

# The Visit Rate of Bardejov Spa in the Context of its History

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## Abstract

The main objective of this article was to evaluate the impact of historical events on the visit rate of Bardejov Spa in various periods of its development (in the years of 1814–2016). The collection of information on clients' spa visits, especially the oldest data, was difficult (19th century and 1st and 2nd World War). Much information was available only in the State Archive of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic in Hungarian and Latin. Some data for several years were not available at all, and some data were not recorded in writing. The paper summarizes the history of the spa, natural medical sources, spa treatment and indications. At present, the number of guests has an increasing trend, as evidenced by the visit rate for 2016, as well as by current data for 2017. In 2016, Bardejov Spa reached a pick of the visit rate with 25,863 clients. In 2017, there were 27,170 clients. The main clients are the Slovaks, about 90%.

## Keywords

Slovak Spa, Bardejov Spa, visit rate, spa tourism, spa treatment

**JEL classification:** I10, L83

## Introduction

The geological development of the Western Carpathians created preconditions for varied and rich sources of natural healing thermal and mineral waters in our territory. These treasures have been used by residents of this area for the treatment of various diseases since their first settlement (Petraccia et al., 2006; Zálešáková, 2013). According to the water registration at the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic (2016), 1,657 mineral springs are documented in the territory of Slovakia and 112 of them are recognized as suitable for the purpose of filling in containers and medical care. According to Bodiš et al. (2016), Slovakia can be proud of dozens of unique spa resorts whose treatment effects reached a good reputation not only at home, but also throughout Europe. Nowadays, tourism has undoubtedly become essential to both national and international economies and each country is currently trying to face the challenges imposed by this industry (Orieška, 1994).

Tourism, thanks to its cross-cutting nature and multiplier effect, has become a strong economic sector with a growing share of GDP, with an effective increase in sustainable employment and an impetus in progress of economically undeveloped regions. The share of tourism in GDP in the European Union is about 4 to 6%, while in Slovakia this share represents 2.7% (in 2016). Tourism is one of the richest sources of employment as human work cannot be replaced in this area. It creates 6 to 7% of all jobs and induces other 2 to 3% in supply services. On the basis of the information provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, the total number in mass accommodation facilities was 14 million in 2016 (more than 10 million in 2010). In 2017, there were 21 spa towns in Slovakia with 31 spa treatments providers and 80 accommodation facilities in total. The total capacity was 12,339 beds and 6,334 rooms. Over the last 10 years, there has been no significant change in this indicator (bed capacity in 2005 was 11,804 beds). The number of visitors in the Slovak spa had a rising tendency until 2008, and it rose by almost 10% per year. Probably due to the economic recession, this growth slowed in 2008 by over 3% and in the following year decreased by more than 18%. In 2009, the number of visitors started to grow again and reached the level of 2006 thanks to an increase in the number of domestic visitors (Matlovičová et al., 2013). The number of visitors to spa facilities in 2016 was about 316,000; in 2017, it was 311,138 with a number 2.7 million of overnight stays.

