

## WELLNESS IN SERBIAN HOTELS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMICS

*Aleksandra Bradić-Martinović<sup>1</sup>; Tatjana Mišić<sup>2</sup>*

### Abstract

*In the last twenty years, Serbia has significantly improved the number and quality of accommodation facilities in tourism, especially in the hotel industry. The wellness concept in the hotel offer is known as a highly competitive tourist product, which has the capacity to attract domestic and foreign guests. Hotels in Serbia have recognized this possibility and started investing in wellness facilities and equipment, especially in spas with exceptional natural resources (thermal and mineral water, air and peloid). The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the hotel industry, especially in cities. In response to the challenge, wellness hotels respected the measures of the RS Government and the Crisis headquarters but also changed procedures. Our research has shown that the situation regarding the implementation of anti-Covid standards in Serbia wellness hotels is satisfactory.*

Key Words: *hotels, wellness, spa, COVID-19, tourism, Serbia*

JEL classification: *L83, Z3, Z32*

### Introduction

The wellness concept has a long tradition, but it has gained an entirely new business dimension in the last twenty years and has become a significant tourist product recognized by private capital and policymakers at the national level. Many countries in the world and the region (Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria) offer guests numerous facilities equipped with wellness resources and thus enrich their tourist offer and attract many domestic and international tourists.

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In this paper, the emphasis is placed on hotels that offer wellness facilities, focusing on hotels in Serbia during the Covid-19 pandemics. The paper aims to highlight this significant subject, one of the strategic polls of Serbian spa tourism, and to explore the praxis of Serbian hotels with wellness facilities during the second year of pandemics. After the introductory part in which the development of the wellness concept was presented, the scope of the global wellness economy and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on its range was shown. The most critical trends in wellness that are expected in the "New normal" framework are also covered. The second part of the paper presents the business concept that hotels apply in developing wellness content. The third part presents the Serbian hotel industry as a framework for implementing the wellness concept and explains the development in Serbian hotels. The last part presents the results of a survey conducted on a sample of hotels on the behaviour and procedures they conducted and continue to perform to protect guests and employees in wellness facilities from the coronavirus.

### **Wellness Tourism – Old Concept in New Age**

The development of humanity follows progress in the awareness of life and how we can improve its quality. The dimension of preserving physical and mental health and vitality has created new and innovative tourism products. The Wellness movement and industry certainly fall into this category. Wellness is a new paradigm that emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century as an alternative to the traditional medical model of treating mental and physical illnesses (Myers et al., 2000). It implies a psychosomatic balance and harmony of physical, mental and emotional dimensions, known as the holistic approach. In general, the wellness concept emphasizes a proactive approach in which people try to identify potential health problems and then prevent their further development with specific treatments and activities (preventive approach). Nevertheless, the individual treatments used in wellness do not have to be substantially different from those practised by medical tourists, but the motive is essential. When it comes to medical tourists, illness is always present as a motive (Romanova et al., 2015, p. 238).

The term wellness is a modern word with ancient roots. The fundamental principles of wellness, both preventive and holistic, can be traced through history to ancient Eastern civilizations (India, China) and Western civilizations (Greece, Rome). In Europe and the USA, in the 19th century, intellectual, religious and medical movements developed in parallel with

conventional medicine, which focused on holistic and natural approaches, the healing process and preventive care. Today, they form a solid foundation for developing the wellness sector. The holistic modalities of wellness became globally visible in the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by an informal network of American physicians and thinkers, and among the leaders were Halbert Dunn, Jack Travis, Don Ardell, Bill Hettler and others. The strengthening of their influence enabled the inclusion of the wellness concept in the mainstream, and people began to apply the methods of healthy living, self-help, self-care, physical exercises (fitness), healthy eating and spiritual development (GWI, 2019). In the 21st century, the wellness concept has developed into a solid economic activity. This is especially important if we consider that wellness can be seen as an active process through which people become aware of themselves and the world they live in, allowing them to make more valuable decisions and be more successful.

