences, University of Niš, 18000 Niš, Serbia
jelena_asistent@yahoo.com

Abstract. *All the indicators about the development of tourism in Serbia so far point to the spa tourism as a chance that has been missed. If economic and social circumstances had been different, the majority of spas in Serbia would undoubtedly have found a place among the most attractive destinations in Europe in view of tourist demand and natural resources. As a spa with a long tradition, Niska Banja shared the destiny of Serbian spa tourism. Thermo-mineral springs and radon gas are primary natural resources of Niska Banja which are used as natural means in spa treatment and rehabilitation. However, tourist flow of Niska Banja is inadequately proportional to its natural resources. The authors point to the characteristics of the current and possible future tourism development.*

Key Words: *tourist flow, spa tourism, Niska Banja, development.*

INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Looking at the whole world, spa tourism has had a very long tradition. Namely, thermal waters were used for treatment purposes as far back in time as in the period Before Christ. In the middle ages, thermal waters had not been used for treatment until the 13th century when the residents of lower level status started using them. In the 16th century, the faith in the healing ability of such resources was restored thus making it attractive for people of higher rankings as well. At the beginning of the 19th century, first chemical analysis of thermal waters was done. In the 20th century, medical tourism as well as general tourism experienced an intensive development. After World War II, the intensity of medical tourism development was slower than the one of general tourism.

2. Through mass tourism development, the needs and demands of tourists were focused on "the sun and seaside", whereas spas represented tourist destinations for the eld-

erly and the sick, where the tourist offer was based on thermal water therapies. Spa tourism, as a form of medical tourism, flourished significantly during the 80s of the last century, when the characteristics of this form of tourism started changing as well. The changes in tourist needs and demands in the last twenty years or so have influenced the transformation of a great number of European spas into destinations with tourist-recreation facilities and medical prevention. Although great financial investments are needed, the transformation of spas is necessary in order to realise greater tourist flow and keep their position in tourist market.

3. When it comes to medical tourism, Serbia has a tradition longer than 160 years. Thermo-mineral waters, healing mud, clean air and professional medical personnel represent a significant potential for spa development. Today, although Serbian spas occupy a significant place in Serbia with their tourist flow, the overall tourist flow in all spas is not proportional to their natural resources.

1. SERBIAN SPA TOURISM – ITS STATE AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS

Tourism has become the greatest "industry" and leading economic activity in the world. The diversity of tourist offer has enabled contemporary tourists to choose among different forms of tourism, such as cultural, spa, nautical, etc. The increase in demand for spa tourism in the world is the result of the modern way of living. Hectic and stressful rhythm of a modern man's life, environment pollution and unhealthy diet lead to different diseases. The stated has influenced the emergence of the need to improve people's health and overall satisfaction. Due to the stated reasons, spa tourism and wellness belong to significant forms of contemporary tourism.

As a Balkan state as well as a state in transition, Serbia has to look for its place in the European tourist industry by activating natural and anthropogenic resources in the sense of forming its own image, acceptable interior and tourist product which fulfils all the standards that apply to European tourist products [4, p. 530].

Having in mind the basic trends in the world tourism, goals of long-term tourism development and the existing resources, the following forms of tourism in Serbia can be distinguished: tourism in large cities, transit tourism, spa tourism, Danube tourism and tourism connected to special interests (interest in culture, art, sport, hunting, fishing and others).

However, although there are favourable conditions for tourism development, the degree of tourist potential valorisation and achieved level of tourism development are lagging according to all the indicators [2, p. 23]. Namely, after the sudden decrease of tourist flow by the end of the 80s and during the 90s of the previous century, "the state of stagnation began by the end of the 90s of the previous century and, according to the statistic data, it is ongoing although some aspects and processes have become more complex in the area of property ownership, their sale, pre-categorisation, changing the purpose of a business activity, insufficient maintenance and investment in new capacities, subdividing facilities in private ownership, incompleteness of legislature in the domain of tourism, decrease of the standard of living of our population and drastically decreased interest of foreign tourists in staying in Serbia" [6, p. 25].

