

# New Europe College

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## LIVING AT THE WATERS

The practice of taking the waters is well documented and studied for the Western part of Europe, and most of the researchers, regardless of their field of interest, agree on the origin and general motivations of these practices. It seems that they have originated in 18<sup>th</sup> century Great Britain, and they expanded on the continent, at first in Germany and France, and then in the Central Europe, in Italy, Spain and the Scandinavian countries. Although thermal springs had been used since the Antiquity, all researchers, even beginning with the medical texts written in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>1</sup> have emphasized the fact that thermalism is something different: it is not just using waters for cure, but using waters scientifically, based on a medicalised approach.

Anglo-Saxon sociologists involved in tourism studies<sup>2</sup> tend to consider the entrance of thermal waters in the attention of doctors as taking over of the holy wells, and therefore to consider the practices of taking the waters as a kind of profane continuation of medieval pilgrimages. The spa resort is viewed as a precursor of modern tourism, which came to offer something close to a modern vacation. Across the Europe the rise of the spa followed a similar trajectory to that of the Grand Tour; but the ostensible motive for spending time taking the waters was, in the first instance, health, as the doctors elaborated medical discourses crystallized around the ascribed curative qualities of the springs.<sup>3</sup> Both evolving esthetics and accessibility changed the destinations and the perceptions of early 19<sup>th</sup> century tourists. It is commonly considered that romanticism brought seascape and mountains in the forefront of interesting sights. The Alps, long considered a mere untamed obstacle en route to Italy, became a destination in their own right and an important stop on many a Grand Tour. Mountain climbing for the few and hiking for the many became ordinary attractions.<sup>4</sup>

Researchers involved in leisure studies tend to relate thermalism to other forms of leisure, considering it a perfect example of popular practice taken up by higher ranks via rationalization of its purposes.<sup>5</sup> From this point

of view, the medicalisation of thermal practices is crucial, as it structures the experience of taking the waters into a ritual. The notion of ritual is often involved in describing the daily life in a spa, both in regard to the practices of cure and with respect to the entertainment activities.<sup>6</sup> Ritual is akin to routine and custom, but it normally has a substantially more profound wealth of meaning and emotional content than either routine or custom. It exerts a control over conduct and belief that is both obvious and subtle. Because ritual defines how something can be expressed, it controls what can be expressed, while eliminating alternative perspectives. Nevertheless, a ritual must seem appropriate to its audience, which ultimately decides by acceptance or rejection if it will take the performance seriously. Thus a delicate balance often exists between manipulation and integration, between those sponsoring a ritual – in this case, the doctors – and its wider audience.<sup>7</sup>

Into the 18<sup>th</sup> century baths remained large pools in the open air, situated within the towns and open without charge to all who wished to bathe. Although only scattered evidence has survived, it appears that in the early modern period bathers of both sexes and from all social groups wore little clothing while frolicking in the baths. Doctors directed patients to take the waters either by drinking from the spring or by bathing, but the amount to drink and the length of bathing time varied, left to the discretion of the patient. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, as bourgeois usage grew dramatically, so too did the expectations for regulation of access. In France a patient needed a medical certificate issued by a doctor to enter the waters. Doctors also quickly developed a complement of hydrotherapeutic techniques, including hot and cold pressurized showers, hot mud packs for the body, and individualized boxes for prescribed steam baths. During the average 3 weeks course of treatment, only a minor portion of a patient's time was spent in the bathing pools. Even when patients were in the baths, the length of daily treatment was closely controlled by the spa staff.<sup>8</sup>

In France the open-air pools largely disappeared, replaced by individual bathing compartments in which a bather would not come in contact with anyone but the spa staff. Some researchers consider that the strict separation of the sexes and careful attention to appropriate attire resulted in part from women's complaints of men's behavior at baths; the institution of new norms of propriety may have resulted as much from women's increased presence as from the desire for social control on the part of the bourgeoisie in general. Nevertheless, segmentation by social class was clearly instituted. The poor and working poor were excluded

from many of the baths and an array of new hospitals for the poor requiring hydrotherapy segregated them from the wealthy bathers.<sup>9</sup>

The justification for pleasure was hidden in its medicalisation and was controlled through a complex set of regulating social rituals which governed the social round. Bourgeois notion of social propriety and medical doctors' attempts to assert their professional credentials led to the strict regulation of bathing in both spas and seaside resorts. Medical constraints are considered, especially by leisure studies researchers, as limiting and restricting, especially with regard to sea bathing – the beach has been interpreted as a kind of carnivalesque scene (in Bahtin's terms) tamed by the invention of the medical beach.<sup>10</sup> Challenges to the assumption that medical constraints are restrictive have taken into account the ways in which these constraints are negotiated, but these accounts nevertheless consider the medicalisation as wholly restricting. After Richard Gruneau,<sup>11</sup> "it is not the absence of socially produced rules and constraints that characterize leisure: rather their presence"; constraints structure the experience of leisure by prescribing certain actions, proscribing other actions and describing boundaries or contexts within which these actions make sense. In Foucault's terms, constraints are essential to the acquisition of even the minimal skill in order to enable participation in thermal practices. The medicalisation of the use of waters allowed their territorialisation, organizing enclosure, partitioning, function and rank<sup>12</sup> – which made it possible for the visitors to employ practices continuously and without interruption. Partitioning eliminates "the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation."<sup>13</sup> Enclosures within larger enclosures are functional sites. Constraining the bathers into designated places allows ranking of participants, for intervention by the "technicians" – baths personnel, the dippers into the sea. Not all these constraints are imposed by the doctors; those referring to the segregation of pools or beaches on sexes are inseparable from a broader control of the body in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. 18<sup>th</sup> century spa resorts employed masters of ceremonies to police "the company", imposing dress codes and shared expectations of politeness and etiquette on potentially overbearing aristocrats as well as on their socially insecure inferiors from the new middle ranks, and creating a polite holiday regime that reached its heyday in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in all Europe.