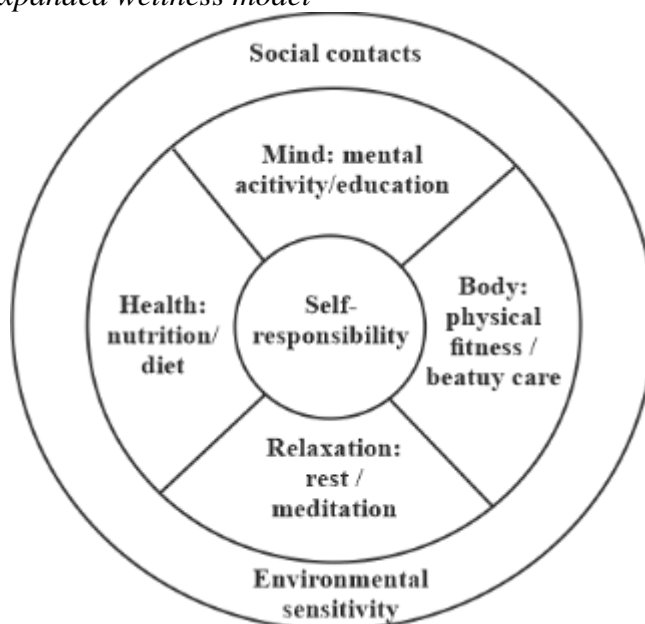
Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) believe that wellness tourism is the sum of all phenomena that have arisen from the travel and stay of people whose primary motive is the preservation or promotion of health. Wellness tourists stay in specialized hotels that have the appropriate professional knowledge and provide them, to a greater or lesser extent, individually tailored services. Wellness holiday packages are comprehensive and include treatments and exercises for physical fitness, beauty care, healthy eating, weight reduction diet, relaxation techniques, meditation, mental conditioning, and health and healthy living education.

Wellness tourism, which is viewed as part of health tourism and as a set of complementary services, is a concept that has emerged in recent times and is closely related to the offer of environments and services to achieve optimal physical and spiritual well-being of individuals. Wellness can be applied without using natural healing elements and without the supervision of a doctor (Gligorijević & Novović, 2014). Its significance depends on the culture and geographical region. For example, in southern Europe, wellness tourism is associated with the sea, the Mediterranean diet, and a slower pace of life. In Scandinavia, it involves outdoor activities - walking and swimming, and staying in the sauna, steam bath, etc. The modern tourist offer includes numerous wellness services in different tourist destinations - sea, mountains, spas and cities, but throughout history, wellness has traditionally been associated with spas and thermal springs. Even though the wellness service is significantly diversified today, spa tourism still largely coincides with wellness tourism.

Over time, there is a change in the view of the wellness services framework, and the whole concept is expanding in scope. As a result of that, wellness can be observed and a set of methods and techniques that help maintain balance and harmony between mind, body, and emotions, to awaken a sense of responsibility for one's own life and health, to achieve the desired aesthetic dimension that affects the level of self-confidence, and therefore live achievement, to introduce the practice of healthy or healthier eating and to involve mental techniques such as meditation. Ardell (1977) presented a new model in Figure 1.

Thermal and air spas traditionally represent destinations where people heal and treat themselves, rest and have fun. The stay and use of spa resources go back to distant history, and, as a result, spas have become ideal destinations for the development and implementation of the wellness concept.

Figure 1: *Expanded wellness model*



Source: Ardell, D. B. (1983). *A Wellness Modell for National Health Insurance. Journal of Health and Human Resources Administration. 5(3), p. 322.*

Viewed through the perspective of users of spa culture cultures, as a destination for practising the wellness concept, it relies on two large groups - the economic elite (colloquially called jet-set) and hippie counterculture, on the framework of the Baby boomer generation. Pine and Gilmore

(1999), point out that this generation saw the shortcomings and threats of globalization at different levels and began to develop a philosophy of individual development through responsibility and personal transformation. A significant change has been introduced by the trend that health services (in a broader sense) are provided through the infrastructure and superstructure of the hospitality industry and not necessarily through the health care system. In this way, spas became centres for providing wellness services by natural selection.