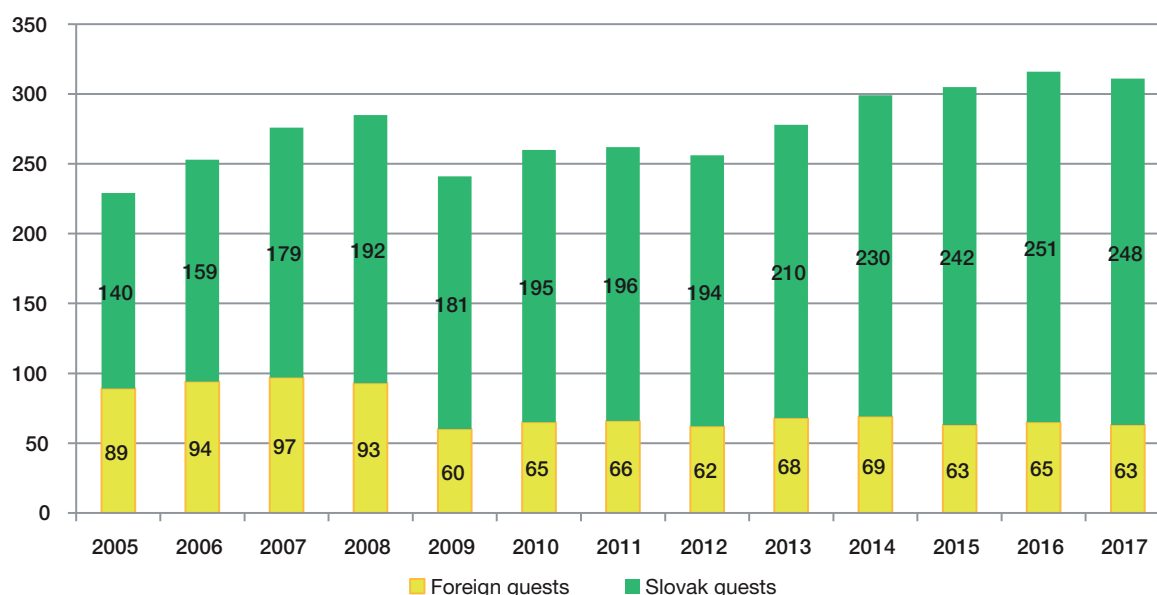
The spa tourism share in the total number of visitors in tourist accommodation facilities in Slovakia is 6.3%; the share in the total number of overnight stays in tourist accommodation facilities in Slovakia represents 19.4% (Statistical Office of the SR, 2018). The number of guests of spa tourism accommodation facilities in Slovakia for the years 2005 to 2017 and the average number of overnight stays is presented in Table 1.

The number of foreign and Slovak guests in the spa tourism accommodation facilities in Slovakia for the years of 2005–2017 is presented in Figure 1.

**Table 1** The number of guests in the spa tourism accommodation facilities and their average number of overnight stays in Slovakia for the years of 2005 to 2017

Year	Number of guests (in thousands)	Average number of overnight stays
2005	228.8	9.4
2006	253.3	9
2007	276.2	8.9
2008	284.8	9.2
2009	241.3	9.9
2010	259.5	9.6
2011	261.5	9.2
2012	256.4	9.3
2013	278.4	9.1
2014	299.0	8.8
2015	305.0	8.6
2016	316.0	8.7
2017	311.1	8.8

Source: Public database, Statistical Office of the SR (2018), and authors' own research

**Figure 1** The number of foreign and Slovak guests in the spa tourism accommodation facilities in Slovakia for the years of 2005 to 2017 (in thousands)

Source: Public database, Statistical Office of the SR (2018), and authors' own research

In the structure of foreign visitors, clientele from the Czech Republic is clearly dominant and creates nearly 50% of all foreign spa guests (in 2017, it formed 48.7%). From other groups, the following nations can be mentioned: Israelis (10.9%), Germans (9.4%), Poles (5.3%), Russians (5.0%), and Austrians (4.1%). The highest number of overnights, which the Slovak spa guests spent in the Slovak spa, was 10.2 days in 2009. The foreign guests stayed in the Slovak spa 9.5 days; this highest number dates back to the year of 2005. In the year of 2017, the Slovak guests stayed 8.7 days, the foreign guests 8 days. The revenue from the accommodation (per year 2017) was approximately 62 million Euros, out of which 74% was generated by domestic and 26% by foreign visitors. The total revenue (in Euros) generated by the Slovak and foreign guests and the average price for accommodation is presented in Table 2. These data are presented since 2009, when Euro was introduced in Slovakia (Statistical Office of the SR, 2018).

**Table 2** The total revenue and the average price for accommodation from the Slovak and foreign guests in the spa tourism accommodation facilities in Slovakia for the years of 2009–2017

Year	The Slovak guests		The foreign guests	
	Total revenues (in thousand Euros)	Average price for accommodation (in Euros)	Total revenues (in thousand Euros)	Average price for accommodation (in Euros)
2009	30,117	16	13,791	25
2010	34,805	18	16,771	30
2011	35,557	19	14,765	28
2012	40,022	22	14,748	28
2013	40,767	21	16,372	29
2014	41,166	20	16,692	30
2015	38,395	19	15,414	28
2016	45,432	20	15,848	32
2017	45,133	20	16,819	35

Source: Public database, Statistical Office of the SR (2018), and authors' own research

## Bardejov Spa

In the paper, we summarize data from one of the most famous Slovak spa, Bardejov Spa. The aim is to clarify the impact of the historical events in particular periods, during an increase and decrease of the visit rate in Bardejov Spa and give a comprehensive view of the main periods of its tourism development.