The curists not only accept constraints of space, they accept also constraints that manipulate time. Constraints of time allow them to

learn and embody the tempo at which routines are to be performed and coordinate these with others if participating in a group (for example, how many glasses of water had to be drunk, at what pace, how much should the deambulation take, what kind of walks and on what type of ground should be taken, how often should one bathe and for what period, and so on).

Health was understood to be a reflection of the balance between people and nature. Disease was seen as a reflection of the imbalance between humans and the unnatural environments that they created for themselves. Cities, factories, slums and other manifestations of the industrialism were creating this imbalance. The science of balneology itself is regarded by the doctors as a prestigious and scientifically based continuation of the humoral medicine.<sup>14</sup> The basic principle is that mineral waters have definite and measurable influences on the human body, which influences can be manipulated and used so as to reinstitute health. Helped by the development of chemistry, balneology arrived in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to a clear taxonomy of the waters in direct relationship to the diseases they eased. In general, waters are classified according to their temperature, their acidity and the content of minerals;<sup>15</sup> there are also two types of mud. In France, spas were classified according to the medical conditions they addressed. That was not the case in Germany, where health resorts were classified in conformity to the types of cure they offered. Balneotherapy was quickly complemented with the science of climatology, which investigates the definite and measurable influences different types of climate have on the human body, therefore studying the effects of sun, wind, temperature, humidity and atmospheric pressure. Its development brought the sea into doctors' attention, a pseudo-scientific theory of ions and ozone in the sea air being advanced to contribute to the benefic powers of the seawaters. With regard to their chemical content, Romanian doctors generally classify mineral waters into seven categories,<sup>16</sup> and in doing so they rely most of the times on German bibliography. Spas are sometimes differentiated according to the diseases they heal, but most of the times the same spa is indicated for quite a large range of medical conditions. Only in the interwar period do medical texts recommend certain spas for specific illnesses.

So, taking the waters meant: going to a place which is different from home (whatever home would be), and different in the sense that: there are healing waters, the air is pure, the temperatures are correct, the scenery is inspiring for the spirit; there you have to use the water, in a complex



and strict way, and during the rest of the time, you have to practice some kind of sport (at least walks), to keep a diet and to relax taking part in entertainment activities such as listening to music, dancing, attending theater representations and so on. Thus, leisure activities are actually part of the treatment; but their presence in spas is subversive, because they finally take over the spa – of course, with the help of the shifting paradigm in the general medical discourse, which can no longer justify entirely the ascribed curative qualities of the waters.

From the medical point of view, the visitors of a spa should have come there to cure an illness. Therefore, the choice of the place should not have been the patients' decision, but the doctors' and it should take into consideration only the adequacy of the waters to the illness they would cure. The period to be spent in a health resort should have been three weeks – this is the period for having a proper cure. The waters should not be used without supervision – that meant that the way in which they were to be used was prescribed by a physician, and the actual use was supervised by specialized personnel.

In a health resorts in which waters were used internally, curists arrived at the recommendation of a doctor. The physician of the spa prescribed the spring that was to be used, the amount of water that was to be drunk, the hours at which water is to be taken, the diet that the curists had to adopt and the physical exercises that were to accompany the ingurgitation of water. The curists would go to the *buvette* of the indicated spring, with the prescription, and there, an assistant – usually a young woman – would fill in the prescribed number of glasses with water. After drinking every glass of water, the curists were supposed to walk around – this is why the *buvettes* are always in parks and most of the time have a covert gallery in their proximity, so that the deambulation could be possible on any weather. When completing the number of glasses indicated – and this number was usually high: 9, 12 even 30 glasses per day – the curists were supposed to undertake all other activities advised by the doctor: walking on certain types of terrains (the areas around spas and especially the woods in the vicinity were usually set with carefully planned alleys for walking or horse riding), taking sun baths, listening to the military music played in kiosks were among the most frequent activities.

In the case of external use of waters, the practices were usually bathing in pools or in individual cabins. The bath could be general or partial, using water pressure (different types of showers) or steam, and packing, with wet bandages or with mud. Of course, all these procedures were

also to be prescribed by the doctor and put into practice by specialized personnel – the bathers. Common auxiliary procedures which did not necessarily include the use of water were inhalations (of natural gases with qualities similar to those of the waters or with different chemical substances), massage, gymnastics (the so called mechanotherapy or in pools) electrotherapy, phototherapy (using artificial or natural light).

And, of course, the curists should have a good time, but should also stick to the diet, dance, but not too much, should go to bed not later than 11 PM, because too much excitement could affect the results of the cure, and should get up early in order to benefit from the cool clean air of the morning. Gambling was totally prohibited, as it excited the spirit too much.

Even if the cure was to take three weeks, the treatment is not complete if not repeated regularly – the visitors should be faithful to the spa indicated by the doctor and should return there every year. Some spas have the practice to celebrate long-standing visitors, such as Dionisie Simionescu, the father superior of the Sinaia Monastery, who was celebrated in Karlsbad in 1928 for his 25<sup>th</sup> cure there.

In 1848, Vasile Alecsandri describes the visit of a Frenchman to Balta Alba, which was supposed to be a spa near Braila. The miraculous waters had been discovered only a few years ago, but the spa was already visited, as a newspaper and some well-intended new friend tell him, by ten thousands people. After a devastating trip in a carriage that breaks down a few times, the Frenchman reaches the spa in the middle of the night:

*we arrived in a village of huts covered in reed and crowned by storks' nests. The strange appearance of those dwellings, amidst which well sweeps stood up like huge crane necks; the howling dogs running around under fences; the storks' pecking ... and, in a word, that mixture of light and darkness which gave things a fantastic look, all made me believe I was in another world. ... And I found myself alone in the middle of an irregular and bushy square.*

The visitor is however lucky to come across someone speaking French, and is taken to the single accommodation available at the moment, the empty hut of a sentinel (any way, there are no hotels, locals' houses being the single option for accommodation). There is no restaurant in the village, so that the poor guy has to go to sleep on an empty stomach. In the morning, awakened by an unidentifiable noise, he gets out to see

*in wonder, about 30 coaches of all kinds, ..., all running towards a pond... I entered Valachia as in a deserted land, I suddenly hear about a society of ten thousands souls gathered together in a spa near Braila. This makes me change my opinion and believe that Valachia could be a civilized country, as long as it has so successful baths. But the postal carriage ... and the village of Balta Alba make go back to the initial impression and I go to sleep convinced I am in a savage land. So imagine ...seeing all these European coaches full with European figures and European clothes!*

And he goes on describing the mixture of French hats with oriental *ișlice*, tailcoats and *anterie*, Parisian outfits and strange costumes.

