

## THE CONNECTION OF THE CONSUMER NEEDS IN THE HEALTH TOURISM SECTOR TO EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

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*Nowadays the protection of health, the conscious thinking that places health in the lime light more and more characterizes the different social groups. Several factors led to the development of this trend, and to the changed needs of the consumers there were different reactions from the supplier side. New courses that are being offered at the university faculties should match those trends. Therefore it is advisable to know what the characteristics of a wellness customer are, in order to discuss the certain fields in the study programs. It is a basic interest of the supplying organizations to monitor the changing of consumer's needs and to react to those. In line with the changing attitude there was development in healthcare and medicine, which intensified the process. Today health is not only in everybody's own interest. Nowadays everything that has to do with health consciousness is very important. Looking at this from another point of view shows the same tendencies. Everything that is offered under the banner of health-protection is of importance, even if its effects are not medically proven. In accordance with this trend it is central to develop a well positioned health-touristic supply that can be attractive to the different target audience. Based on geographical capabilities packages can be developed, that arise the interest of the aforementioned consumers and give them an alternative among the rising competition. For this it can be useful to know the factors that led the consumer to his or her decision. So it crucial to look for those criterions and viewpoints that help the supplier to understand why and how a customer chooses between the different health touristic services. To satisfy those customer needs, we also need to have a qualified work force. The other goal of the paper is to draw attention to the areas that the different education programs need to focus on.*

**Keywords:** wellness, consumer motivation, primary research.

Wellness is a significant trend nowadays. Wellness is a harmony of body and soul, meaning that the beauty that can be seen is combined with an inner beauty and balance (Töröcsik, 2004).

According to international literature, the expression „wellness” is much more complex. It means a special status of human well-being that builds up of responsibility, healthy nutrition, body fitness, and spiritual activity (Dunn, 1961).

Regarding wellness there are two different segments. The consumers of one segment take part in wellness programs during their spare time and they are looking for a body and soul well being. This needs can be satisfied by the supplier sector enterprises. Those people who want to achieve body and soul well being during their everyday life belong to the other segment. They are looking for those possibilities that enable wellness to become a part of their everyday life (Fodor & Fürediné, 2006).

Nowadays health and wellness became a kind of status symbol, a fashion. Therefore the group of consumers that have an interest in health consciousness changed. The knowledge of the tendencies is important in order to develop the national market, so market research is crucial.

The market is developing constantly so it is a key issue to follow the changes of the consumer's needs and desires. In order for the suppliers to satisfy those needs, there is a need for profound market researches that show the preferences and expectations of the consumers.

These trends are also inevitable for the South Plain Region of Hungary. If we look at this as an opportunity from the economical perspective, than we need to look at it also as an opportunity from the universities point of view. The reason behind that is if it is vital for the region to attract more tourist than it will be important to present what they need. The guests must be satisfied with the level of service, therefore qualified workforce is needed. That is why this could be a great opportunity for the different faculties.

This happened to be the case at the Szent István University Faculty of Economy in Békéscsaba, where students have the chance to study at the tourism and hospitality program. Numbers show that more and more students are interested each year in this program. At another nearby faculty of the Szent István University a relatively big number of students start studying about health tourism management. These facts also show that the universities and the students are well aware of these trends. Therefore it is important to provide the best possible course program for them and this lead us to think about what the consumers are really what. It is important to know what they want and what their motivation is.

## Materials and methods

In our research, we have conducted a standardized personal survey, which contained only closed-ended questions on nominal, ordinal and interval levels of measurement. The main categories of question were related to the need for wellness services, to the consumer behaviors and motivation and there were also the personal question as tools for primary segmentation.

The main goal of the questionnaire was to find out the circumstances of the use of wellness programs and to define the most important consumer motivation factors.