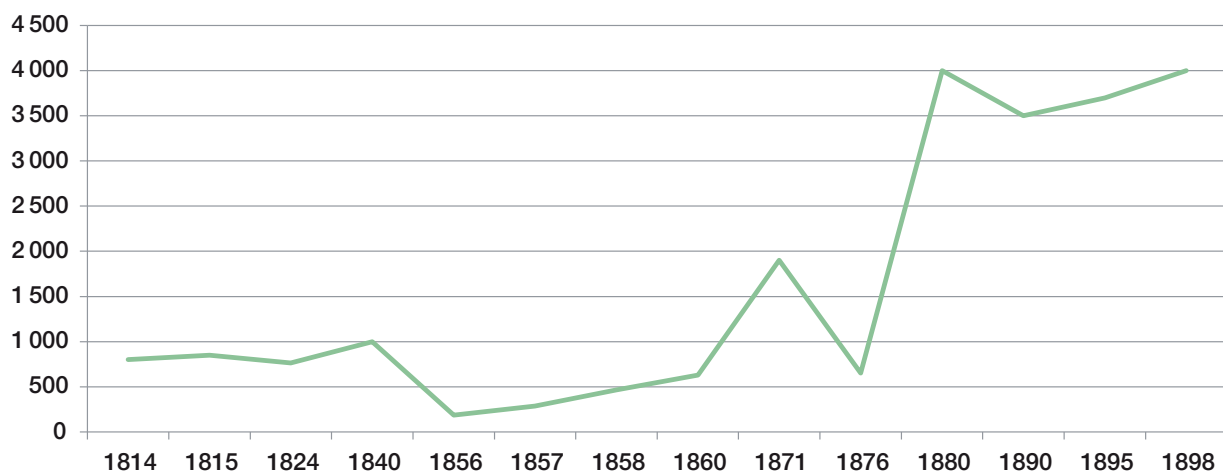
Bardejov Spa is situated in the valley of the Bardejov Brook, about 6 km from the historically significant medieval town Bardejov (Dubcová et al., 2008). In addition, the spa, spanning 31 hectares, is located at the foothills of the Low Beskid Mountains in

northeastern Slovakia and is owned by 33 subjects. Currently, Bardejov Spa is one of the best equipped treatment facilities, where its rich tradition and history are combined with modern treatments. Bardejov Spa is among three most popular, most visited and largest Slovak spas with 1,631 number of beds. The biggest treasure of the spa is its natural medical sources, which thanks to their composition, are one of the most significant in Europe. The geographical location, mineral springs, natural environment, and microclimate are beneficial for the treatment of various diseases.

Based on the study of historical materials about Bardejov Spa, including the spa treatment, construction of accommodation facilities and especially its visit rate, we prepared an overview of the historical development divided into individual stages. We tried to include its history, visit rate, treatment, indications, reconstructions, constructions, and social life which conditioned the increase or decrease in the number of guests. In the course of studying historical sources, we summed up all the available information into the individual stages divided into the first period of flowering, the period of stagnation, the second period of flowering, the period of the First and Second World Wars, the development of Bardejov Spa from nationalization and development in the years of 2000 to 2016, and separately for the year of 2017.

The growth of the visit rate in each period was affected by the following development. In the visit rate graph of Bardejov Spa (see Figure 2), it is possible to identify an increase or decrease in the number of guests who stayed overnight in the spa in the periods of the first great flowering from 1814, during the period of stagnation from 1848 to the period of the second flowering of Bardejov Spa, finishing in 1898.