*At the shore of the large pond I suddenly see a fair that was not a fair ... a chaotic sequence of tents, wooden shacks, mat holes, carriages, horses, oxen, people, which formed by far the strangest gathering on the face of the Earth. Near a wooden box where the rich smoked ciubuc, there was a booth of rags in which the poor burnt into the sun. Close to it, a mat cage and a carriage that served as sleeping room.*

And the description continues in the same tone for another paragraph. Descending into water, he realizes that there are no special places for men and women, and feels embarrassed by the legion of naked women bathing around him.

*And as I walked I came into creatures of the beautiful sex, as well as into creatures of the un-beautiful sex, ... and that convinced me of the savage nature of Valachia, because only in a savage country one could meet that innocent mixture of sexes [amestec nevinovat de sexuri].*

He is invited to a cruise with a steam boat that proves to be a raft with two mill wheels put in motion by men, and when he goes to the Casino, he finds about two hundred people gathered in a large wooden hall, and is impressed by their European appearance, their civilized manners, and their perfect French.<sup>17</sup>

The same Alecsandri describes the season in Borsec, in the summer of 1845: the first thing that strikes him, after, again, the bumpy and adventurous road, is the fact that classes mix, brought together by the brotherhood of the temporary stay, a brother hood

*not in Jesus, but in mineral waters. The system of equality is ... Lobogo; it is a cold bath in which the carbonic gas boils ceaselessly ... Six people can hardly fit inside, but if three of them were emperors and the other three shoemakers, one would not distinguish among them. ... Borsec is not a village, nor a borough, because it has no streets, no shops and no locals. It is a mish-mash of about fifty wooden houses, which resembles flies, as they are dead all through the winter, only to revive in the spring. ... Regarding the doctor, ... although there should be one, one would be useless, as anyone can tell you how you should take your cure. The method comprises two issues: 1. Drinking as much water as possible, and 2. Bathing in Lobogo, or Şaroş, or Elisaveta, or Lazăr. These are the four basins of Borsec.*

The well is surrounded by a wooden fence, and has a place to the left, which is called "the garden" and a long shed, which is called "the covert gallery", and the both serve for curists walks.

The curists get up early, and gather to the well, glasses in hands, to drink the horrible waters with overt grimaces of disgust. After drinking 9 to 12 glasses of the mineral water and walking around for about two hours, in order to facilitate the digestion, the curists have to bathe into the cold waters of one of the basins, shacking and screaming. This takes them the whole morning. The rest of the day is spent in chitchats, walks into the woods nearby, having informal lunches, and, on Thursday and Sunday nights, in dancing balls. These balls take place in a wooden hall having some fir tree branches as decoration, lit by tallow candles, which hosts an interesting mixture of:

*Romanian dames in delicate dresses dressed up in Parisian fashion; Hungarian baronesses and countesses dressed up pretentiously but without style, rude Armenian women dressed like cleaning ladies...*<sup>18</sup>

The first spa from the Principalities is Slănicul Moldovei. It seems that the first of the 17 mineral springs was discovered in 1801 by the *Serdar* Mihăluică Spiridon, who discovers yet another 5 sources between 1804 and 1806. The first invalids appear here in 1812, thrilled to be able to beneficiate from the same kind of miraculous waters they had heard to be fashionable in Germany. The rumor of the discovery travels fast, so that in 1816 the Bishop Veniamin Costache visits the waters. During these years, nothing is developed around the springs, and the way through the forest was an adventure.

Receiving from *Vodă* Calimachi and then from *Vodă* Mihai Sturza the permission to move peasants to the springs, between 1816 and 1839 the *serdar* builds a helmet with 30 houses for the accommodation of visitors who came in growing number. But in 1840 he is expropriated by the state, the helmet is at first given in lease, and then, from 1864 on, it is given to Epitropia Sfântul Spiridon from Iași. Here is how Wilhelm de Kotzebue<sup>19</sup> describes the Slănic around 1850:

*Strange view. A triangular area...Around, houses, or better long barracks with low ceiling, with shingle roofs and with very small windows; in front of each house, there is a veranda with large eaves; more or less smooth doors come in rows differentiated one from another only by a number; everything has the color of old fir wood ... If visitors' houses are so bad taken care of, at the springs the situation is even worse.*<sup>20</sup>

Epitropia Sf. Spiridon used to be both a hospital – the largest in Moldova – and a monastery, until 1860, when Carol Davila places it under the Ministry of Health; as a monastery it owned large areas of land and woods, and as the most important medical institution from Moldova it was endowed with Slănic Moldova, with the intent to develop a successful health. All economic matters were run by doctors, for our period Gh. Cuciureanu and then Ianeu Branisteanu, distinguished physicians but not necessarily best developers. This might explain why when Epitropia decides to invest in the spa, in 1878, they do not invest in a railway to the spa, but mostly in the technical installations for water collection and in a very modern baths establishment.<sup>21</sup> In 1880 the Epitropia initiates a competition for the best project of modernization, which is won by the architect of Karlsbad, Josef Slovack, who plans Slănic like a central-European spa. In conformity with the project, a number of lots are sold to private buyers in order to build villas, some geological researches are undertaken, a road to the spa is begun and some hotels are built.