The development of spa tourism in Serbia has a long tradition. Spa tourism is one of the oldest tourism activities especially when it comes to using water and air for healing purposes. Spas have always mirrored the society in different social epochs as well as the level of medical development of a specific time. They represent a specific health and medical culture in different parts of human society as well as in the history of Serbia and Serbian society.

Serbia is extremely rich in numerous thermo-mineral springs which represent a good basis for medical-spa tourism development.¹ Different spring localities with specific characteristics represent a crucial point for the development of spa tourism. Their diversity according to physical and chemical composition, temperature, spring abundance and other characteristics, make this area attractive and tempting.

After World War II, spa tourism started developing and in 1960, Serbian spas gained the legal status of natural health resorts. A more intensive development of spa tourism started in the 70s of the previous century. In that sense, the increase of the number of tourists and their overnight stays, as well as the increase of the spa tourism share in the overall Serbian tourism was noted. From 1985 to 1990, the number of tourists in Serbia and spas was steadily decreasing and then in 2000 it was steeply reduced. In the last decade of the previous century, spa tourism shared the destiny of the whole Serbian tourism as well as the destiny of the overall socio-economic stagnation and recession. Apart from this, numerous other factors slowed down the development of spa tourism (insufficient infrastructure and investments, etc.). The period of tourism growth and development in spas until 1990 was replaced with the period of drastic decrease of touristic flow in all the Serbian spas.

The most famous spa centres with extremely long traditions are Vrnjacka Banja, Sokobanja, Niska Banja, Bukovacka Banja and Mataruska Banja. Today, tourism flow in Serbian spas is above the level of the one in the 70s of the previous century. However, the share of spas in the tourism flow in Serbia between 1966 and 2009 increased which was a consequence of the reduction of the number of tourists in Serbia, civic administrative centres and other places as well as the change of tourists' needs. In the period from 1954 to 2009, average number of overnight stays was reduced from 10.8 to 6.4 days.

The development of spa tourism in Serbia is characterised by complete domination of the domestic over the foreign tourist flow. The participation of foreign tourists in the tourist flow in spas ranged from 1.5 to 6.7 %. They participated least during the 70s and 80s of the previous century, and most in 2009. After World War II, an extremely low percentage of the foreign tourist share in the overall number of tourists in spas is a consequence of stimulating the development of sea tourism in other republics of ex Yugoslavia.

¹In Serbia, there are about 300 mineral and thermo-mineral springs which were explored and tested. Two basic ways of using mineral and thermo-mineral waters are healing and bottling. There are 38 spas in Serbia. Of about 87,000 lodgings in Serbian tourist offer, 40,000 are in spa and climate-conditioned places, and 30 to 35% of overall tourist flow is realized in spas.

Table 1 Tourist flow in Serbia and Serbian spas

Year	Tourist flow in Serbia		Tourist flow in spas		Spa share in tourist flow in Serbia (in %)
	Overall number of tourists	Foreign tourists	Overall number of tourists	Foreign tourists	
1954	864,000	40,000	97,000	2,000	11.23
1966	2,460,000	473,000	227,000	5,000	9.23
1970	3,323,000	687,000	332,000	5,000	9.99
1975	4,021,000	842,000	394,000	6,000	9.80
1980	4,328,000	868,000	464,000	7,000	10.72
1985	4,746,000	847,000	493,000	8,000	10.39
1990	3,940,000	880,000	454,000	28,000	11.52
1995	2,432,000	204,000	323,000	13,000	13.28
2000	2,169,225	165,676	330,000 ¹	13,000 ¹	15.21
2005	1,989,000	453,000	303,000	17,000	15.23
2009	2,019,000	646,000	358,000	24,000	17.73

¹Data for Kosovo and Metohia are not included

Source: Republic Institute for Statistics, Municipalities in Serbia 1971-2009, Belgrade.