**Figure 2** The visit rate of guests of Bardejov Spa in the years of 1814–1898



Source: own processing based on studies by Mulík (1969, 1981)

The number of visitors at the beginning of the first flowering was also growing thanks to Professor Kitaibel, who developed an analysis of curative springs and suggested indications for particular diseases. This brought the rapid spread of awareness of Bardejov curative waters, as it can be seen in the number of guests in 1814, when 800 guests visited

Bardejov Spa, and even more in 1815. Not only medical care was offered at that time in the spa, but also a variety of cultural and sports activities to make patients' stays enriching and entertaining. New summer residences were built, hotels and spa became more and more luxurious. As we can see in Figure 2, the visit rate was rising constantly. Great popularity during the period was influenced also by the visit of Austrian Princess Maria Lujza and later, by Russian Tsar Alexander I. As there is no record to clarify why the number of guests dropped to 763 in 1824, we can only deduce that this could be caused by the fact that Bardejov Spa became more luxurious, and consequently less affordable for the inhabitants of the surrounding towns, as the treatments and stays in the spa were quite expensive. Still richer cultural and social life and building of the Institute for Cold Water Therapy increased the number of guests in Bardejov Spa to 1,000 in 1840.

From the visit rate of Bardejov Spa (see Figure 2), we can see a decrease in the visit rate because the following years were not very prosperous for Bardejov Spa. Unfortunately, the number of visitors in the revolutionary period was not recorded. We only know that the Revolution and the arrival of the Russian soldiers affected Bardejov Spa to a considerable extent. Pánska Street was destroyed and there was no efficient investment into the spa development. Moreover, as a consequence of improvements in the railway network abroad, many richer visitors preferred treatment beyond the Slovak borders. The fire in 1856 destroyed many houses and the number of spa guests was reduced to only 186. However, this situation lasted only shortly, and in the course of the three following years, the number of visitors increased, in 1857 to 285 guests, in 1858 to 465 guests and in 1860 to 630 visitors. Spa tourism grew significantly thanks to low service charges, which could be afforded even by less wealthy people, and thanks to new diseases that began to be treated in the spa (Cassens et al., 2012). The number of guests increased to 1,900, as evidenced by the year of 1871.

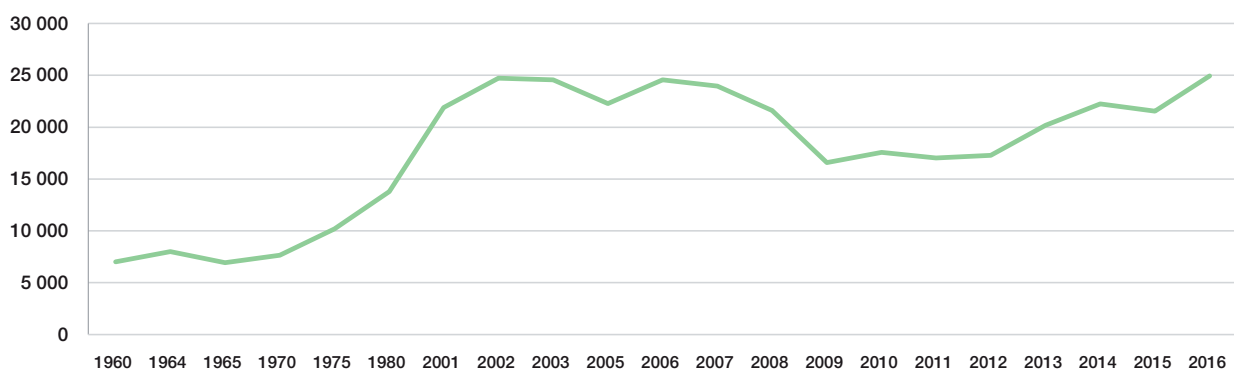
Since there are no reports for 1876 why the number of guests was so rapidly reduced to 650, we can only conclude that it was caused by stagnation in the renovation of the spa and ownership changes. The following year of 1880, the second period of flowering of Bardejov Spa began. Thanks Bardejov financial incentives, the construction of a spa colonnade, a wooden pavilion, and many other improvements, which raised a spa reputation, began. Thanks to a wide range of services, the spa received 4,000 guests and could flourish. As Mulík mentions (1969, p. 141), inconsistent criteria and reports distort the visit rate of that time. Therefore, it is not known why the number of visitors in 1890 dropped to 3,500. One of the reasons was an increase in stay and procedure charges, which was not affordable for everyone. The turning point in the rise of the number of guests was the construction of the Deák Spa Hotel, which raised the total capacity of the spa. The construction of the Bardejov – Prešov railway line in 1895 brought important progress and new guests, whose number reached 3,700. The visit of another prominent European ruler, Elisabeth Empress, known as Sissi, and the construction of the Dukla and Astoria Hotels also contributed to a good reputation of the spa, which can be seen in the number of guests – 4,000 in 1898.