The modern wellness industry has experienced exponential growth in a relatively short time due to incentives in raising awareness and taking personal responsibility, the general development of tourism, prolonging the population's life expectancy. In support of this claim, Table 1 shows a cross-section of the situation in the field of global wellness economy in 2019 in comparison with the 2020 – first pandemic year.

Table 1: *Global Wellness Economy – 2019 vs 2020 (in billion USD)*

<b>Sub-sector</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Wellness Tourism	639	436
Personal, Beauty & Anti-Aging	1,083	955
Fitness and Mind-Body	595	738
Healthy Eating, Nutrition and Weight Loss	702	946
Public Health, Prevention & Personalized Medicine	575	375
Traditional & Complementary Medicine	360	413
Wellness Real Estate	134	275
Workplace Wellness	48	49
Thermal / Mineral Springs	56	39
Spa Economy	119	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,311</b>	<b>4,294</b>

Source: *Global Wellness Institute - GWI, The Global Wellness Economy Reports in 2021 and 2022.*

Without going into the detailed analysis of the presented data, we want to emphasize that Wellness and Spa tourism experienced the most brutal pandemic impact, while the sub-sectors Healthy Eating, Nutrition and Weight Loss and Fitness and Mind-Body recorded growth in the first crisis year. As a result, the "New normal" philosophy was created, which implies changes and adaptations to the circumstances of changed reality. The wellness market is expected to fit into the "New normal", which will be constantly redefined and re-designed in the years after Covid-19. It is

predicted that this tourist segment in the period 2020-2027 will experience moderate growth at an annual rate of 4% (London Business Wire, 2020). The same source points out that development will enable changes in the following areas of business:

- Hygiene and sanitation - there is a need to re-examine the physical characteristics of spas and wellness facilities for clients to gain trust during and after Covid-19. Checks of personal hygiene of the staff will be of the utmost importance because it will distinguish the best spa facilities from others. The quality of water and air conditioning purification and circulation systems will have to be top-notch to ensure guests' safety.
- Digitization. Bearing in mind that the demographic age group is decreasing, the digital literacy of the target consumer is increasing. The current business lull is the perfect opportunity for spas to digitize and improve their platforms. The development of modern applications will be helpful in communication with the market, and digital marketing will play a much more significant role than before.
- Focus on mental health. Changes and closures during a pandemic are expected to cause a significant increase in cases of depression, sleep disorders, stress and poor mental health. In the future, spas may explore and focus on mental well-being services. Services can include all forms of online communication.
- Pricing/promotion strategy. Cash flows will inevitably be more or less limited due to norms and restrictions of social distancing imposed by governments to prevent the spread of the virus. Independent hotels or resorts can offer promotions for massages and treatments in vouchers or gift cards with appropriate discounts depending on the room's price, aiming for the long-term advancement of the spa.
- Diversification. The epidemic has drawn our attention to an essential aspect of holistic well-being, emphasizing the immune system. Spas and wellness centres have already incorporated alternative treatments into their offer, but even greater diversification of services is recommended. One of the proposed approaches is the science of "A-Jurveda" because it is expected to increase the demand for food and treatments that strengthen the immune system.
- New target markets. When the pandemic is suppressed, and locks are lifted, spa and wellness destinations close to larger cities, which can be reached by car, are expected to be considered the most suitable and safest destinations for guests. Regardless of the type (independent, hotel or resort), wellness facilities will have to target the local market or

potential guests who live at a distance covered by a car. Although this approach is unlikely to be sustainable in the long run, particular emphasis must be placed on attracting guests from this target market.

### **Wellness in hotels**

The growing demand for wellness services has become an incentive for their inclusion in different business models. Hotels recognized this opportunity as soon as possible and focused on providing various wellness services. In the form of resorts or regular hotels, these business entities offered their customers quality and often exclusive and luxurious spaces equipped according to the guest's expectations, complemented by content such as expert consultations and lectures about health and personal development or organic food and nutrition.

