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Italian SPAs and health promotion. A multidisciplinary tool towards innovative strategies

The European asset of SPA facilities is a border-crossing multidisciplinary system, with the potentialities to inhabit the threshold between several disciplines such as tourism, hospitality, medicine, architecture, urban planning, cultural heritage, management. Despite recent positive trends, the Italian scenario of SPAs appears unorganized and lacking coherent, objective and systemic information. This context leads to a general condition of confusion and unreliability among the Italian panorama of scholars, practitioners and end-users.

Within the evolution of European health policies and border-crossing regulations, wellness, health and medical tourism strategies are enhancing the renovated attention to health promotion. Nevertheless, the existing Italian structures do not appear capable to support a recovery program if they are not considered in a systemic vision. Therefore, a strategic tool is needed to address a suitable development.

This research is part of a wider ongoing investigation developed with the support of the Italian Foundation of the Thermal Scientific Research (FoRST). The main objective is to develop a multi-criteria and multi-scalar tool with an interdisciplinary approach able to evaluate the Italian scenario of SPA facilities and foreseen guidelines for its developments.

The methodological path involves both quantitative and qualitative subsequent and interconnected steps:

- a) providing a survey/census of Italian spa facilities, starting from a nationwide-shared definition;
- b) defining the evaluation criteria of SPA facilities per macro-areas (territory, healthcare, building and services); the criteria have been listed by the research group and will be checked and validated by a team of experts, selected according to their skills and competencies in the four areas;
- c) setting up a weighting of the criteria. By assigning different weights to one criteria on the base of the target (healthcare, wellness tourism or tourism) it will be possible to provide a full scenario on the conditions of Italian SPAs. The weights will be assigned by the same experts. While step-2 (list of criteria) will be checked through an online survey, this phase is expected to be developed during a workshop;
- d) rating Italian SPAs according to the weighted criteria, identifying not only which ones represent a greater potential from a health promotion or touristic point of view, but also identifying specific critical aspects of each structure to be improved.

The expected result is the development of a multi-level and multi-criteria tool, which is at the same time an internal evaluator of each structure and a support for strategic planning. The valorization of their aptitudes, the implementation of their characteristics and the limitation of their criticalities can produce positive impacts in the territory local economy from the sanitary, touristic and educational point of view.

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