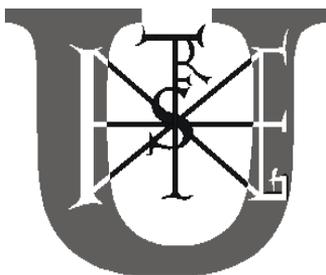


**Szent István University Gödöllő**  
**PhD School of Management and Business Administration**



**THE POSSIBILITIES OF DEVELOPING THE  
WELLNESS TOURISM SERVICES IN THE  
SOUTHERN GREAT PLAIN REGION**

**SUMMARY OF Ph.D. THESIS**

**ZOLTÁN ÁRPÁSI**

**GÖDÖLLŐ**  
**2014.**

**Name of PhD School:** Szent István University  
PhD School of Management and Business  
Administration

**Scientific branch of PhD School:** management and business administration

**Head of PhD School:** Dr. István Szűcs professor, Doctor of Science  
Szent István University, Gödöllő  
Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences  
Institute of Economics, Law and  
Methodology

**Supervisor:** Dr. Ágnes Horváth associate professor,  
Szent István University, Gödöllő  
Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences  
Institute of Business Studies

.....  
Approved by the Head of PhD  
School

.....  
Approved by the supervisor

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## *1.1. Importance of the topic*

The theme's actuality consist of the appearance of the wellness' frame of mind and its effect to a lot of area.

In my point of view, we can utilize the consumer's behavior change by the wellness' trend, where the guest can feel the mixture of the health and the pleasure of spending the pastime.

Nowadays the health consciousness is getting a bigger and bigger emphasis and related to this, conscious consumption. The affected ones try to adjust their consumption to the healthy lives approach in life's different areas. This aspiration to healthiness is not just regard to eating habits or systematic exercise, it appears in the spending of the pastime's motivation.

These aspects are prevailing by choosing the tourism destination, so we have to define the area's tourism strategy and pay attention to the national trends.

Namely this service alternative can bring prosperity to areas, what could be fill in an emphasized role in healthcare, prevention or medical courses by their mineral- or thermal water supplies or another natural endowment. This could mean a breaking point, a regional development for a lot Hungarian counties. In terms by its geographical capability, the South Plain region (DAR) has appropriate amount of water base, which is a helping hand in rising in health tourism. We have to recognize the influential facts of the target audience and their contexts, attitudes and thoughts of the region to make the appropriate strategy.

That is why I pursue and analyze the concept of the wellness' primary and secondary facts and outline the way that how this trend can contribute the south plain region in my essay.

## *1.2. Goals of the research*

During my research I drew up four main goals, they were divided into two groups.

One group was about the attitude towards the wellness conscious lifestyle. The other group was about the analysis of the region's macro-environmental factor. These goals were the basis of my hypothesis and the new and novel scientific results.

**(C1)** One of my main aim is the analysis of health development theories in order to present strategic development opportunities to the South Great Plain region, which would help them to market the wellness services better. There were also partial goals connected to that.

**(C1a)** To analyze the consumer trend of wellness and the models.

**(C1b)** To know the specialties of the wellness philosophy and to find out how the region can adapt it to its strategy.

**(C2)** To explore the consumers opinion about the wellness philosophy and how it affects their decisions..

**(C3)** To reveal what socio demographic criteria affects the choosing of wellness services.

**(C4)** To get to know the most important opinions about the South Great Plain region.

As the result of the work I gathered important and practical information, which can be used to identify those criteria that influence the decision of the target market. The steps of regional development strategy can also be determined.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research divided into a secondary and a primary section. In the previous I revealed those wellness models based on the sources of the specialized literature that interpret the content and the connection of the wellness.

During my primary research I focused on joining the two subdivisions in keeping the aims in line. In the first section I paid attention to explore the trend of wellness, the opinions and the expectations of the facilities with regard to the consumers; while in the other section I focused on the acquaintance of the opinions of the Southern-Plain region and the hidden opportunities of that area.

Since in the specialized literature the meaning of wellness, and the scheme of the detailed characterization and determination isn't considered to be integrated, I've done more exploring, fundamental quantitative and qualitative researches. During my empirical research I used quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The primary aim of them was to establish the large-scale survey and the results contributed to the finalization of the structure of the questionnaire form.

In behalf of the clear revision, I summarized the aims and the related method of the research in a table. (Table 1.)