However, it is possible to distinguish between hotels that provide wellness services. Regular hotels, especially those with higher capacity, have long recognized the potential of wellness content and included it to a greater or lesser extent in their range. In addition to the mandatory swimming pool, they have completed their offer of saunas, Turkish baths, jacuzzi tubs, fitness rooms, relaxation, meditation and similar content. In this case, the hotel continues to do business with a broad audience, regardless of their interests, but additionally attracts guests by diversifying services. Many tourists will rather choose a hotel with wellness facilities than those without, especially if they are in the same price range. In this sense, wellness facilities in regular hotels can be seen as a comparative advantage.

Business systems such as wellness resorts and wellness retreats also appear on the market in this area. Wellness resorts unite several units, and among the most important are accommodation facilities, numerous wellness activities, selection of healthy and often organic food and wellness facilities (Mihailović et al., 2020). In some cases, they are also called "wellness sanctuary" or "wellness clinic". According Europe Best Destinations (2022) most beautiful Wellness hotels in Europe are Hotel Ambassador, Opatija – Croatia with 243 rooms and suites, state-of-the-art meeting facilities, world-class restaurants and a lounge bar, and an authentic spa experience at 1,300 square meters; Rome Cavalieri, Rome, Italy located just minutes from the Vatican City and the historic centre with Cavalieri Grand Spa Club covering 26,900 square ft. and offering a wide range of relaxation treatments, as well a cutting edge fitness area, one indoor pool and three outdoor swimming pools including a children's pool and park;

Aspria Uhlenhorst, Hamburg, Germany located in the centre of Uhlenhorst near the Alster lake and cosmopolitan downtown Hamburg, Capri Palace, Anacapri, Italy, a luxury hotel of refined elegance that recalls, with arches, vaults and columns, an ancient Neapolitan palace of the 1700s; Corinthia Palace Hotel & Spa, Malta is dedicated to a truly holistic approach to wellness, our range of both classic and unique treatments allows you the chance to fully unwind in the hands of high quality staff; Rubezahl-Marienbad Schloss Wellness Hotel, Marianske Lazne, Czech Republic a fully reconstructed Castle with a fantastic history, the hotel was built in 1903 in Marienbad in the style of a fairy-tale castle and one of the oldest West Bohemian spa hotels offers Roman Bath Complex, weight loss and detox program completed with beauty services; Six Senses Douro Valley, Porto, Portugal located in the heart of the Douro valley, classified as world heritage by UNESCO and many more.

On the other hand, a wellness retreat implies staying in accommodation with precisely provided wellness facilities, usually separated within a fixed period. The offer in wellness retreats is in the form of programs. It mainly includes learning and lifestyle workshops, yoga classes, consuming and preparing healthy food, digital detox, recreational sports such as hiking, cycling or horse riding. Examples of successful wellness retreats are Bodhi Tree House, Costa Rica is a yoga retreat that keeps nature in mind via their creatively designed centre - the resort focuses on connecting with the earth and being as environmentally friendly as possible to preserve the jungle's natural state; Dolce Vitality, Italy is a resort with two annual retreats (in March and in November) and offers daily yoga and meditation classes, guided walks through the mountains around Positano, strength training with a personal trainer, daily massages, and access to the hotel's pool, sauna, and Turkish bath; The Ranch Malibu, California offers a week in nature without absolutely no distractions; Sensei Lāna'i Resort, Hawaii provides fitness classes, including meditation, yoga, hiking, and lectures daily; Fivelements Retreat Bali, Bali, Indonesia is a plant-based, eco-friendly resort, guests enjoy sacred arts and Balinese healing traditions, such as deep bodywork, energy movement, and meditation.