The increase in the visit rate in individual years was really affected by reconstructions, constructions, development of treatment and indications, and visits of well-known his-

torical figures. The growth of the visit rate in each period was affected by the following development. In Figure 2, it is possible to identify an increase or decrease in the number of guests who stayed overnight in the spa in the periods of the first great flowering from 1814, during the period of stagnation from 1848 to the period of the second flowering of Bardejov Spa, finishing in 1898.

It is important to note that the number of guests in the spa was affected by two laws. They were as follows: the Act on the Nationalization of Spas and Springs of 1948, when the reconstruction and restoration of the damaged buildings for year-round operations started and the Act No. 43 on Spas and Springs. The approval of the spa statute for Bardejov Spa in 1955, significant for continuing the construction and development of the spa, was of great importance as well. The spa grew up in popularity which was a contribution to the reduction of the number of indications and resulted in a better therapeutic effect for patients. Therefore, in 1960, 7,000 visitors were treated in the spa. Many guests arrived mainly from western part of Czechoslovakia. In 1964, the number of visitors rose to 8,000. Even though the number of guests fell in the following year, it started to rise again thanks to the doctor František Radáč who contributed to the building of a service centre, colonnades, cinemas and balneotherapy with a health centre and an indoor swimming pool. The construction of the Hotel Minerál and the opening of the spa open-air museum called Skanzen contributed to the increase in the number of guests to 7,637 in 1970 (see Figure 3). The completion of the construction of the Ozón Hotel raised not only the number of visitors (10,200 in 1975), but also the accommodation capacity of Bardejov Spa. Vibrating social life, lively spa tourism, and high-quality health care showed results in the rise of the number of guests, and in 1980 with the accommodation capacity of 1,100 beds, it reached 13,800 guests (Kireta, 2012).

**Figure 3** The visit rate of Bardejov Spa in the years of 1960–2016



Source: own processing based on Mulík (1969, 1981), Bardejovské Kúpele a.s.

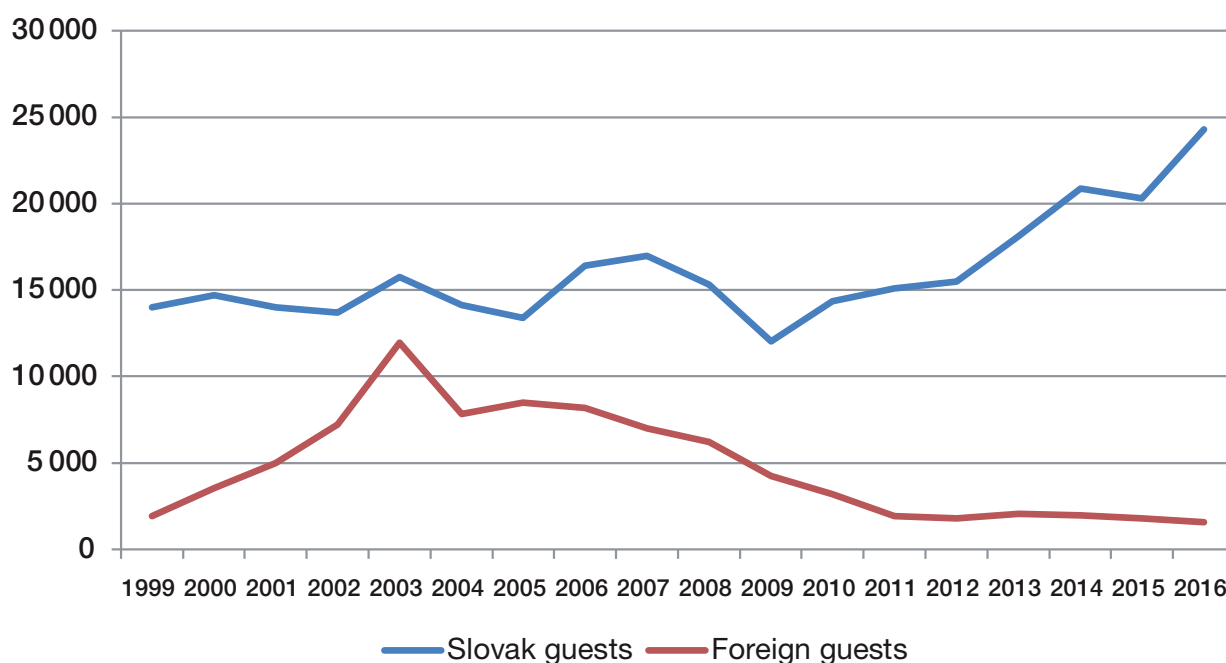
Since we were not able to find any data for the years of 1990 to 2000, we can only deduce that the visit rate increased, as in the following years, in 2001 there were nearly 22,000 guests, and in 2003 – 28,000 guests arrived in the spa. In the following year of 2004, the amendment to the payment of some healthcare fees marked the spa tourism; consequently, the number of guests was reduced to 21,937. In 2007, the number