**Table 1.: The systematic approach to the applied research methodology**

<b>Aims</b>	<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>Methods</b>
(C2)	The attitude of consumers towards wellness is not related to its exact content.	Fundamental research, large volume assessment: descriptive statistics.
(C3)	The preference system of wellness services is influenced by consumer-related socio-demographic criteria.	Fundamental research, large volume assessment: correlations, Chi-square test, analysis of variance
(C3)	The opinions about the South Great Plain Region are influenced by consumer-related socio-demographic criteria.	Fundamental research, large volume assessment: Chi-square test, analysis of variance
(C4)	The opinion about the South Great Plain Region is positive, while negative attitude is not typical among non-residents.	Fundamental research, large volume assessment: descriptive statistics
(C1-C4)	The most important competitors of the South Great Plain Region can be mostly defined by geographic attributes of accessibility	Research 4 interviews with specialists, conventional content analysis
(C1-C4)	The consumer opinions about the South Great Plain Region are not homogeneous, there is no clear image of the region	Fundamental research, large volume assessment: descriptive statistics

Source: own research

The sections of consumer researches are outlined as follows:

### **Fundamental quantitative researches**

**Research No.1: Quantitative survey (2009):** acceptable questionnaire form, not a representative, random sampling; among the respondents there were people who live in Budapest and in Pest – and Békés County; primarily I analysed the consumer opinions with regard to the wellness, and the consideration of choosing wellness services. In the questionnaire, besides personal inquiries, there are questions about the circumstances and characteristics of the wellness programme resort; or questions about the consumers' opinions of the wellness services.

**Research No.2: Quantitative survey (2010):** included 120 people, not a representative, random sampling. During the survey **there was one condition that the respondents must be citizens of Budapest or Pest County**. It was because according to my opinion, it is important to know these inhabitants' opinions about the Southern-Plain region, and learn what they think about that region in regard to the wellness services. Primary aim was to analyse the features of the use of wellness services on samples of Budapest and Pest County, the main characteristics of the consumers' opinions about the Southern-Plain region as a wellness resort.

### **Fundamental qualitative researches**

**Research No.3: Qualitative survey (2010):** The qualitative section of 2010 was determinable, with regard to the whole project, through that I tried to get information about the features of the consumers attitude. By that I could help with the finishing of the large-scale questionnaire and map the motivation of the target participants.

I got the qualitative data by in-depth interviews with the help of a nearly edited interview-sketch. The collecting of data was in April 2010 and I evaluated all together 30 manuscripts by a traditional content-analyse method. Choosing the participants of the interviews I used only one screen-condition: only the over 18-year old were allowed to take part in the research.

In the interview-sketch there are the under mentioned topics:

- Factors that play a role choosing the destination, and the means of holiday.
- Consumer opinions about wellness.
- The point of view of choosing wellness services.
- The characteristics of popular and unpopular wellness services.

The aim of the research is to base the C-2, C-4 goals of the essay, and the preparation of the large-scale survey's conception.

**Research No. 4:** Beyond the reveal of the inhabitants' opinion I took notice of the experts' views to examine the judgement of the region and to summer-up professionally the hidden opportunities. In the last period of the qualitative phase I questioned experts through in-depth-interviews. In my research I asked the managers of active hotels and travel agencies in the Southern-Plain region. I made 15 interviews focused on 9 topics. These topics took up the questions: What changes are there in the demand of the services, and in the number of service industries; who is considered to be potential target, and are there any changes; What are the greatest assets of the region; Who and Why could be any concurrent; In which field could be done any developments; Is strategy plays any role, in regard to wellness?

### **Large-scale survey**

(2011): In the research I dealt with the opinion about the Southern-Plain region as a wellness destination, considering that the main goal of the research is revealing the development opportunities of that area.

The last phase of the research project was the quantitative survey in 2011, in which I analysed the impact of the wellness trend, the system of consumers preference about choosing a wellness service industry, and the view of DAR, as a wellness destination, in terms of how can that branch of business contribute to the development of the Southern-Plain region.

The sampling proceeded by "snowball" method in order to ensure that among the respondents there are some people who live in the region and meanwhile they use the wellness services; and also others who don't live in the region, but they have already used that kind of services. Furthermore, it needed to get some people who aren't inhabitant of that area and have never used and not even intend to use any wellness services there. At the end of the research I got 1052 acceptable questionnaire forms.

During my survey I applied pre-tested questionnaire forms, which issues were partly the same as the topics of earlier fundamental research

In the quantitative research the data input and the statistical treatment at the fundamental research was by the help of SPSS 11.5 programme, the research with thousand people was by SPSS 19.0 and 21.0.