### **Serbian hotel industry**

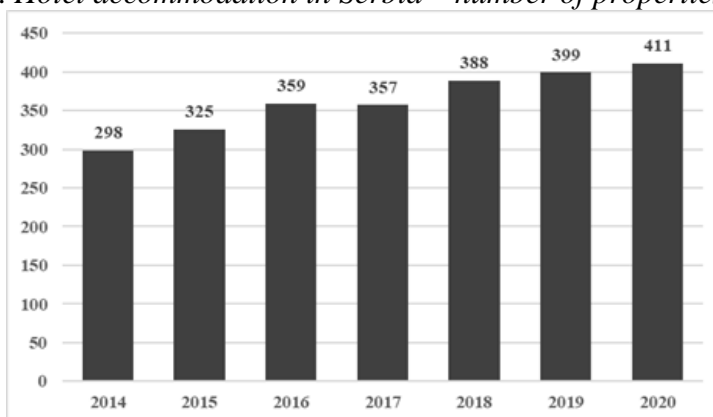
The hotel sector is the main element of the tourism industry and can be seen as a critical element of the tourism industry and can be seen as a critical element of the success of national tourism (Ognjanović, 2016). In business terms, the primary role of the hotel is to provide accommodation and food



to guests. Hotels should meet specific quality standards (categorization), as well as protect the privacy of their guests. (Bradić-Martinović, 2021).

The Serbian tourism sector has seen a substantial expansion in accommodation capacity after 2010. Based on data provided by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, between 2014-2020 number of hotels (including garni hotels) raised at a rate of 5.5% (CAGR), as presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: *Hotel accommodation in Serbia – number of properties*



Source: *Statistical Office of RS (2014-2020). TU-10 Monthly reports in August. Accommodation capacity by property type.*

Cimbaljević et al. (2018) point out that although the hotel industry in Serbia has been growing significantly in recent years, small and medium-sized enterprises continue to dominate, with an increasing share of international hotel chains in Belgrade. In Table 2 we presented basic hotel statistics – rooms and beds in the last ten years by type of tourist resorts.

Table 2: *Hotel accommodation facilities by type of tourist resorts*

Year		Total	Cities	Spas	Mountain resorts	Other tourist resorts	Other resorts
2011	Rooms	<b>20,297</b>	5,901	3,027	3,211	6,893	1,265
	Beds	<b>42,096</b>	10,594	6,475	7,854	14,291	2,882
2012	Rooms	<b>16,618</b>	5,574	2,480	2,825	4,911	828
	Beds	<b>33,434</b>	9,808	5,074	6,834	9,836	1,882
2013	Rooms	<b>16,480</b>	5,524	2,800	2,833	4,389	934
	Beds	<b>33,719</b>	9,740	5,800	7,261	8,751	2,167
2014	Rooms	<b>17,030</b>	6,411	2,558	2,723	4,443	895

	Beds	<b>34,252</b>	10,779	5,363	6,990	8,939	2,181
2015	Rooms	<b>17,985</b>	7,095	2,491	2,805	4,689	905
	Beds	<b>36,305</b>	12,247	5,140	7,285	9,512	2,121
2016	Rooms	<b>19,002</b>	7,425	2,575	2,989	5,134	879
	Beds	<b>38,391</b>	12,668	5,494	7,721	10,495	2,013
2017	Rooms	<b>18,629</b>	7,462	2,356	2,918	4,988	905
	Beds	<b>37,923</b>	12,849	4,991	7,718	10,370	1,995
2018	Rooms	<b>19,953</b>	8,685	2,192	3,081	5,001	994
	Beds	<b>40,110</b>	15,062	4,612	7,932	10,311	2,193
2019	Rooms	<b>20,373</b>	8,939	2,292	3,122	5,056	964
	Beds	<b>41,191</b>	15,417	4,987	8,138	10,500	2,149
2020	Rooms	<b>21,273</b>	8,999	2,404	3,622	5,302	946
	Beds	<b>44,099</b>	16,024	5,264	9,357	11,295	2,159

Source: *Global Wellness Institute - GWI, The Global Wellness Economy Reports in 2021 and 2022.*

The presented data concludes that the total hotel accommodation in Serbia, in the last ten years, measured by the number of beds, has grown by 0.5% (CAGR). However, the growth trend in the capacity of city hotels significantly exceeded the average value and amounted to 4.2%. In the same period, the number of beds in hotels in Mountain resorts increased (1.8%). In contrast, other types of resorts (Spas, Other touristic resorts, and Other resorts) recorded a decrease in capacity by -2.4%, on average.