Based on the fluctuation of overnight stays, periods of rise and significant reduction in tourist activity in Serbian spas can be clearly seen. The development of spa tourism started in 1954 and lasted until 1985. Due to a long-standing crisis caused by economic and non-economic factors, there came to a sudden decrease of the number of tourists and overnight stays. The share of foreign tourists in overnight stays in spas was less than 1% until 1985. The increase of foreign tourists and their overnight stays has to be one of the priorities in further development of Serbian spas. With the aim to increase the number of foreign tourists and their overnight stays in Serbian spas, it is necessary to develop not only health but other forms of tourism as well.

Table 2 Overnight stays of tourists in Serbia and Serbian spas

Year	Overnight stays of tourists in Serbia		Overnight stays of tourist in spas		Spa share in overnight stays of tourists in Serbia (in %)
	Overall number of tourists	Foreign tourists	Overall number of tourists	Foreign tourists	
1954	2,434,000	131,000	1,061,000	4,000	43.59
1966	5,774,000	825,000	2,070,000	14,000	35.85
1970	7,676,000	1,136,000	2,817,000	17,000	36.70
1975	9,967,000	1,381,000	3,473,000	17,000	34.84
1980	12,020,000	1,466,000	3,997,000	17,000	33.23
1985	13,897,000	1,473,000	4,154,000	27,000	29.89
1990	11,670,000	1,468,000	3,464,000	49,000	29.68
1995	8,125,000	644,000	2,399,000	122,000	29.53
2000	7,696,000	431,000	2,510,000	59,000	32.61
2005	6,499,000	992,000	2,012,000	65,000	30.96
2009	6,762,000	1,469,000	2,287,000	97,000	33.82

Source: The same.

In the first seven months of 2010, the most visited spas in Serbia were Vrnjacka Banja, Sokobanja, Niska Banja, Banja Koviljaca and Prolom Banja. In the stated period, Serbian spas were visited by 17.22% of the overall tourist number with 32.83% of overall overnight stays [9]. Spas simultaneously absorb about 3.86% of overall number of tourists who visited Serbia. Average length of a tourist stay in spas is 1.5 to 4 times bigger in relation to other tourist centres in Serbia, which is a good basis for spa development. Thus, it can be concluded that Serbian spas represent significant tourist centres and that, regardless of considerable oscillations in tourist flow during certain years and time periods, they deserve greater attention from science, state and society.

Prior to the implementation of Spa and Health Tourism Development Strategy in Hungary, spas were not the major source of regional income. Hungarian government invested about 370 million dollars into 74 projects of different size, forming about 2,750 new job positions in tourism and 9,000 new job positions in other work areas [10].

Having in mind Hungarian experience and with a view to develop tourism in spas, state and local Serbian authorities should prepare the following actions: a) establish the goals of tourism development in spas; b) do market research in the areas of natural resources and tourist needs; c) attract new market segments, including young population; d) form a competitive product on the national and international level; e) create an appealing atmosphere for attracting investments.

The development of tourism in Serbian spas would: a) increase consumption and length of stay; b) change tourist profile in spas.

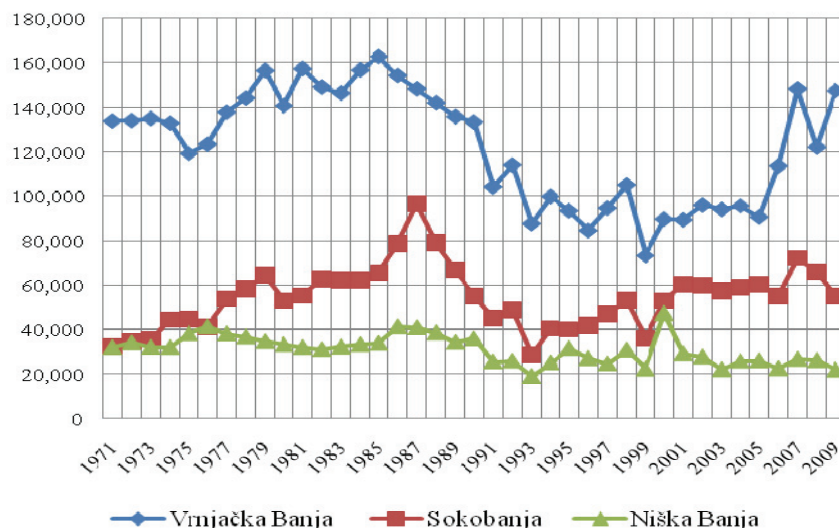
2. CHARACTERISTICS OF TOURIST FLOW IN NIŠKA BANJA (NIŠ SPA)