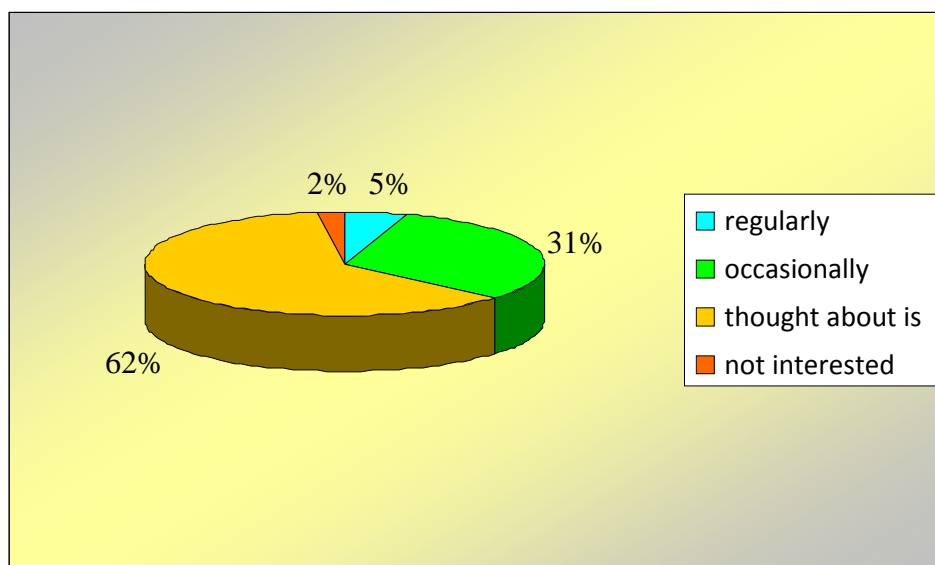
Regarding the demographic content of the sample we focused on two counties, Békés county (40%), Pest County (47%) and the capitol Budapest (13%). 31% of those questioned were men and 69 % were women. Most of them are young (between 18-29 years of age) or younger middle aged (31-39 years of age). There were very few of those in the sample, who were 60 years older. 55% were married or in a common-law marriage status and 41% were unmarried. Most of those questioned were living in a city (68%) or in the capitol (13%).

## Results of the research

### Specialties of wellness tourism consumers

62% of those who participated in the survey think that it would be nice to go to a wellness tourism program, but did not have the chance to do it yet. Many of them answered the once in a while it is possible to go on such trips. Only 5 % of those questioned said to be able to enjoy wellness services regularly. (see figure 1)

Figure 1. *Participation in a tourism or wellness program*



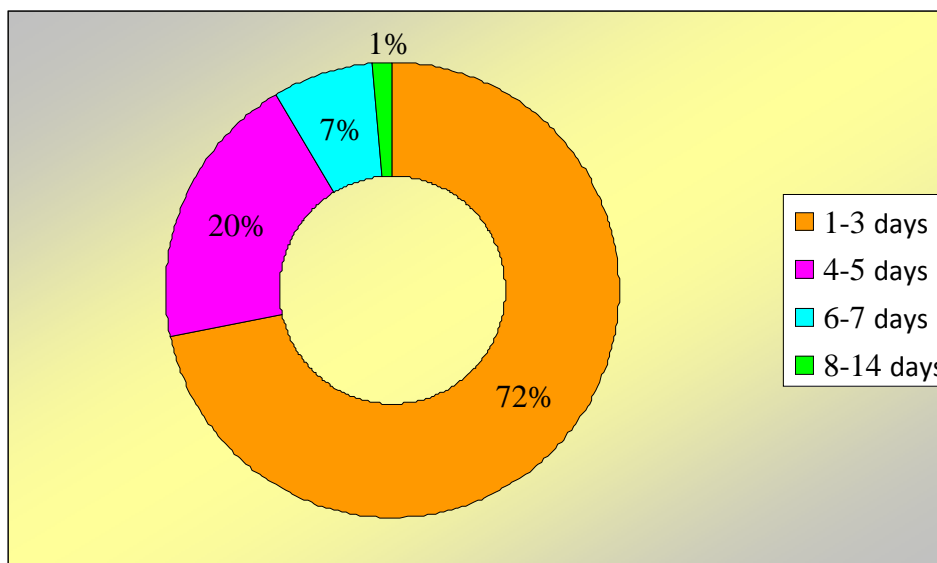
*Source: own research, 2009. N= 195*

Nearly half (40%) of the sample has been on a wellness holiday in the previous year and more than one third of them (35%) two or three years ago. In the same year, when the survey was conducted, only 18% had been on such program.

Around 33% of those questioned said that that they take up wellness services once or maximum three times a year and round 30 % - which could be considered quite a high rate – answered to use wellness services more than six times a year.