In 1901 Slănic was known as the Aix-les-Bains of Romania: the hotels Racoviță, Cerbu, Puf, Zimbru, Dobru were already built, and there was an establishment of hydrotherapy with the most modern installation from the country, a royal casino, and a well designed park. The central-European appearance of the spa is modified during Carol II, when Sterian builds the new casino.<sup>22</sup>

During about the same period Govora begins to develop. The waters here had been discovered in 1880. Six years later, I. C. Brătianu purchased

the chemical analysis of the waters, a small hotel is finished in 1887 and a baths establishment is inaugurated in 1889. For the collection of the springs the hydraulic engineer Bochet is hired, his best recommendations being the collection of waters from Vichy and Aix-les-Bains. In 1894, the state had already built 3 hotels, enlarged the baths establishment and begun the arranging of the terraces above the springs and the park; the trains stop during the season in Govora Halt. The health resort resembled during those years a Central-European spa. In 1910 the Society Govora-Călimănești is constituted, and the spa begins a process of modernization. The second state hotel is demolished, and on the park's highest terrace the Palace Hotel is built with all modern comfort: toilets, central heating system, elevators; the old baths establishments are replaced with new ones.<sup>23</sup>

To conclude, until 1870s, no baths establishments, no accommodation, no restaurants, no doctors, no prescriptions: in fact, there were no spas. Many monographs written by doctors, by geographers or by amateur local historians, like those of Olanesti, Calimanesti or Lacu Sarat, consider that the spas appear in the interval of 1830-1850. But, in fact, only the use of their waters can be documented for that period, as the features that characterize a spa appear actually only during the last three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that the practices of thermalism reach Romanian people before the creation of a material culture that would justify them.

A leitmotiv of various texts about spas, whatever these texts are – travel journals, guides, monographs, juridical texts, medical writings or memoirs dedicated to an authority or another – is the large number of Romanians visiting spas abroad, as opposed to the small number of those preferring autochthonous resorts. This seemed all the more intriguing as the same texts note, with pride, that in Romania there would be one third of Europe's mineral waters and that, each time a Romanian mineral water is analyzed, it is found superior to its more famous correspondents in Germany or France. In 1902, Doctor Gheorghe Marinescu gives a conference to the Geographic Society, in the presence of His Majesty, talking about a few spas from Romania and abroad, and introduces the subject as being a "*national, economic, industrial and patriotic issue*". For this, he makes a statistic of the number of Romanians who visited Karlsbad between 1861 and 1901 and of those who traveled to Marienbad between 1899 and 1901.<sup>24</sup> Marinescu mentions that he had chosen these two Central-European spas because they were, at the time, the most frequented by Romanians, and he discovers that their number increases each year. For example, in 1861, 85 Romanians took their cure in Karlsbad, and in 1886

their number reached 1388, to decrease to 1080 in 1901. Marienbad was visited by about 20,000 curist a year, and Karlsbad by more than 50,000 patients. Comparing the number of Romanian visitors with the number of other foreigners, Marinescu observes that only the Russians are present in a larger number than Romanians, but notes that while Russia has a population of more than 75,000,000 people, while Romania has a population of about 5,500,000 people. For comparison, Govora had 1694 visitors in 1899.

The doctor Gheorghe Marinescu and all those who are trying to find a justification for this phenomenon,<sup>25</sup> consider the explanation to be the bad management of the spas, which are difficult to reach, in which the baths establishments have rudimentary installations, and the possibilities for accommodation exclude more often not only the idea of comfort, but also the idea of hygiene. After Marinescu, only in Slănic and Constanța one can find hotels comparable to those abroad, and decent hydrotherapy installations can be found only in Câmpulung (which is not actually a health resort) and Slănic. Most of the spas have no hydrotherapy installations, and even if there are some, they are insufficient. He considers that the success of the German spas is due to the fact that the cure comprises not only a usage of waters, but also different other annex therapies, and he proves to be judging the situation correctly, as some economic researches suggest.<sup>26</sup> Romanian spas also miss systematized paths for the field therapy, and no restaurant offers diet food, a thing that makes the cures that involve drinking water superfluous.<sup>27</sup> The analysis of the waters is seldom appropriate, and the spa doctors are sometimes charlatans, and even if they have adequate medical qualifications, they are appointed for political reasons, and very often have to change the place after a year or two, thus not having the opportunity to really set up a solid medical tradition for each particular health resort. The curists take the waters most of the time without a prescription from a doctor. He also criticizes the society life of Romanian spas, arguing that because the therapeutic offer is so limited, people tend to spend all the time left in casinos, balls and theater representations – and he makes a curious statement: that aristocratic ladies find it more costly to take the waters in Romania, because they have to change their outfits several times a day, and all dresses and accessories must have been bought abroad and really expensive. And he concludes, with a literary reference to Maupassant, that only proper advertisement would bring the Romanian spas in the attention of foreign customers. Taking into consideration the descriptions quoted before, Marinescu's

explanation is at least plausible. He believes that the success of most of the health resorts abroad is the fact that they are managed through private initiative, and suggests that the Romania State should grant his spas for several years to private companies.

But there might be other things that contribute to this phenomenon of people taking the waters abroad, which could also explain why the development of Romanian spas is so delayed as compared to the apparition of the practice of frequenting health resorts.

The history of travel and the increasing participation in leisure travel of various social groups reveals the degree to which those groups used it to set themselves off from others and thus to construct, mentally and materially, differences of class. In modern Europe travel was as much a defining characteristic of social position as the work with which it was so often contrasted. To participate in the emergent consumer culture was to engage in a social performance. In their leisure activities more than in their work time, people found opportunities to adopt and assert social identities that they themselves chose. The nobles served as models for middle-class people wanting to break away, at least part of the time, from the work ethic and the stigmas attached to pleasure seeking. What these curists sought can be summed up, in Bourdieu's phrase, as cultural capital: in this case, an ability to claim fist-hand knowledge of places, cultures, scenes, languages, that was supposed to mark out the civilized, modern man and set him and his circle apart from those who did not share this experiences. And as all the newspapers and the magazines described in detail all trips to Western Europe of the members of the upper classes, showing the same interest regardless if the motivation was a cure at a spa or a semester at a University, the public acknowledgment of these experiences was assured. It might also be relevant that for women there were fewer socially legitimized opportunities to travel – and, indeed, women, especially young ones, are mentioned far more often for their pleasure trips – of which many to spas – than for their education pursuits, if any.