According to the geographic position, Serbian spas can be divided into: spas of north Serbia, spas of central Serbia, spas of west Serbia, spas of east Serbia and spas of south Serbia. The spas of north Serbia include: Banja Kanjiza, Banja Junakovic and Banja Palic. The spas of central Serbia include: Bogutovacka Banja, Palanacki kiseljak, Selters Banja, Ribarska Banja, Vrnjacka Banja, Mataruska Banja, Josanicka Banja, Ovcar Banja, Gornja Trepca, Banja Vrujci and Bukovicka Banja. The spas of west Serbia include: Banja Koviljaca and Pribojska Banja. The spas of east Serbia include: Gamzigradska Banja, Brestovacka Banja, Zvonacka Banja and Sokobanja. The spas of south Serbia include: Niska Banja, Bujanovacka Banja, Vranjska Banja, Novopazarska Banja, Sijarinska Banja, Kursumlijska Banja, Prolom Banja and Lukovska Banja.

In Serbia, the majority of spas generate small flow of tourists and overnight stays, and it consequently has a small influence on local and social surrounding. The causes of such a state are numerous and manifold and they relate to insufficient investment into their development, inadequate organisation and cooperation between those who provide service and the local government, unaltered offer to the changed tourist needs and the like. Although some of the Serbian spas have undergone an intensive development after World War II, the spas with long tradition - Vrnjacka, Sokobanja and Niska Banja - are dominant when it comes to tourist flow.

Within the observed period, the tourist flow of Niska Banja was susceptible to constant oscillations. According to the statistic data of the Republic Institute for Statistic, the tourist flow was significantly balanced in the period from 1871 and 1987 and it ranged from 31,209 (in 1982) to 41,601 tourists (in 1976).

As a consequence of economic sanctions, civil war in the area of ex SFRY, NATO aggression and transition, in the period from 1988 until today, it has been noticed that the number of tourists in Niska Banja varies. In this period, the greatest tourist flow was noted in 2000 when 47,588 tourists were registered in Niska Banja. Simultaneously, that has been the greatest realised tourist flow in the period from 1971 until today.



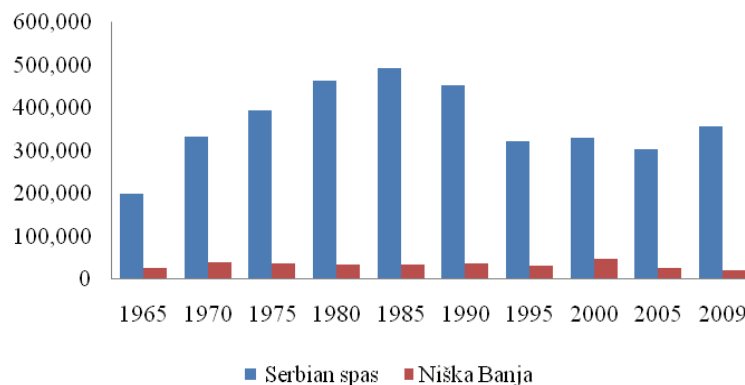
Graph 1 Generated tourist flow in the most visited serbian spas

Source: Republic Institution for Statistics, Municipalities in Serbia 1971-2009, Belgrade.