We were curious to find out how many days the customers spend in wellness resort, using different services. Most of them (72%) answered that they normally use the opportunities of a „long weekend”, which would mean 1-3 days. It is not really common to go on such a special type of holiday as a wellness program for a week (4-5 days) and it is even rarer to go for a longer stay than two weeks. Even though there is a growing need for health and wellness services. (see figure 2)

Figure 2. Duration of wellness services



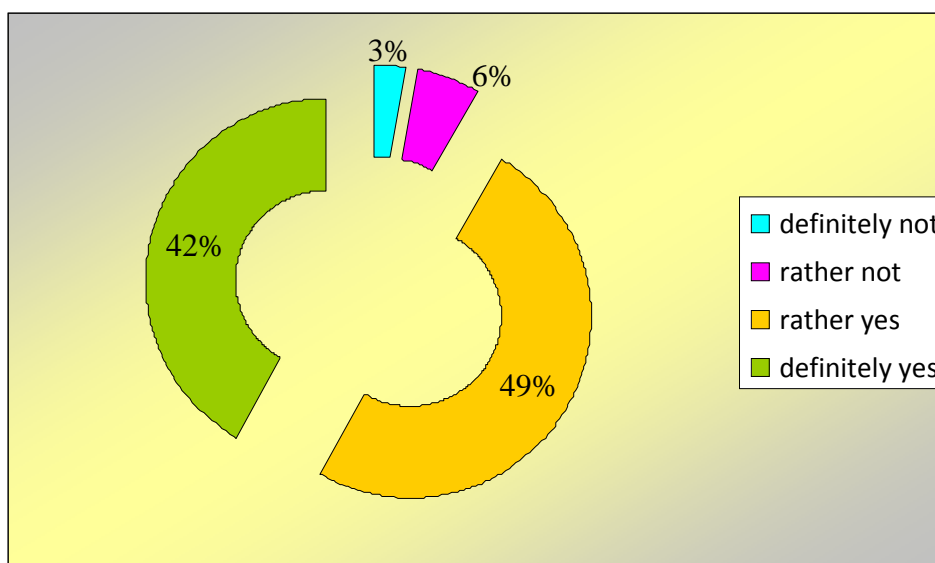
Source: own research, 2009. N= 195

We have found it also very important to analyze whether the wellness tourists would be planning any trips in the near future. We would need to point out the importance of this question, because it could help us define the trends of the demand. We could see if more people would be interested in services in general. On the other hand it is also possible to find out whether the consumers were satisfied with the level of service or not. Being unsatisfied, could lead to lower numbers of tourist and a negative attitude toward the service provider or the city, region as well and would probably not require any service again there. While if the customer had spent an unforgettable time at the destination than could become a regular wellness guest and could also advise other to take up the same service.

The results were better than expected: almost half of the sample (49%) plans to repeat the same trip and 42% answered that would definitely repeat the tourism package. (see: figure 3)

There is very minimal number of answers, who said that was not planning to make any trips again in the future. This would lead us to a conclusion that there is an ever growing need in the consumers to relax and to care about his health. These are good signs that would need action from the supply side as well.

Figure 3. *Going on wellness holiday repeatedly*

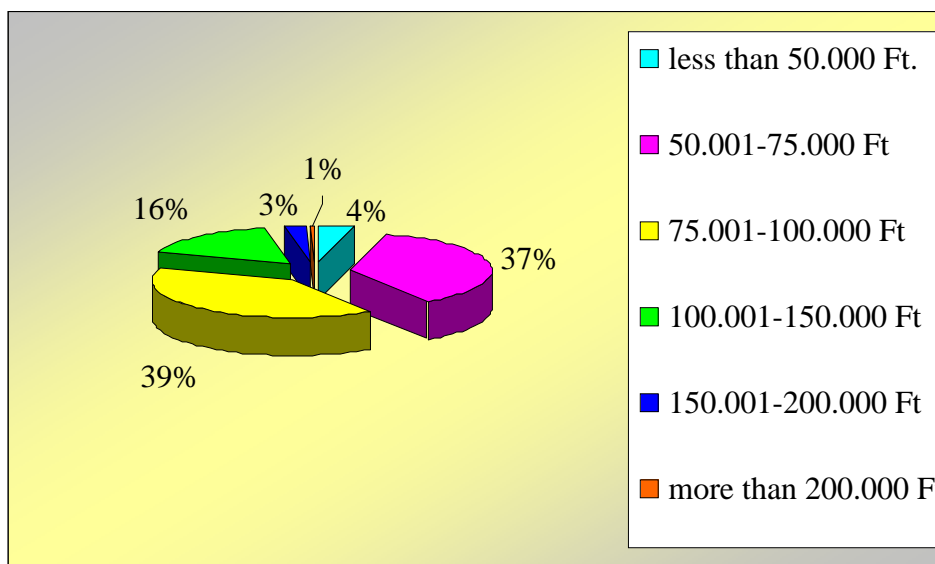


Source: own research, 2009, N= 195

We also wanted to examine, how much our customers were willing to spend on a one week wellness holiday. Most of them (39%) would spend between 75.000 and 100.000 forint, but there were quite a lot (37%), who would likely to pay between 50.000 and 75.000 forint.