A significant challenge for hotels, especially city hotels, is the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. There was no decline in hotel capacity in 2020, but the reaction to the decrease in demand came in 2021 when the number of hotels reduced. Statistical Office of RS has not yet published data on hotel capacity by type of resort, but in August 2021, Serbia has 396 hotels (15 less than 2020) with 20,277 rooms (996 less than 2020) and 41,664 beds (2,435 less than 2020). It is expected that city hotels are leaders in this trend. The latest data from the Ministry for trade, tourism and telecommunication Serbia has 429 hotels. The Government of the Republic of Serbia has managed to maintain a large number of business facilities in the field of tourism through active measures (Kovačević et al., 2020).

### Wellness in Serbian hotels

Wellness in Serbia began to develop to respond to guests' needs and as a reaction to the tourist offer of countries in the region, especially Hungary and Slovenia. A significant transformation took place in the last decade of

the twentieth century, with the growing role of private capital - the period of transition. The offer became richer, structured at the level of smaller facilities that offer segmented wellness services, the adaptation and modernization of outdated spa facilities (especially in specialized rehabilitation hospitals), and finally, the construction of high category hotels with a rich offer of wellness facilities.

In May 2005, the specialized hospital/hotel Merkur in Vrnjačka Banja launched the first spa wellness centre in Serbia - Fons Romanus situated in the building of the thermal mineral bath, with a range of services available to wellness tourists (<https://www.wellness-spa.rs/hotel-merkur>). This is a positive example of the division of medical and wellness services, which contributed to the increase in the number of service users in the short term, and it managed to attract more foreign tourists (Vićentijević, 2016).

After that, wellness began to expand in the tourist offer of Serbian hotels, and today, besides Hotel Merkur, the most famous Serbian wellness hotels are MK Resort – Grand hotel Kopaonik, which offers an outdoor hot water pool, which provides a unique outdoor swimming experience during the winter; Hotel Premier Aqua located in the spa Vrdnik, which is rich in thermo-mineral water, near the national park Fruška Gora – the hotel is the best example of health tourism facility in Serbia; Premier Prezident Garni Hotel and Spa in Karlovci – 5-star hotel with pools, saunas, hot tubs and fitness centre; A Hotels - Hotel Izvor, Aranđelovac - 5-star hotel located near to Bukovicki Park; Hotel & Spa Palić Resort, with the largest number of hotels belonging to international chains, located in Belgrade, offering wellness facilities (Metropol Palace, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Belgrade, Belgrade Art Hotel, a member of Radisson Individuals, Hyatt Regency Belgrade, Crowne Plaza Belgrade, an IHG Hotel, and Holiday Inn Belgrade, an IHG Hotel).

When it comes to wellness retreats in Serbia, this concept has not yet been adopted (Mišić & Bradić-Martinović, 2020). At least not massively. Hotels do not offer such accommodation options, so the idea is being developed within private and semi-private initiatives. Sokobanja plans to introduce a program of exclusion from the virtual world, the so-called digital detox for 3, 5 or 7 days.

Despite the efforts that some hotels are investing in raising their competitiveness, it is vital to keep in mind their environment, i.e. a whole tourist destination. Petković et al. (2022) indicate that, above all, foreign