During the results processing of the quantitative research, besides the descriptive statistics I did some two- and multiple variables correlational

researches, with the help of Khi-square-test, factor-, cluster-, variance-analysis. Every time I did the segmentation in the course of K-means cluster process. In each case of processes I did several tests, but during my exposition of my research outcomes I only specify the result of the most professionally explainable and statistically decent segmentation. At the correlations studied by variance-analysis I took notice of the significance and the values of  $-F$ . In the Khi-square- testing in every case I performed the intrinsic coherence-examination of each connection on the basis of the value of the corrected standardized residue (AdjR), defined as follows: Adj.R  $\geq$  2:95% reliability positive diversion compared to the expected value; Adj.R  $\geq$  3:99% reliability positive diversion compared to the expected value. In the case of negative sign with the same value-intervals compared to the expected values, negative diversion. (Sajtos-Mitev 2007)

During the qualitative research I did traditional content parsing, so I recorded the interviews (the interviews of both the target group and the experts)

## 3. RESULTS

### *3.1. Main results of the literature review*

The increasing role of health generated new consumer groups and new target markets. The service providers try to reach these new potential target markets by creating well-positioned elements. Nowadays, the health conscious way of thinking and the way of life is getting a more holistic interpretation. For some consumer groups the healthy lifestyle became a philosophy of life and a way of thinking.

In the 50s, when wellness was known as wellbeing, the definition of WHO in 1948 was a milestone: "health is the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". WHO's definition was first that formulated that the well-being of people is not the same as simply being healthy, having a healthy body, but it also depends on the psychological balance and emotional satisfaction. Recognizing this led to a new approach to healing as well: on one hand the person as a whole cannot be separated from the illness, and on the other hand, the patient also has an important role in the healing process.

The wellness concept was slightly broadened by the 1986 Ottawa Charta. To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment." They concluded that health is not an aim in itself, but it is a tool in the path to the condition of well-being. With this, the responsibility was placed from the doctor to the individual. The afore mentioned facts were a breakthrough in defining the concept of wellness, as it created a whole new approach to the subject.

This had a great impact on the American, Halbert Louis Dunn's works, who created the word 'wellness' by combining the word wellbeing and fitness.

Halbert Louis Dunn laid the basis of the definition of wellness, but many followers developed it further and translated definition, created in "High Level Wellness" into practical language (Berg 2008).

According to the European Union Wellness (EWU), founded in 1990, life is a wellness recipe, which is focused around the individual, and the natural and social environment, and those cannot be separated. So according to the EWU the individuals' comfort or discomfort depends on these effects, so the wellness programs should be available.

The German Wellness Association believes that wellness is a process of achieving a good state of mind, while the factors that help the individual to be

healthy help along the way, so that he can live a healthy happy life. (DWV 2007)

Lanz - Kaufmann (1999) describes wellness as an ongoing and active interaction with a mission - to achieve physical, mental and spiritual health and harmony - in line with social and environmental factors. Defining elements are that the individual is responsible for himself and of the care of his body (fitness), healthy eating, relaxation, mental activity and general behavior.

According to Illing (1999), the wellness is to achieve physical, mental and spiritual well-being with the assistance of elements such as the vitality and relaxation. People, who visit the health centers, may receive these elements. Similarly stated Steinhäuser / Theiner (2004), according to them, the wellness is a philosophy of life, which leads to a complete well-being, and is based on the cooperation of the body, the soul and the spirit.

Greenberg / Dintiman compared the wellness to a wheel, which is composed of five health factors: physical, social, mental, spiritual, and emotional. The balance of the five factors lead to the wellness condition (Lanz - Kaufmann 2002, Berg 2008).

Hertel accepts the known definitions of wellness, but he thought much emphasis should be placed on the common points of the different approaches. This could be the significance of lifestyle and responsibility for our health. (Lanz - Kaufmann, 2002)

Opaschowski recognized that the large fitness wave of the 1980s could be interpreted by the wellness. This also, why he thought that the wellness is physical activity, coupled with relaxation, spiritual and intellectual effort. (Opaschowski 1987).

In Haug's opinion, (German health educator) wellness is a new practical and pragmatic health approach that puts the individual's quality of life at the center. He outlined his own elements of a wellness program: "individual responsibility, fitness, stress-free living, conscious eating and environmental awareness" (Haug 1991, Lanz Kaufmann, 2002).