None of those questioned would say it was worth to pay over 200.000 forint for a week of special wellness package. Even the amount between 150.000 and 200.000 would seem to be unreal for the most.

Figure 4. *The value of a week wellness holiday*



Source: own research, 2009, N= 195

### Factors that determine the use of wellness services

Looking at the rank of the most important factors that determine the choosing of types of accommodations and services, we can see that none of the factors received a higher mean value than 4,5. (table 1.) The relatively high values of standard deviation show that the different factors are not measured by the same weight by the different consumers. This means we cannot say that there are strict motivation factors and consumer preferences of the consumers. This, however, did not really hit us by surprise, because we are speaking of a special, relatively new, continuously changing market, which is also influenced by the current consumer trends.

Table 1. *Factors that determine the choosing of holiday destinations (1=absolutely not important, 5= absolutely important)*

| <b>factors</b>                   | <b>mean</b> | <b>st. deviation</b> |
|----------------------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| should be domestic               | 3,24        | 1,37                 |
| should be foreign                | 2,33        | 1,19                 |
| thermal bath                     | 3,21        | 1,27                 |
| spa                              | 3,32        | 1,31                 |
| <b>silent surroundings</b>       | <b>4,23</b> | 0,94                 |
| beauty care service              | 3,20        | 1,30                 |
| diet plan                        | 2,41        | 1,31                 |
| fitness room                     | 3,17        | 1,42                 |
| <b>pool</b>                      | <b>4,13</b> | 1,13                 |
| organic food                     | 2,71        | 1,30                 |
| babysitting                      | 3,18        | 1,52                 |
| children friendly hotel          | 3,66        | 1,44                 |
| <b>medical attendance</b>        | <b>4,13</b> | 1,12                 |
| pharmacy                         | 3,38        | 1,36                 |
| short stay                       | 2,99        | 1,27                 |
| one week stay                    | 3,19        | 1,30                 |
| two week stay                    | 2,40        | 1,25                 |
| more than two week stay          | 1,91        | 1,14                 |
| lectures about healthy lifestyle | 2,25        | 1,21                 |
| cultural programs                | 3,77        | 1,11                 |
| sport                            | 3,94        | 1,14                 |
| <b>possibility of excursions</b> | <b>4,38</b> | 0,73                 |
| <b>hiking</b>                    | <b>4,06</b> | 1,03                 |
| <b>massage</b>                   | <b>4,05</b> | 1,22                 |
| <b>sauna</b>                     | <b>4,14</b> | 1,10                 |

Source: own research, 2009. N= 195

Among the more important (mean greater than 4,00) factors are such as the silent surroundings, possibilities of making smaller trips, excursions or hiking, having a pool at the hotel and massage service with sauna and also to have medical attendance.

According to the international scientific researches, there are four wellness factors. (fitness/sport, healthy nourishment, relaxation and spiritual activity) The above mentioned factors could rather be connected to sport and relaxation.

The other two wellness factors were not really important for those of questioned. The mean value of spiritual activity (lectures of healthy foods, cultural programs) and healthy nourishment (organic food) were mostly around or below 3,00.

### Consumer motivation of wellness

According to international studies, pleasure, evenness, internal balance and harmony are very important for the wellness-consumer, how are trying to get past the stressful circumstances.

The result of our study is similar to the international experience. Among those of questioned, the most important and valuable motivation was the possibility of relaxing and looking for the pleasure of treating ourselves.

The search for the relaxation and the self treatment from the wellness consumers is a good indication of the latest trends, the influence of individualism. According to this trend the consumer's main focus turns toward himself, the internal balance and harmony. Therefore it is expected not only to have nice surroundings, but also to receive a great service and have a nice experience (Berg, 2008).

Speaking of the most valuable sources of information, we need to say that the internet is the best way to reach the partner (Table 3). 76% of those questioned said that internet is the best way of collecting information and this is also not a big surprise, since internet is developing and spreading at a relatively high rate.

Besides the internet, television is the other more important source of information. We also need to point out that the social connections have a big share as well.