of guests rose approximately to 24,000, but the global economic crisis and the Euro adoption brought a further decrease in the visit rate, and only 16,000 patients visited the spa in 2009 (Kireta, 2012; General Director of Bardejov Spa, 2018; Gutek et al., 2012).

At present, the number of guests has an increasing trend, as evidenced by the visit rate for 2016, as well as by current data for 2017. In 2016, Bardejov Spa reached a pick of the visit rate with about 26,000 clients, in 2017 there were 27,000 clients. Year-on-year, the number of overnight stays increased by 9% and reached 251,884. From the year of 2003, the number of foreign tourists 11,955 reduced to the number 1,573 (in 2016). With the growth of domestic clientele, the share of the foreign clientele was reduced (Table 3; Figure 4).

**Figure 4** The visit rate of the Slovak and foreign guests in Bardejov Spa (the years of 1999–2016)



Source: Own processing based on Mulík (1969, 1981), Bardejovské Kúpele a.s. (2018)

In 2011, another amendment to the Health Care Act was adopted, which caused some decline in the number of patients as well. This number levelled off thanks to the opening of the new Wellness Centre and Centre for Men's Health, and the introduction of a fibro-elastography examination of the liver. The number of guests increased to more than 17,000 at the end of 2012. In 2015, the Mineral Hotel was rebuilt into a luxurious congress Hotel Alexander \*\*\*\*\*, which brought accretion of the accommodation capacity. At present, the company Bardejovské kúpele a.s. has the accommodation capacity of 1,196 beds in 613 rooms in the main season. The number of employees ranges from 245 (+ 92 outsourcing), which makes it the second largest employer in the Bardejov District.



**Table 3** The visit rate of the Slovak and foreign guests in Bardejov Spa (the years of 1999–2016)

Country of origin of the guests	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Slovakia	14,009	14,691	14,013	13,687	15,734	14,112	13,375	16,389	16,957	15,334	12,032	14,340	15,092	15,480	18,123	20,859	20,309	24,290
Czech	179	628	2,082	3,632	7,760	4,400	4,766	4,692	4,424	4,670	3,187	2,487	1,178	549	602	802	775	780
Poland	335	835	623	1,074	1,692	1,186	1,051	933	825	499	135	133	93	242	179	198	140	189
Austria	1	3	2	66	312	234	261	146	167	148	56	29	8	25	27	13	10	14
Hungary	9	1	18	104	183	194	629	350	209	58	56	11	7	7	25	16	12	50
Ukraine	96	90	44	50	140	170	312	414	367	267	129	96	78	172	605	451	300	171
Belarus	17	87	61	118	106	73	145	275	381	131	99	62	99	316	127	153	226	109
Russia	72	189	344	77	124	56	177	201	264	188	244	173	185	192	312	204	131	67
Germany	32	270	358	298	368	283	218	136	71	69	38	51	53	43	30	30	25	43
United Kingdom	n	n	n	3	6	22	37	6	21	24	4	4	14	5	18	4	8	5
France	n	n	n	5	100	57	44	7	9	6	2	3	19	3	2	4	8	9
Israel	n	505	379	308	450	217	158	49	36	3	4	3	2	11	3	19	53	97
Canada	2	1	n	n	4	1	10	4	8	6	3	13	3	2	4	9	6	8
USA	14	14	14	20	42	31	39	71	36	25	15	18	14	28	23	3	11	30
Other Countries	1,156	917	1,061	1,443	668	901	644	899	168	124	263	124	183	193	87	66	109	1