It is common in the definitions that they emphasize the multi factorial nature of wellness. According to the narrowest interpretation, wellness consists of at least three components: body, soul and spirit; in a broader approach, there could be up to ten elements (Table 2).

**Table 2.: Components of wellness interpretations.**

	Body	Spirit	Soul	Social	Emotional	Self responsibility	Fitness	Healthy nourishment	Environmental awareness	Relaxation
WHO (1948)	X		X	X						
Dunn (1961)	X	X	X							
Hettler (1980)	X	X	X	X	X					
Ottawa Charta (1986)	X		X	X						
Opaschowski (1987)	X	X	X							
Haug (1991)						X	X	X	X	X
Lanz-Kaufmann (1999)	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Illing (1999)	X	X	X				x			X
Greenberg Dintiman (2002)	X	X	X	X	X					
SRI (2010)	X	X	X	X	X				X	

Source: own compilation

In summary, the conceptual approach to the wellness lifestyle features includes:

- Health-conscious thinking,
- Regular exercise,
- Age-appropriate physical condition,
- Healthy nourishment,
- Regular relaxation, stress management,
- Beauty care,
- Proper mental and spiritual state,
- Environmental awareness,
- Ignore bad habits.

## ***3.2. The results of the fundamental researches***

### ***3.2.1. Quantitative research of the consumer behavior about wellness***

The primary goal of my fundamental research in 2009 was to analyse the empathise of wellness idea and the explanation of the conception. Furthermore, I thought that was very important to examine the preferences connected to wellness services and the general characteristics of the wellness holiday habits. The research helped with the elaboration of the next phases, with testing the questionnaire verform of the nationwide large-scale sampling, defining the policy of the research and outlining the assumptions.

In regard to the range of the relevancy about determinable factors of selecting holiday resort, I experienced that no one factor got more than 4.5 average value. And the relatively wide range of values shows that respondents' opinion about the importance of the factors aren't the same. This proved that we can't talk about mature consumer expectation system, which is not surprising since the meaning of the concept hasn't been cleared up yet, even in professional circle.

In the respondents' opinion the quiet area, the possibilities for excursion, having a swimming pool in the hotel, facilities for massage service, sauna and medical attendance are all included among the most important factors (an average  $\geq 4,00$ ).

*These influential factors are mostly assigned to the fitness/sports and the recreation/relaxation factors, from the 4 wellness elements (fitness/sports, balanced diet, recreation/relaxation and intellectual activity), which are emphasised by the foreign literature.*

(Precht, 2006)

*The other two wellness elements weren't preferred among the in-polled: the average value of the intellectual activity (presentation about the healthy lifestyle, cultural opportunities), as well as the balanced diet (organic food, slimming diet facilities) is around 3.00 or below.*

In spite of the immature preference, I considered it to be worth studying which factors are related by the consumers' judgements if it's about choosing a wellness resort; I used factor analysis for the influential factors.

- **F1: experience, indulgence** (sauna, massage, swimming pool, aqua park, alternative treatment opportunities); explicated variance = 10,33%;
- **F2: health consciousness** (slim diet, fitness, organic food, beauty care, presentations about the healthy lifestyle); explicated variance = 9,76%;
- **F3: active, nature lover** (hiking, excursion, cultural opportunities, sports facilities, pet hostel); explicated variance = 9,21%;
- **F4: child-oriented, traditional medicine:** (child-friendly, medical supervision, childminder, pharmacy); explicated variance = 8,31%;

- **F5: long-term recreation:** (two weeks, more than two weeks in negative correlation max. 3 days); explicated variance = 7,351%;
- **F6: leisure and therapy** (hometown, quiet area, spa); explicated variance = 6,62%;
- **F7: travel abroad** (abroad, one week); explicated variance = 6,46%.

In the *experience, indulgence* factor there are the “sauna” and “massage” services, the demand of a “swimming pool” in the hotel, the “aqua park” and the “alternative treatment opportunities”. The second factor is the *health consciousness* that involves factors which are connected to nutrition and intellectual activity, health consciousness and diet elements. In the category of *child-oriented, traditional medicine* besides the medicine there is the “*child-friendly*” atmosphere. In the *long-term recreation* factor there the planned trips for “*two or more weeks*”. But the “*max. 3 days*” is in a negative correlation with the other elements of the factor, which is a logical consequence, and shows well the contradiction among the elements and the opposite sense of connection between the factors. In the *leisure and therapy factor* those influential factors got in which represent the restfulness, the traditional thermal cure and the opportunities of inland travelling. The “*travel abroad*” and the “*one week*” elements together established the factor of travelling abroad. It was an interesting outcome that the “*aqua park, swimming pool, sauna*” were moving together during each factor-testing, which proves that these influential elements are in close touch with the public opinion about choosing a holiday resort.