Here, however, a problem arises in that the notion of holiday depends on an "other", the idea of necessary work. Those privileged people whose life entailed a circuit of high-class resorts in their fashionable seasons were members of a leisure class for whom the concept of a vacation was scarcely relevant. Indeed, the observance of the dictates of international fashion was at the core of their construction and presentation of self, and thus resort life might almost be regarded as work rather than leisure, the remuneration



being psychic and coming as the reward for suitably directed expenditure of time, money, and expertise, but no less important for that. Crucial to the idea of frequenting spas was that it involved physical displacement, whether to a single destination or to several: change of scene, of culture, in pursuit of pleasure and (in some sense) relaxation. In this respect, the idea of going to the waters itself can be relevant for understanding the process of modernization in Moldavia and Walachia, as it attests the apparition of a novel conception about the rhythm of urban life and about the way of spending time, as frequenting spas was a way of demonstrating that life in Romania has the same rhythm as in the Occident.

As regarding the large number of Romanian curists abroad, a number surpassed only by the Russians, it might be relevant that the same ratio applies for studying abroad, also: in France (where most of the young intelligentsia studies), most of the foreign students are, between 1862 and 1914, the Russians (22.26%), followed by the Romanians (11.25%). In Germany, the other preferred destination for studying abroad, between the Russians and the Romanians the Swiss and the Englishmen interpose, but considering the Balkans, the Romanians are also best represented. Both in France and in Germany, in the decades around the turn of the century, 2/3 of these students chose Medical Faculties.<sup>28</sup>

As doctors play an important role in the creation, development and commercial success of a spa, it would have been difficult to have health resorts before the character of the doctor imposes in Romania. Until the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as there was no department in Balneology at the Universities of Medicine from Romania, and as few physicians who studied abroad chose this specialty for their Ph.D., any generalist or internist could prescribe cures for spas (and many of them recommended German or French spas). In 1922 the Institute of Balneology and the Romanian Society for Balneology, Climatology and Mineral Waters are created, and if we are to believe their publications, all rules, regulation and legislation regarding the subject is owed to their lobby work. Their first success is in 1924, when they accomplish the transfer of health resorts to the administration of the Ministry of Health, as mineral waters and spas were regulated by the Ministry of Industry (according to the regulations from 1888, the Ministry of Health is involved only in issuing the authorizations for balneal installations; in 1898, even this small control factor is taken away and ascribed to the Ministry of Industries).<sup>29</sup> But this transfer, although generally profitable for the spa industry, sometimes was put into practice absurdly: for example, when transferred to the

jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health, some salt lakes were transferred with a minimal area of land around them – only a few meters. Therefore the terrain around the lakes could not be allotted, and the evolution of the health resorts that had begun to develop around them stagnates (this is the case of Amara, for example).

After 1918 and until 1924, the state had managed, through the Ministry of Lands and then through the Department of mineral waters and quarries, within the Ministry of Industries, two large health resorts, Băile Herculane and Ocna Sibiului and a number of small spas of local interest, such as Valea Vinului. Beginning with the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1924, the Ministry of Health regulates and supervises the organization of 112 large or small health resorts, and of an indefinite number of climatic health resorts and places for villegiature, which are either state or private property.<sup>30</sup> Through the State Monopoly Administration, the State manages five spas of local interest (like Ocna Șugatag or Praid), which are frequented almost exclusively by local miners. Other important spas are owned by the state, but given in concession to private companies (Govora, Călimănești-Căciulata, Sovata). There are some spas which are owned by organizations such as Epitropia Sfântului Spiridon din Iași (Saint Spiridon Trusteeship from Iași), Administrația Fondurilor Religioase din Bucovina (the Administration of Religious Funds from Bucovina), Episcopia Romano-Catolică din Oradea (Roman-Catholic Diocese from Oradea) or Eforia Spitalelor Civile (Civil Hospitals Ephors), which manages important spas such as Slănicul Moldovei, Vatra Dornei or Băile Felix, small spas such as Slănicul Prahovei and bath establishments such as those from Pucioasa. Most of the health resorts belonged either to the neighboring villages, or to private persons or companies (Tekirghiol-Movilă was owned by Sever Movilă, Olănești belonged to the Marmorosch-Blanc Bank). The villages who owned spas either administrates them (those from Southern Basarabia, like Achemebet, belonged to German, French and Swiss colonists and are managed by them, the health resort Sangiorz-Bai belonged to the village Parva from Bistrița and is under local administration), or grants them to private companies (for example, Borsec belonged to Ditrău, Lăzarea and Remetea villages, that had given it for exploitation to the Tischler-Mauriciu Company – the Society of Borsec Baths).

Until 1924 there were no norms or general rules for the organization and function of health resorts, there was only The Law of the Four Large State Spas, (Govora, Călimănești, Lacul Sărat and Tekirghiol). The first two spas, which had been granted from 1910 to the Govora-Călimănești

Society, were in train of developing, but faced difficulties in collaborating with village administrations, thus dealing with situations like that in Govora, where Palace Hotel built by the Society was surrounded by a street with houses of timber frame and barracks.<sup>31</sup> Lacul Sărat and Tekirghiol were described in 1924 as being “an accumulation of establishments, houses and villas without any systematization, without streets, without sewage systems, without drinkable water”.<sup>32</sup> The notion of health resort being still quite vague and not regulated, one could easily set up a bath establishment and then some hotels, villas, etc., which practically constituted a spa, but because it was not recognized as such, there were no obligations which it was supposed to meet, neither from the point of view of the organization of the cures, nor from the point of view of urban development. In the case of climatic health resorts, any village in which a sanatorium was built aspired to the statute of climatic spa, which led to the situations like those of the monasteries from Neamț county, declared climatic health resorts, although they did not offer anything to their clients except beautiful sceneries, not even sanitation or access facilities. In general, spas managers based themselves on the miraculous properties of the waters they exploited, and did not consider the aspect or the comfort of the buildings a priority, therefore most of the health resorts were

*a quite large number of establishments, most of them without any modern facilities, and a corresponding number of houses, very many in the same conditions, which looked like they were thrown into place with the hay fork, without any tendency of urban planning, of beautification, modernization or comfort” and many show “empiricism ... instead of the science of balneology.”<sup>33</sup>*

The texts always mention the lack of interest from the villages managing the mineral waters, which limit their involvement in collecting the cure and music taxes that they were entitled to, refusing to develop organization and urban planning programs. If Germany is given as example with regard to the way in which it attracted clients through comfort, as well as variety and novelty in the cures and the treatments offered, France is quoted for the urban development of its spas.