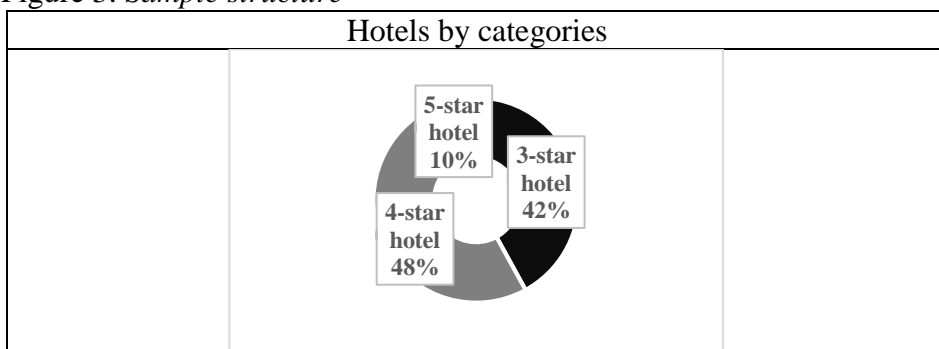
tourists are attracted by three key components - "developed infrastructure, sound attractions, and established accommodation facilities for different types of visitors". The best example is Vrnjačka Banja, which meets all the above criteria and is the leading tourist destination in Serbia, so it is not surprising that the first wellness hotel has just opened in this spa and continues to thrive.

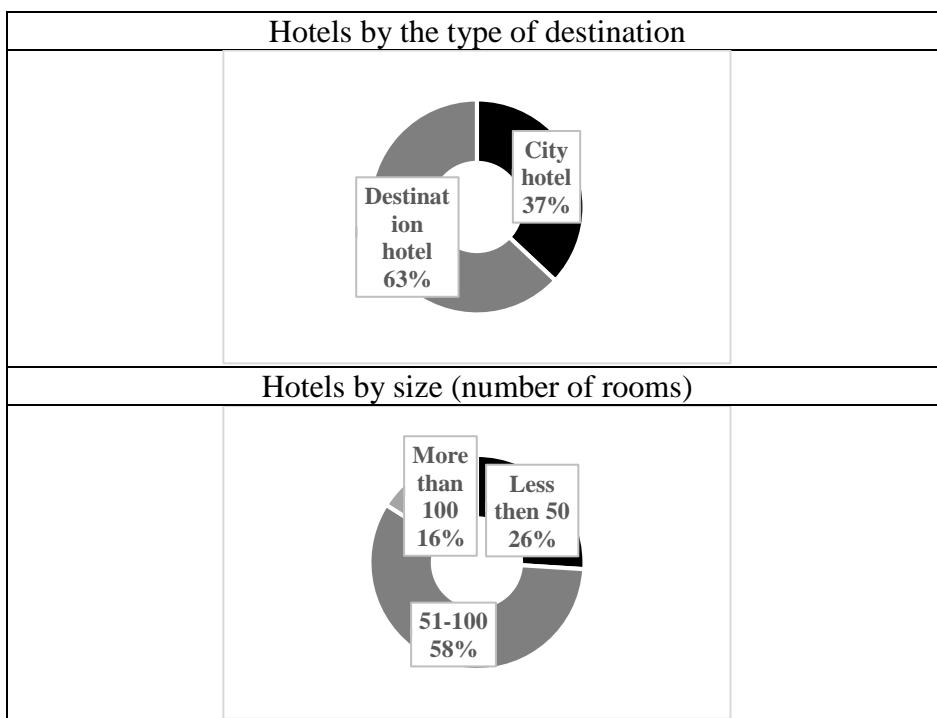
### Wellness hotels in Serbia during Covid-19 pandemics

Our research is based on an online survey method for data collection. We used Google Forms and a short anonymous questionnaire divided into three segments. The first segment covers the application of measures to control the spread of Covid-19 disease in spa facilities in hotels in Serbia, the second explores the protection of personal data of hotel guests (which was used for other research), and the third segment is about basic information about hotels (categorization, location and size). Initially, in the first half of August 2021, we sent 150 invitations (including all categories, locations, and sizes of hotels) by email. Finally, 38 correct and complete questionnaires were collected. The structure of our sample is as presented in Table 2.