Apart from the factor number, I’ve noticed a similar intense correlation in the case of “*slimming diet*”, “*fitness*” and “*organic food*”, it refers to the fact that in the mind of wellness tourists the elements related to health consciousness are stuck together.

About the motivation behind the consumption of the wellness recreation for the respondents the most important was the opportunity of recreation and seeking for indulgence. This fact also proves the effect of the trend of individualism on the part of wellness consumers

### ***3.2.2. Fundamental quantitative research about the attitude towards wellness, and its characteristic, referring to the Southern Great Plain Region.***

In 2010 I did some quantitative research again, as the part of a multiphase project. I still focused on the attitude towards wellness, but it became necessary to modify the questionnaire form using the outcomes of the qualitative research. It was completed with a section of the consumers’ opinions about wellness services of the region. It is important to see what the attitude is like in general

towards wellness, and how it appears in connection with the Southern–Plain region. The questionnaire form was filled in by 120 people.

This time the key issue of the analysis was also about how important some certain factors are for the respondents, if it is about choosing the destination of a wellness resort. *The most preferred elements are providing sports facilities, and offering quiet area, thermal spa and aqua park, massage and sauna services.* (Table 3.) It compares to the results of the earlier quantitative and the previous qualitative research, where the most important expressions among the unbidden associations, related to wellness are: sauna, massage, pool, rest.

**Table 3: The importance of factors when choosing a destination (value=average, where 1= not at all important, 5= completely important)**

Factors	2010.		2009.	
	average	standard deviation	average	standard deviation
Being at domestic resort	2,66	1,08	3,24	1,37
Suitable hiking, touring destination,	2,98	0,90	<b>4,06</b>	1,03
Being in a foreign location	1,98	0,90	2,33	1,19
Thermal Spa should be present or nearby	<b>3,07</b>	1,03	3,21	1,27
Water park should be present or nearby	<b>3,07</b>	1,10	3,32	1,31
Cultural programs needed at the resort	2,98	0,87	3,77	1,11
Quiet and peaceful location	<b>3,32</b>	0,81	<b>4,23</b>	0,94
Beauty care services should be available at the resort	2,10	1,04	3,2	1,3
Sport facilities should be available	<b>3,34</b>	0,82	3,94	1,14
Childcare is provided at the hotel	1,73	1,20	3,18	1,52
Sauna is provided	<b>3,10</b>	1,29	<b>4,14</b>	1,1
Masseur service is available at the facility	<b>3,05</b>	0,99	<b>4,05</b>	1,22
Medical services or medical advice is available	<b>2,44</b>	1,07	<b>4,13</b>	1,12
Lectures on healthy living is provided at the hotel	1,93	1,00	2,25	1,21

Source: own research, 2010. N= 120; 2009. N= 195

Since the results of the qualitative research clearly suggested that the choice of wellness services can play a role in the region's assessment, I also considered important to understand the consumers' opinions.

During the quantitative phase I have analyzed separately the assessment of the Southern Great Plain region.

As a result of the primary preference test, the Western Transdanubia region has become the most preferred destination, 50 % of respondents would opt for this region as wellness holiday destination.

As a result of the second order preference test, the Southern Great Plain, Central and Northern Hungary had the same proportion of mentions (44.6 %). Primarily, however, among the preferred alternatives, the Southern Great Plain region and Central Hungary reached the lowest rate (5.2 % and 6.9 %), which means that they are not at all really trendy and popular wellness destinations.

According to respondents, therefore, the Great Plains is not currently a popular and fashionable tourist destination in Hungary. This is probably because of poor communications, inappropriate positioning and the lack of strategic approach to marketing.

### ***3.2.3. Qualitative research of consumer needs for wellness resorts***

In 2010, the fundamental goal of the small sample qualitative research was to bring up information that would help to identify the hypotheses and would build the basis of a quantitative research.

The qualitative research was conducted in the form of individual in-depth interviews, where 30 people were asked about their opinion. This material was evaluated by conventional analysis method.