Source: General Director of Bardejov Spa (2018); n – not identified

## Discussion

In general, health and spa tourism are increasingly becoming an important economic and marketing strategy for hoteliers, resorts and tourist destinations that attract tourist visits. The importance of the Slovak spa tourism is determined by the fact that according to the marketing strategy of its development, it is considered the third most important form of tourism. Its priority status is also determined by the fact that the medical spa is considered to be the main product line of the Slovak tourism. The response to the mentioned problems was marketing activities strengthening at the level of the individual spa resorts and at the national level. According to the Strategy (in Matlovičová et al., 2013), orientation focuses on the key markets represented by neighbouring countries with relatively good transport, joint historical and social linkage with the past (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Ukraine), as well as on the countries that have significant long-term presence within the number of tourists (Germany, Russia, Italy, the United Kingdom).

The average yearly spa treatment is represented by 120,000 inhabitants of Slovakia. In 1996, it was 117,683 and in 2015, 119,424. However, while health insurance companies paid 100% of the costs of spa treatment 20 years ago, they paid only 51% last year. In 1996, health insurance revenue amounted to €1.14 billion, and in 2015 insurance choices amounted to €4.23 billion. Overall, in 2015, the Slovak spa was visited by 154,000 clients. Foreign guests come mostly from Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland, or Russia. On the contrary, the interest in the Slovak spa does not attract the inhabitants of France, Portugal or Spain. Only about 60% of the bed capacity is used in health care in the Slovak spa. The Association also deals with specific insurance measures.

Since January 1, 2019, VAT on accommodation from the original 20% to 10% was reduced in Slovakia. This was also done on the basis of the positive experience of other EU Member States that agreed that such a legislative measure would increase the demand for accommodation services in the territory of the Slovak Republic, thus positively supporting further development of tourism in Slovakia.

## Conclusion

Geographic location of the Slovak Republic in western Carpathian arch creates great conditions for the development of the spa tourism based on the healing, mineral and thermal waters. In the European context, the region of the Slovak Republic is relatively rich in springs of thermal and mineral waters, which belong to the valuable natural resources. Slovakia is considered a traditional spa destination within the European context since the establishing of the first settlements located close to the thermal or mineral springs, has a long history. The oldest spa centres in Slovakia include Bardejov Spa, Bojnice, Piešťany, Sklené Teplice, Trenčianske Teplice, and Turčianske Teplice.

The main objective of the paper was to evaluate the impact of historical events on the visit rate of Bardejov Spa in various periods of its development (in the years of 1814–2016). In the time of the first records of Bardejov acidulous mineral waters dating

back to 1247, nobody anticipated the hidden potential of curative springs and future benefits for the region and all Slovak spa industry. Due to the article extent, we were not able to do a comprehensive assessment of the state of all Bardejov Spa's development periods. Nevertheless, with the detailed field research, we summarized all available information into the individual periods that we divided into the first period of flowering, the period of stagnation, the second period of flowering, the period of the First and the Second World Wars, and the development of Bardejov Spa from the nationalization to the present.

From the above-mentioned historical periods, we evaluated two following periods. The first period, specified by the years of 1814–1898. This includes the period of the first great flowering, the period of stagnation to the period of the second great flowering of Bardejov Spa. The second period - the period of development of the spa was defined by the years of 1960–2015. By evaluating the data obtained over time, we can say that Bardejovské Spa has always had a tremendous potential in the sphere of spa tourism despite the fact that some circumstances like the fire in 1856, the Revolution of 1848-1849, the stagnation in modifications, the First and Second World War and the amendments to the Law on Baths about tenants, have greatly marked the progress of these spas and spa tourism. At present, the number of guests has an increasing trend, as evidenced by the visit rate for 2016, as well as by current data for 2017. In 2016, Bardejov Spa reached a pick of the visit rate with about 26,000 clients, in 2017 there were nearly 27,200 clients. The main clients are the Slovaks, about 90%; 5% are clients from the Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, and 5% are foreign clients from the Czech Republic, Poland, and Israel.

## Acknowledgements

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