The lowest tourist flow was noted in 1993, the year which was remembered for its hyperinflation. The hyperinflation in 1992, especially 1993, which made all the processes unrealistic [1, p. 136], negatively influenced the development of tourism in Serbian spas. In the last decade of the 20th century, unfavourable social and economic happenings negatively influenced the development of tourism in other Serbian spas as well. For the purpose of comparative analysis, the graphic representation of tourist flow in Sokobanja and Vrnjacka Banja is shown below.

In 1971, 1972 and 1976, Niska Banja and Sokobanja noted almost the same tourist flow. From 1971 to 1987, Sokobanja increased tourist flow three times, whereas tourist flow in Niska Banja remained the same. After 1993, when the lowest flow was noted in Sokobanja, the number of tourists and overnight stays has grown, whereas Niska Banja noted periodical increase and decrease of the number of tourists and overnight stays. In the first decade of the 21st century, the number of tourists and overnight stays in Vrnjacka Banja, as well as Sokobanja has mostly grown.

Statistic data of the last four decades show that Niska Banja has noted a greater number of foreign tourists and their overnight stays in the stated period. However, although foreign tourist flow in Niska Banja is greater than in Sokobanja, it is not in accordance with its transport system and geographical position.



Graph 2 The number of tourists in Niška Banja and Serbian spas
Source: [5]

The best indicator of the position of Niska Banja on the Serbian tourist map is its share in the overall number of tourists who have visited spa centres. Average distribution of tourist flow shows that spas have a share of 12.5% in the tourist flow, with Niska Banja being in the third place with an average of 10%.

The comparison of the number of tourists in Niska Banja with the number of tourists in Sokobanja and Vrnjacka Banja, as well as its share in the overall tourist flow of Serbian spas, show that once famous Niska Banja has now lost its importance. The tourist flow in the stated period shows that thermo-mineral water and radon gas are not sufficient for the development of tourism in Niska Banja.

3. TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS IN NIŠKA BANJA

The geographical position of spas had a significant influence on their tourist flow. While considering and evaluating the geographic position of Niska Banja, it is necessary to view its relation to: important communications, attractive tourist motives and populated zones, i.e. cities [3, p. 43].

Niska Banja, the oldest municipality of the city of Nis, is situated at important cross-roads between east and west Europe. Having in mind significant communication routs, the most important transport-tourist position is held by the spas situated next to the Corridor X, and those are Niska Banja and Vranjska Banja. Compared to Vranjska Banja, Niska Banja has a more favourable transport-tourist position near the airport. Nis airport can have an important role for establishing a flow of foreign tourists towards Niska Banja.

The vicinity of greater cities has a twofold importance for tourism development in spas – the cities are the centres of both domestic and international tourist flows [3, p. 44]. As a natural, social, educational, health, cultural and sports centre of the south-east Serbia, the city of Nis possesses also a range of attractions which represent a significant resource for tourism development [7, p. 16]. Simultaneously, these resources can contribute to a faster tourism development in Niska Banja. Based on the overall analysis of tourist-geographic position of Niska Banja, we can conclude that it has a more favourable position in relation to other Serbian spas.

The basis for Niska banja tourism development is seen in its favourable position, healing water and radon gas. Numerous oversights in tourism development were conditioned by misdirected and inadequate planning. Spontaneous development of tourism during the 60s, 70s and 80s of the previous century was discontinued later. Due to tourist demands and needs, it is necessary to undertake certain measures for increasing the quality of tourist offer.

Apart from health tourism, it is necessary to develop other forms of tourism as well – outing/hiking, transit, manifestation and wellness tourism. In the development of selective forms of tourism, a significant role should be played by personnel who would constantly monitor tourist interests, wishes and needs, research and analyse their motivation and identify the needs for the development of new specific forms of tourism in Niska Banja.

Tourist flow in Niska Banja has never been in accordance with its natural resources, material basis as well as geographic position and transport system. With the aim to have a faster tourism development, it is necessary for the state and local authorities to undertake actions so as not only to direct investments into building new tourist-catering facilities and open-air pools, but also to create a propaganda tourist offer on both domestic and foreign market and enrich the content of tourist stay and its extension.