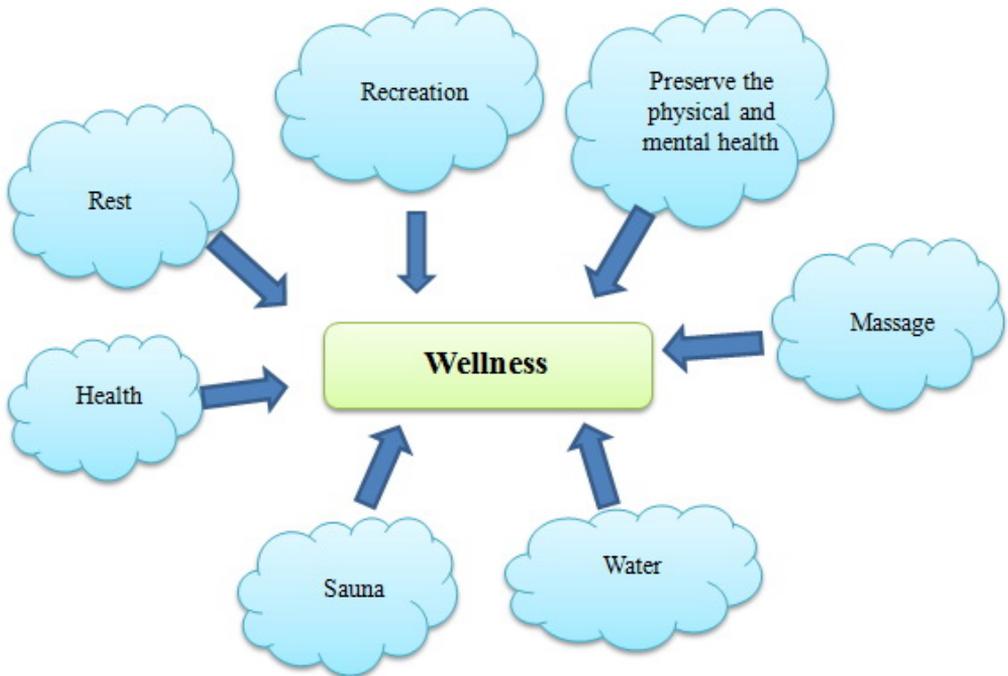
The topics were determined to get information about why the consumers choose certain destinations, what they think the criteria is when they choose wellness services and what they prefer when choosing a provider.

Overall when speaking of choosing destinations, the service quality element and price are the dominant factors, but the resort's reputation or the atmosphere of the city are also highly valued. The interviews also revealed that the structure of the preference system is basically determined by the date of the holiday (winter or summer).

In some part of the research, I have also examined what comes to the mind of the respondents when hearing the word "wellness". The result of the

association test was positive, since no negative words or bad experience were mentioned.

Most often heard terms were "rest", "recreation", "health", "sauna", "water" and "massage". (Figure 1)



**Figure 1. Associations about wellness**  
Source: own compilation

According to the respondents, wellness provides an opportunity "not to pay attention to anything else outside your own convenience".

In addition to the concept of association, I have also analyzed the respondents' opinions whether wellness could be considered as an art of fashion. The participants were united to express the opinion that the younger generation (25-35 years of age) is more of a trend setter than health conscious.

I also separately analyzed the question of what exactly are the service elements of the wellness offerings. After the result of the association test, it was not surprising that almost everyone mentioned the water of different temperatures (hot, thermal) and also the "sauna", "massage". Some also mentioned "fitness programs, Pilates, aqua fitness , tepidarium".

Several people pointed out that as part of the "spa feeling" one must see the region's endowments and the beautiful environment. It should not be in "smoky city center" because of "the importance of a friendly, clean environment".

Based on these results, we can see that the respondents were aware of the true meaning of the word 'wellness' and what services can be considered as part of the wellness experience.

### ***3.2.4. Results of expert in-depth interviews***

In this phase of the research, I have asked for the opinions of experts from the region's hotels and travel agencies, about the potential opportunities, wellness services and consumer perception of the region. I had a total of 15 interviews.

The experts also confirmed my hypothesis that in terms of macro-environmental conditions, the Southern Great Plain region would be suitable as wellness destination.

However, this requires the development of strategic solutions, which would take into account the region's endowments and as a result would help the creation of unique and distinctive characteristic. It would be important to develop a unified strategy, in which the wellness trend opportunities and regional development concepts would be combined.

### ***3.3. Quantitative large-scale research***

In the summer of 2011, as the last phase of the research project I have conducted a survey on a sample of 1052 individual. In the large-scale survey - based on the information and experiences of the first phases of the research - I have analyzed the impact of the wellness trend, the service provider preference, and its relationship to the Southern Great Plain region. This could guide the development opportunities of the region.