The second success of the Romanian balneologists is the publication, in 1926, of the *Balneo-climatic Law*. The law establishes the conditions a town has to fulfill in order to be declared spa (to have at least 500 visitors a year, to have a systematization plan, a plan of the cure establishments

and certain institutions), classifies spas in health resorts of national or local interest, in balneal, climatic and balneo-climatic spas, and establishes a crucial role for the doctors in the organization and functioning of all health resorts.

In 1889, a special law had decided the allotment of terrains owned by the state in health resorts, to be sold out in order to develop these spas. Beginning with 1926, the law extends its power over the spas situated outside the territory of the former Principalities. In order that the buyer rights become definitive, some clauses were established, such as the deadline to which the buyer would build on the terrain, and the necessity to assure infrastructure. But this is not the case with private lands: when these are allotted for sale, no conditions regarding systematization are imposed, and that leads, as in the case of the resort Tekirghiol-Movila, to situations in which the spa begins to develop without having streets or sewage.

Only in 1928 some building regulations appear: the buildings had to be approved by the General Balneo-climatic Inspectorate, to whom the blueprints had to be handed over; inside the sources' protection perimeter construction was forbidden, and all buildings had to have electricity and sewage system. The height, types of foundation, of roofs and annexes these buildings were allowed to have are also established.<sup>34</sup>

I should also mention the fact that doctors' attempt to impose their medicalised view on the use of waters was very successful in Romania – medical organizations managed the most important spas, doctors were among the developers and promoters. Being doctor in a spa seemed to have been so profitable, that in the interwar period the situation reversed completely: spas were no longer in need for doctors, but the number of doctors in spas was too high. For example, in 1928 there were 426 doctors in spas; only in Techirghiol there were 12 physicians for 5000 visitors, while in Evian there were 17 doctors for 40.000 visitors.<sup>35</sup>

Another feature omnipresent in medical or tourist guides and in doctors' writings is the high quality of the Romanian springs. It seems that all types of waters can be found in Romania – which is obviously not the case for Germany or France – and the analysis of each and every spring is done in comparison with famous German or French waters. Sometimes Romanian springs just resemble their more illustrious correspondents, but many times they are of equal quality or even superior – for example, some springs in Govora, Calimanesti, Slănic Moldova or Sovata. Their quality is even internationally recognized.<sup>36</sup> Leaving aside myths such that of Napoleon

III treating himself with waters from Caciulata, after the suggestion of Carol Davila, and even intending to come here in 1869,<sup>37</sup> Romanian mineral waters are abundantly prized at the International Exhibitions. But, however effective some mineral waters would be, the success of a spa was never decided only by its medical characteristics. Spas are at least as much places for cure as places for entertainment.

It is necessary to remember that the medical discourse, although intending to structure the daily life in a spa and to transform the health resorts in a kind of hospital-town,<sup>38</sup> actually manages to structure just the practices of using the waters and only the daily life of the visitors who were also patients. Activities which were not strictly connected with using the waters and visitors who were not trying to cure themselves (and who can be more numerous than the curists) escape the constraints of the medical discourse exactly with the help of the medical discourse. Because physical displacement and change in the rhythm of the daily life, which were considered a condition for the success of the treatment, meant a routine opposed to that of working: leisure.

Doctors are just one of the key figures of a spa; another key figure is the developer. And developers understood quickly that the success of a health resort is not a matter of the effectiveness of its waters. Economy studies<sup>39</sup> of the development and demise of English and German resorts concluded that what really mattered were, in this order, comfort (in accommodation, in using the waters), entertainment possibilities, fashion and advertising strategies, novelty and variety in cures other than those directly related to using the waters, accessibility (trains, roads), the quality of the waters and the quality of the surroundings. But even without empirical studies, the matter was quite clear for the contemporaries, as a Romanian doctor complains in 1926:

*Comfort is what people appreciate the most in a balneal or climatic health resort. The visitors leave their homes, where they have a certain degree of comfort; but, even if they don't have this comfort at home, they demand it from the health resort. The essential part of a health resort is its curative value, but usually this comes in a second place, because on the scale of preferences other requests come first, namely entertainment, but unfortunately not healthy entertainment, but jazz bands until 4 o'clock in the morning, gambling etc., or some baroque formulas of treatment which the more eccentric they are, the higher advertising power they have, like walking barefoot in rivers (Wöringshofen), having green salad as drink (Lahman-Dresda), walking bareheaded (Radegund) etc.<sup>40</sup>*

When arriving in a health resort, the visitors – sometimes single persons, many times families – could chose from the following accommodation possibilities: the hotels, the villas – which could be rented entirely or by room, the private houses of the locals or they could built their own second residence, in which they could accommodate also their relatives and friends.

Most of the entertainment was provided by the Casino – a must not for the doctors and a must for the developers, considering just the example of Balta Alba, where, in the 70's of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were no accommodation possibilities except peasants' houses and the lake had no bathing facilities, but there was a building functioning as a casino. The casino did not suppose always gambling; in fact, it was in the first place a dancing hall and included, most of the times, a theater and concert hall, reading rooms and tea and coffee rooms. Sometimes the casino is the only reason why people were visiting a spa, and weekend trips for gambling were quite often.