Table 3. *Source of information, when choosing a wellness service*

| <b>information source</b> | <b>(%)</b>  |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| mail                      | 11,3        |
| travel agency             | 16,9        |
| travel expo               | 6,2         |
| <b>internet</b>           | <b>76,9</b> |
| medical suggestion        | 3,6         |
| <b>television</b>         | <b>45,1</b> |
| newspaper                 | 34,9        |
| <b>friends</b>            | <b>45,1</b> |
| family                    | 14,9        |

*Source: own research, 2009. N= 195*

The fact that only 3,6% answered that the motivation behind taking part in wellness programs are based on medical suggestions by a doctor leads to an internationally well known trend that the wellness tourist are those who are not sent by anybody, they have freely chosen to take up the program and service. Therefore those customers need to gather as much information as possible from different source.

### Consumer expectations and motivations of women and men

Experts say that most of the wellness consumer are women. The quality of life is very important for them and they are always very busy.

This is one of the reasons, why we wanted to see if there is any difference between the motivating factors of women and men. Therefore we analyzed the consumer preference of men and women separately. The result showed that for the ladies, it is more important to have the possibility of any kind of beauty care service, to be able to eat organic foods and to be children friendly.

Contrarily to that, men like to travel abroad, where they can find spa or baths at the hotel and also a fitness facility can be found there.

Table 4. *Factors that determine the choosing of holiday destinations by women and men (1=absolutely not important, 5= absolutely important)*

| factors                          | women       | men         | sample |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------|
| should be domestic               | 3,26        | 3,21        | 3,24   |
| should be foreign                | 2,21        | <b>2,59</b> | 2,33   |
| thermal bath                     | 3,23        | 3,14        | 3,21   |
| spa                              | 3,27        | <b>3,44</b> | 3,32   |
| <b>silent surroundings</b>       | 4,26        | 4,16        | 4,23   |
| beauty care service              | <b>3,45</b> | 2,67        | 3,20   |
| diet plan                        | 2,49        | 2,24        | 2,41   |
| fitness room                     | 3,11        | <b>3,32</b> | 3,17   |
| <b>pool</b>                      | 4,17        | 4,03        | 4,13   |
| organic food                     | <b>2,89</b> | 2,31        | 2,71   |
| babysitting                      | 3,20        | 3,13        | 3,18   |
| children friendly hotel          | <b>3,78</b> | 3,40        | 3,66   |
| <b>medical attendance</b>        | 4,07        | 3,93        | 4,13   |
| pharmacy                         | 3,41        | 3,31        | 3,38   |
| short stay                       | 2,93        | 3,13        | 2,99   |
| one week stay                    | 3,13        | 3,27        | 3,19   |
| two week stay                    | 2,40        | 2,39        | 2,40   |
| more than two week stay          | 1,85        | 2,04        | 1,91   |
| lectures about healthy lifestyle | 2,30        | 2,14        | 2,25   |
| cultural programs                | <b>3,94</b> | 3,40        | 3,77   |
| sport                            | 3,89        | 4,04        | 3,94   |
| <b>possibility of excursions</b> | <b>4,44</b> | 4,26        | 4,38   |
| <b>hiking</b>                    | 4,07        | 4,03        | 4,06   |
| <b>massage</b>                   | 4,11        | 3,90        | 4,05   |
| <b>sauna</b>                     | 4,17        | 4,08        | 4,14   |

Source: own research, 2009. N= 195

Later on we plan to do other researches, which could help to identify other socio-demographic factors that could significantly influence the choosing of wellness service and accommodation packages. We believe that



we could discover further interesting connections and differences among the factors of consumer expectation.

## Discussion

The results of the research clearly show that there is a need for wellness services. It is likely to become even more popular if money had no influence in the case.

We find it very useful to point out the most important factors, which influence the choosing of service provider, accommodation, city or region.

Now that we see the key factors that motivate the consumers, we need turn our focus on the other side and see what the educational programs have to do with this. It is clear that this sector needs professionals, who use such information and create a good brand, a value, a tourism package that could attract many guests. Knowing the motivating factors is one thing, meeting those needs is another. It is one important task at the different levels of the education system to teach all the information and give all the knowledge to those in the service sector. It is important to study the using of different marketing techniques and the specialties of certain marketing tools. It is also crucial to learn how the system works, what resources exist and can be used in order to be or become competitive. Based on the results one can say that educational programs also must develop in a unique way to train nutrition, fitness or medical experts for this field of tourism.

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