According to the results of the large-scale survey, the role of communication channels became determining factor. This supports the fact that we are talking about a service of trust, which is very important in winning customers and also important when choosing the necessary communication strategy.

Based on the results, it seems to me that opinion leaders, who are authentic, and reliable source to consumers could play an important role in the marketing campaign, since it can be seen that social channels are very important during

the decision making process. I am convinced that choosing the right "face" could be the basis of successful communication for wellness providers.

As a result of answers relating to the region's image we can summarize that the respondents would mainly choose Northern Hungary as a wellness destination. Central and Southern Transdanubia are the areas that also appear to be an attractive alternative. However, the Southern Great Plains' judgment was mixed, because about the same number marked the region as preferred than refused as possible wellness holiday destination.

This result confirms the conclusion of previous investigations that have emerged about the region's image, positive and negative opinions equally present, when speaking of the region.

**Table 4.: The opinion about the Southern Great Plain region (1=not at all characteristic, 4=completely characteristic)**

<b>Features</b>	<b>sample average</b>	<b>Average (DAR residents)</b>
Advanced infrastructure	2,36	2,25
Affordable accommodations available	3,42	3,35
Clean, tidy villages	3,07	2,98
<b>Kind, hospitable residents</b>	<b>3,50</b>	<b>3,38</b>
Many entertainment options	2,88	2,78
Vibrant cultural life	2,80	2,72
<b>Advanced health tourism services (thermal bath, spa)</b>	<b>3,53</b>	<b>3,46</b>
<b>High quality wellness hotels</b>	<b>3,93</b>	<b>3,92</b>
<b>Family friendly environment</b>	<b>3,71</b>	<b>3,69</b>
Favorable natural conditions for trekking, hiking	2,93	2,9
Dynamic region	2,64	2,43

Sources: own research, 2011 N=1052, standard deviation 1,70-2,62)

As seen on the fourth table, the main strength of the region are high-quality spa hotels, family friendly environment and friendly local people.

This result is in line with the conclusions of previous research that the Southern Great Plain is a favorable region in several ways such as hotels affordability, family-friendly environment, gentle, hospitable residents.

This time again, it is the infrastructure that seemed to be the weakest link and also the vibrant cultural life is not really typical of the region either.

The statement list for the assessment of wellness, factor analysis was carried out in order to find out what evaluation criteria are connected with another. The results of various factors are in the fifth table.

**Table 5.: A factor analysis of the perception of wellness**

	<b>Factor structure</b>				
	"existence, youth" Factor1	"trendy, status" Factor2	"physical, spiritual harmony" Factor3	"pampering services" Factor4	"social factor" Factor5
too expensive for me	<b>0,809</b>	-0,022	-0,139	0,121	-0,042
privilege of rich	<b>0,791</b>	0,204	-0,085	0,117	0,088
for young people	<b>0,518</b>	0,002	0,217	-0,384	0,061
trendy thing	-0,074	<b>0,861</b>	0,021	0,004	-0,114
status symbol	0,295	<b>0,757</b>	0,018	0,000	0,175
health consciousness	0,029	-0,017	<b>0,828</b>	0,057	0,117
physical and mental health	-0,136	0,052	<b>0,689</b>	0,168	-0,133
thermal water	0,127	-0,149	0,151	<b>0,750</b>	0,141
massage	0,012	0,145	0,118	<b>0,747</b>	-0,153
for family with children	-0,016	0,051	0,247	-0,158	<b>0,771</b>
mainly for older people	0,082	-0,022	-0,254	0,117	<b>0,764</b>

Source: own research, 2011 N=1052

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization, Rotation converged in 13 iterations. KMO= 0,622  
Total variancia: 54,03 %

As in the previous survey, this time also several factors moved together, such as "sauna", "massage", "thermal" service elements. It appears that these factors are closely related in the consumers' value judgment.

The elements of the so-called "social factors" ("families with children typical", "older people being taken advantage") were also together moving factors, but

depending on factor numbers they were also integrated into the sports facilities, beauty services. This indicates that they are not absolutely a separate service circle, but more like additional service elements. They are similar to the characteristic of the "pampering" factor.

The "trendy status" factor clearly shows - in line with the result of the spontaneous association test - that there are some, who thinks spa is still a symbol of status, or privileged service for some people and it is more like fashion rather than philosophy.