In 1901, in Slănic Moldova the hotels had a total number of 330 rooms; there were also several private villas and the visitors could also accommodate in the so called "new village" (the village is created since 1850 with peasants moved there from other areas, in order to assure service to the visitors). The total number of accommodation places is thus impossible to be decided, but guides advance an approximate figure of more than 2200 visitors during the season<sup>41</sup> – a figure that should be taken cautiously. First, because the number of visitors accommodated in locals' houses is impossible to establish; second, because usually the number of visitors was calculated starting from the number of taxes paid – but the tax for cure was either per person, or per family, regardless of the number of persons comprising the family, and if the visitors stayed less that 3 days, they did not have to pay the tax. The season opened on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June and closed on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, the full season being the month of July and the first 10 days of August, which means a very short season, with only 40 days of high season. The average period of staying is also difficult to calculate, because the three weeks of a regular cure does not seem to be the rule, as the advertisements for hotels and villas mention that rooms can be rented by day, for a period of two weeks or for a month, without mentioning the period of three weeks.

The baths establishment, considered to be the most modern in Romania, was run by a famous doctor, A. Braescu, who had trainings in many West-European Countries, and who was helped by a prominent

woman doctor, Miss Marta Trancu. There the visitors could also have electrotherapy, massages and a therapy with compressed air, a specialty of the place. But, even if largely controlled by doctors, the place was not free of charlatans, like the famous Black Doctor.<sup>42</sup>

With its large Royal Casino (which offers *"theater, concerts, balls, conferences, literary and artistic matinees, so that both the beautiful sex and the intellectuals will find something to do"*<sup>43</sup>) with the well-designed park, and with electricity everywhere, Slănic Moldova is considered to compete with Sinaia as the most fashionable spa of Romania - Carol I had visited the health resort in 1888 and in 1891, and one of the regulars used to be Vasile Alecsandri. Still, there is no railway leading to the health resort, the closest station being the one in Targu Ocna, some 20 kilometers away, from where the visitors have to take carriages.

Although guides and publicity advertise an eventful social life, the inner regulation of the spa – issued by the Epitepie, of course – states that everything has to close at 11 PM during the week and at 12.30 PM during Sundays; there are even fixed hours for breakfast, lunch and dinner for all public places serving food – which are also advised to offer only diet food.<sup>44</sup>

The most frequented spa of Valachia was Govora. If in 1885 Govora has still only 2 visitors, in 1887 there are 500 visitors, and in 1903 2540 visitors – these numbers are also to be taken quite loosely, not only because of the difficulties to calculate the numbers of visitors that are similar to the situation in Slănic Moldova, but also because in 1919 the records are lost.<sup>45</sup>

The total number of rooms can be approximated in 1901 at 450, and the rental system is like the one in Slănic Moldova, but the season is longer, starting on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May and ending on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, with the high season between the 1<sup>st</sup> of July and the 20<sup>th</sup> of August. The baths establishment has 40 individual cabins and two pools (one for women and one for men, of course), 2 rooms for massages and 1 for inhalations. Considering the opening hours of the baths establishment, its capacity is too small: if at the beginning of the season the establishment is open from 7 to 10 AM, during the high season it is opened from 4.30 to 12 AM and again from 3 to 6 PM.<sup>46</sup>

If the number of persons visiting Slănic Moldova or Govora around 1900 is so difficult to establish, the number of those actually using the waters is quite impossible to decide – one can encounter cited the number of tickets sold for individual cabins, for example, but as the three weeks

period on cure was not exactly the rule, the number of people using them remains a mystery.

Who frequented Slănic Moldova and Govora in this period is also something very difficult to found – on one hand, hotels and local news papers tend to mention only those considered important guests; the advertisements present it as an elitist spa for the high society; on the other hand, it seems that ordinary people were quite in large number. This is only a supposition based on literary references and on the fact that the accommodation offer of rather cheap rooms, in small hotels, villas and private houses is by far larger than the offer of luxury hotels.

*The bell announcing dinner had just rang for the lunchtime, and all guests took their places in the dining room and on the large terrace around the big restaurant. A gathering of about two hundred and more people; men, women, children, people of all classes, of all ages, from throughout Romania, in various costumes: from thin occidental fabric to the monastic cloth, from the silk de Lyon to the shirt from Rucăr, in one word, the most colorful, noisy and picturesque gathering one can see swarms during all season, twice a day, in this first class restaurant of Slănic. Here no one bothers about disturbing the neighbor. While one is eating, another is smoking, another one is spitting on floor, and yet another one is blowing the nose [...]*

*Well, Slănic has also its so called aristocratic world, its high-life, where you can meet stiff figures, arrogant, with despising smiles, but these snobs are either condemned to loneliness or, if they do not want to be totally bored, they are taken over by the high egalitarian current, and taken, willy-nilly, in different excursions, where, in the sound of the violins of two-three fiddlers singing lachrymose songs, and under the almighty sun, they stop making differences between people.<sup>47</sup>*

This kind of descriptions is the general rule when it comes to Romanian spas, not only about Slănic. If we are to believe literary texts, Romanian health resorts are not for the elite. It can be very plausible that the real elite went abroad, and Romanian spas are thus comparable with other European small health resorts of local importance. If it makes sense for the elite not to frequent Romanian spas, it is not that obvious why would the elite take the waters here (for example, a spa like Slănic was visited twice by Carol I).

One thing Occidental studies about spas in this period mention quite often is the segregation of classes. It has been argued that the urban



structure of the health resorts up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their remoteness or relative isolation from the nearby settlements, their closed and self-sufficient organization, their prices were intended so as to support this clear and strict differentiation of classes (and the situation is usually opposed to that of the sea-side resorts, where the less easily controllable open space contributed to their more rapid democratization).