The largest number of hotels in the sample falls into the 4-star category (48%), and slightly fewer are 3-star hotels (42%). There are the least 5-star hotels, while there are no lower category hotels in our sample. 17% of 2-star hotels and 1% of 1-star hotels operate in Serbia. We collected data from 63% of destination hotels and 37% from city hotels. This distribution is in line with hotel statistics in 2020 - city hotels have a 36% share of the total hotels. Finally, we obtained responses from 26% of small-size hotels (less than 50 rooms), 58% from medium-size hotels (51-100 rooms) and 16% from large hotels with more than 100 rooms.

Figure 3: *Sample structure*





Source: *Author's calculation*

Our sample consists of 69% hotels with spa and wellness facilities. Given the situation caused by the pandemic crisis and the measures introduced by the Government of the Republic of Serbia through its duration, we considered it essential that hotels are obliged to formally adopt behavioural protocols or procedures aimed at combating the spread of COVID-19. All hotels in our sample (100%) confirmed that formal protocols were adopted.

One of the measures that were present during the entire duration of the pandemic was the requirement that guests have Covid-19 test results or a vaccination certificate(s). It should be stated that August 2021 was the seventh month since the start of vaccination when according to the Center for Investigative Journalism of Serbia (2021), 2.7 million people were vaccinated, which is about 38% of the population compared to the estimated population in 2020, according to the Statistical Office of RS. Despite the risk, only 11% of hotels confirm that the test or certificate(s) are obliged in their hotels in spa and wellness facilities.

The next characteristic measure that is an obligation for all business entities in Serbia, including hotels and their spa and wellness facilities, is hiring or

appointing person(s) who take care of respecting social distance and wearing masks in spa and wellness facilities. In 88% of cases, our respondents confirm that they have an appropriate person(s) for this activity.

The most restrictive measure, which was partially respected in business facilities in Serbia, and mostly in state institutions, is measuring body temperature when entering the facility. Given the specific activities characteristic of wellness, such as staying in a sauna or swimming pool, we felt it was essential to include this in the questionnaire. 75% of hotels in our sample confirmed that they measure the temperature of their guests on entry.

The situation caused by the pandemic is unprecedented, and it was required to acquire the necessary knowledge about protection and hygiene measures, one of the most critical areas in the hotel business during the crisis. We asked our respondents if their employees attended special training in hygiene and cleaning during the Covid-19 pandemic, and 89% of respondents confirmed that their employees complemented and expanded on knowledge on this topic.

Finally, we asked the hotel management whether, during the pandemic, there was a change in procedures related to the preparation and/or serving of food and beverages, and 88% confirmed that they have new or updated policies and procedures.

### **Conclusion**

Serbia is rich in natural resources that enable the construction of wellness facilities of the highest category. It is essential to remember that our country has many traditional spas, which have accepted the wellness concept as a natural diversification of its offer. Vranjska Banja, for example, has the highest thermal water temperature in Europe and started to develop a high-class wellness concept in Hotel Marriot.

Regardless of their location, hotels have also recognized wellness as an opportunity to create a comparative advantage. Depending on the form of the wellness content offer, we distinguish between hotels that, in addition to the standard offer, also have wellness facilities and hotels that specialize in the wellness concept. Hotel Premier Aqua, for example, has adopted a concept for adults only, bearing in mind the possibility of low tolerance of

guests to noise generated by children, and especially bearing in mind that they are developing the concept of health tourism and have Aqua Medica health centre.

The research showed that the management of hotels in Serbia is at a high-level regarding procedures related to the protection of guests during the Covid-19 pandemic. The only exception we noticed is that they do not ask for certificates of testing and vaccination, but they measure the guests' temperature in large numbers. The situation in this sense is not ideal because there are people who do not have the classic symptoms of infection.

The topic of developing the wellness concept in Serbia was also recognized by policymakers as an *Opportunity* in the SWOT matrix in the Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2016-2025: "Successful government reforms create conditions for strengthening PPPs in tourism, construction of new facilities, ski resorts, gondolas, hotels, marinas and piers, new resorts, *spa and wellness centres* and other infrastructure, etc."

### **Acknowledgement**

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