CONCLUSION

1. Great natural resources and favourable conditions for the development of tourism in spas are seen in Serbian numerous thermal and thermo-mineral resources. The development of spa tourism in Serbia has a long tradition. In Serbia, spa centres are the oldest tourist places with long tradition in developing suitable activities and happenings.

A more intensive development of spa tourism in Serbia started in the 70s of the previous century. The period of tourism growth and development in spas until 1990 was replaced by the period of drastic reduction of tourist flow in all the Serbian spas. Today, tourist flow in the Serbian spas is below the level characteristic for the 70s of the previous century.

The development of spa tourism in Serbia is characterised by complete domination of domestic over foreign tourist flow. The increase of the number of foreign tourists and their overnight stays has to be one of the priorities in further development of the Serbian spas. For the purpose of increasing the number of foreign tourists and their overnight stays in the Serbian spas, it is necessary to develop not only health but also other forms of tourism.

2. Based on the analysis of Niska Banja tourism development, it can be concluded that Niska Banja has a potential for tourism development. This potential was recognised by the Romans in the ancient history.

Tourist flow in Niska Banja has never been in accordance with its natural resources, material basis as well as geographic position and transport system. With the aim to have a faster tourism development, it is necessary for the state and local authorities to undertake actions so as not only to direct investments into building new tourist-catering facilities and open-air pools, but also to create a propaganda tourist offer on both domestic and foreign market and enrich the content of tourist stay and its extension.

REFERENCES

1. Arandelović, Z., Gligorijević, Ž., Nacionalna ekonomija, Petrograf, Niš, 2008.
2. Gligorijević, Ž., Petrović, J., Turizam u funkciji strukturnog prilagođavanja privrede Srbije, Ekonomika br. 1-2, Društvo ekonomista "ekonomika" Niš, 2008.
3. Jovičić, Ž., Turizam Srbije, NIP "Turistička štampa", Beograd.
4. Milenković, S., "Turistička industrija" Evrope i mesto Balkana u njoj, Regionalni razvoj i demografski tokovi balkanskih zemalja, br. 12, Ekonomski fakultet, Niš, 2007.
5. Opštine u Srbiji 1971-2009, Republika Srbija – Republički zavod za statistiku, Beograd, 1972-2010.
6. Stanković, L.J., Petrović, J., Marketing of tourism destination of Nis, Facta Universitatis, Vol. 4 No 1, Univerzitet u Nišu, 2007.
7. Stanković, S., Banje Srbije, Zavod za udžbenike, Loznica, 2009.
8. Štetić, S., Alternativni ili masovni turizam, Zbornik radova "Održivi turizam u zaštićenim oblastima", Ministarstvo za zaštitu životne sredine, Beograd, 1997.
9. www.stat.gov.rs
10. www.minttu.sr.gov.zu/pdf/turističkipregled02.pdf.

MESTO NIŠKE BANJE U BANJSKOM TURIZMU SRBIJE**Živorad Gligorijević, Jelena Petrović**

Svi pokazatelji o dosadašnjem razvoju turizma u Srbiji ukazuju da banjski turizam predstavlja propuštenu šansu. Da su privredne i društvene okolnosti bile drugačije nesumljivo je da bi, sa stanovišta turističke tražnje i prirodnog bogatstva, većina banja u Srbiji našla mesto među najatraktivnijim destinacijama Evrope. Kao banja sa dugom tradicijom, Niška Banja je delila sudbinu banjskog turizma Srbije. Termomineralni izvori i gas radon su primarne prirodne vrednosti Niške Banje, koje se koriste kao prirodni faktori banjskog lečenja i rehabilitacije. Međutim, turistički promet Niške Banje nije adekvatno srazmeran njenim prirodnim vrednostima. Autori ukazuju na karakteristike dosadašnjeg i mogućnosti njenog budućeg razvoja turizma.

Ključne reči: *turistički promet, banjski turizam, Niška Banja, razvoj.*