The circumstances in Romania seem to be different, but to what degree they were different it is difficult to establish, as there are no data that would allow an accurate classification of visitors according to their social status. What is even more important than the fact that the same spa is frequented by people from all social milieus, is the fact that they actually mingled in almost all public places; when the peculiarity is described by foreign visitors, it is always considered as something oriental. The same mixture of people of different condition can be encountered in texts about spas in Hungary, but rather for an earlier period, and it is also related to the eastern character of the place,<sup>48</sup> and it is a common feature in the case of the pre-history of the Occidental health resorts, when the use of waters was still open to everyone. Therefore, the lack of class separation can be considered a condition of the beginnings of the development of spas; but in the case of Romania it was accepted by visitors who were familiar with the opposite from their voyages abroad, and it seems to continue into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a matter of fact, Romanian balneologists were among the first to propose publicly the democratization of the use of waters and to try to impose mass tourism. The practice of going to the waters was considered an important tool in improving the public health in Romania. Doctors not only wrote projects that were intended to encourage rural communities to make use of their neighboring mineral springs as the cheapest way to cure their illnesses, but they were also proposing a system in which workers could have access to health resorts with the financial help of the State.<sup>49</sup>

[in Slănic, 1886]... *where there's a total lack of etiquette, where friendships start between people coming from Mehedinti and People coming from Dorohoi, where engagements are settled and divorces are arranged ... where two people who do not know each other do not need the intervention of a third to present themselves to one another. They just approach each other with the hand at the hat.*<sup>50</sup>

Maybe one of the reasons why Romanian spas were still frequented by the elite, even if they had to mingle with the ordinary people, and even with the lack of comfort, was the fact that going abroad for cure was largely presented as showing a lack of patriotic spirit. Of course, those who presented the situation like that – the doctors, the promoters of spas – were acting primarily from economic reasons, and, of course, their discourse is not singular – in fact, deploying the hemorrhage of money to foreign health resorts (especially German) and frequenting autochthonous spas is a very common trope for French texts, also. The Romanian discourse evolves around the following leit-motifs: before 1918, we had the best waters; after 1918, we not only had the best waters in Europe, but also one third of the totality of European mineral and thermal springs. Doctors who recommend taking the waters abroad are denounced as not being patriots.<sup>51</sup> Quite regularly, newspapers and magazines publish articles with titles like *Every year, 3-4 billions of lei go out from Romania with the visitors of foreign spas*, advancing numbers like 10,000 Romanian curists travelling abroad.<sup>52</sup>

The tension between the cosmopolitan character of thermalism and its national feature appears even more clearly after 1918, when the practice of going to the waters is also taken over by the nationalistic discourse. For example, in 1928 doctor Aurel Weiss writes:

*Health resorts are always a very important factor in bringing closer the provinces of a country, because arising the interest of the inhabitants from one province for the inhabitants from another province levels differences and misunderstandings and contributes largely to strengthen relationships of all kinds. This would be the social and national side of balneology.*<sup>53</sup>

## NOTES

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- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 Many of them quote the names of Asclepiades (c 124 BC), Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79) or Galen (AD 131-201), and make abundant references to the roman period. Cf. PORTER, R., "The medical history of waters and spas", in *Medical History Supplement*, 10, 1990, pp. vii-xii.
- 15 With regard to their mineral content, the most important minerals are **bicarbonate, sulphur and sulphates, and chlorides**. According to the balance of hydrogen in the water, balneologists generally accept the following classification of mineral springs: **acidic waters** are waters that measure below 7.0 on the Ph scale, **neutral waters** are waters that measure 7.0 on

- the PH scale, **basic/alkaline waters** are waters that measure above 7.0 on the PH scale. From the point of view of their temperature, there are **cold springs**, with temperatures below 25° C, **tepid springs**, with temperatures ranging from 25° to 34° C, **warm springs, with** temperatures ranging from 34° to 42° C, and **hot springs, with** temperatures above 42° C. Cf. COLEY, N.G., "Physicians, chemists and the analysis of mineral waters: "the most difficult part of chemistry"", in *Medical History Supplement*, 10, 1990, pp 56–66.
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- 26 WILLIAM B., "The rise of the German and the demise of the English spa industry: a critical analysis of business success and failure", in *Leisure Studies*, 16, 1997, pp. 173–187.
- 27 The doctor makes the following remark: "...the Bulgarians take from us millions for tomatoes, peppers or cabbages, and then we give other millions to Karlsbad, to cure our nutrition disease.", MARINESCU, Gh, op. cit. pp. 26.
- 28 KOVACS, L. N., *Itinerarii spre lumea savanta. Tineri din spațiul românesc la studii în străinătate (1864-1944)*, Ed. Limes, Cluj, 2006.
- 29 "O decizie a înaltei Curți de Casatie", unsigned article, republished in *Documente balneare și climatice relative la situația actuală a instituțiilor, cu privire la propunerile de organizarea ale noului proiect de lege*, pp. 2-4, without mentioning the place and the date of its first appearance.

- 30 In the travel guides and medical balneology guides from the 20s and the 30s there are between 137 and 168 health resorts, of which 15 large, or of national interest, the rest being of local interest or only rudimentary baths establishment. The 15 large spas are: Slanic Moldova, Lacul Sarat, Govora, Calimanesti-Caciulata, Tekirghiol, Carmen Sylva, Mamaia, Vatra Dornei, Sovata, Tunsad, Borsec, Herculane, Buzias, Baile Episcopale Bihor, Baile Felix.
- 31 "The spa Govora would be a pride for any western country ... But with this I mean only the area occupied by the installations of the Govora-Călimănești Society, which fulfil all urban conditions: drinkable water, tout à l'egoût, electricity, lawns with flowers, roads and streets, etc. But what a contrast between this oasis and all the other buildings that form a real village around. Apart from a few beautiful villas, the others, including the private hotels, not only that they have no aesthetics, but they have no hygiene, also. Not only the back streets display wooden latrines, but the garbage is thrown from the main street into the steeps of Hința and into all diches; and weeds grow even on the single sidewalk. What a difference from the places run by the Society!" writes VICOL, N. in the Govora guide published in 1929.
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- 36 Unsigned article, "Memoriul Societatii de hidrologie medicala din 1926", in *Documente balneare si climatice relative la situatia actuala a* extract from *Curierul Băilor* 4-5-6, 1930, pp. 8-10.
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