The "physical, spiritual harmony" was organized into a separate group and this indicates that some respondents understand the central, essential values of these dimensions of wellness services. Only 10 percent of the respondents had negative attitude about the region and about 7.2 percent refused the wellness services.

I examined what could be the reason that the respondent does not intend to make use of wellness services in the region. It is also important to know the reasons for any negative attitude, as it can help to choose the appropriate communication message. It is important to know whether they have negative attitude because of the region itself or rather the service does not meet their expectations.

### ***3.3.1. Characterization and forming of market segments based on the opinions of wellness services of the Southern Great Plain region.***

During the analysis, I have split the sample according to who and what attitude has towards the region's wellness services. To split the sample I used the answers of the relating questions. Only one of the four alternatives could be selected by the respondents, which helped me to categorize the answers into four groups.

The question was specifically directed to what activity (conative) and what emotional (affective) characteristics and what knowledge (cognitive) the consumer has. This made possible to split the sample on the basis of attitude towards the Southern Great Plain region into the following four categories:

- ***Convinced***
- ***Opened***
- ***Avoiding the Southern Great Plain region***
- ***Rejecting wellness***

Those members of the sample who had already enjoyed the wellness services of the Southern Great Plain region and would be happy to return became the segment of "**Convinced**".

It is important to retain these people and to encourage them to buy more services. This could be the goal of the regional marketing program, which focus on them.

The "**Opened**" group were those who had not yet taken advantage of the region's wellness services, but would like to make this in the future. They are considered from the tourism marketing point of view, one of the potential target groups.

Those respondents who have not even used the wellness services of the Southern Great Plain region, and would not be willing to do this, make up the group "**Avoiding the Southern Great Plain region**". In their case, the most important marketing goal may be to popularize the region, by emphasizing the benefits.

Those respondents, who would not take any wellness services, form the "**Rejecting wellness**" segment. In their case, it is not negative attitude against the region that results in the absence from the service providers. They are against the wellness trend and philosophy itself.

For this segment a positive image building marketing campaign is not enough, they would need to change the way of thinking, which I think is beyond the scope of a regional marketing strategy.

Overall, it can be declared that those who reject wellness in general have the best attitude for the region, similarly to the "**Opened**" segment. Surprisingly the "**Convinced**" were those, who evaluated the least positively the region. It seems that the fact that they are satisfied with the wellness services and would return back happily is not explained by the endowments of the region, but with different factors, presumably related to the wellness service.

This is confirmed by the result, which shows that the members of the "**Opened**" segment are more pleased with to service factors (quality, price level, staff), than with the region's endowments (cultural programs, entertainment). See Table 6.

**Table 6.: Opinion about the region (average, 1= not at all characteristic)**

	Convinced (count nr.: 323)	Opened (count nr.: 495)	Avoiding the Southern Great Plain region (count nr.: 121)	Rejecting wellness (count nr.: 121)	Sample (count nr.: 1052)
advanced infrastructure	2,2	2,55	2,08	2,43	2,37
Cheap hotels	3,16	3,48	3,57	4	3,42
clean villages	2,9	<b>3,3</b>	2,82	3	3,09
friendly residents	3,36	3,69	3,2	3,44	3,51
lots of activities	2,7	3,07	2,67	3,06	2,9
vibrant cultural life	2,55	2,97	2,91	2,91	2,82
advanced health tourism	3,43	<b>3,64</b>	3,09	<b>4,08</b>	3,54
advanced wellness hotels	3,62	<b>4,19</b>	3,32	<b>4,75</b>	3,93
family friendly	3,46	<b>3,89</b>	3,55	<b>4,1</b>	3,72
favorable natural conditions	2,81	3,09	2,41	3,29	2,93
dynamic regions	2,36	<b>2,98</b>	2,22	2,65	2,66

Source: own research, 2011 N=1052

The service selection preference system is differentially analyzed by segment. In this case there was some evaluation criteria for which based on the significance values, statistically verifiable differences were found between the groups. There were differences in the services which are mainly related to wellness (massage, sauna, beauty services): these were evaluated as the least important by the **"Rejecting wellness"** segment and more important by the **"Convinced"** and **"Opened"**.

I found it interesting, that when using wellness services, the criteria of relaxed surroundings was the least important factor for the **"Avoiding the Southern Great Plain region"** segment.

In my opinion, the results show that instead of the descriptive variables it is better to use segmentation technique. This means that firstly, I would suggest concentrating on local residents who could provide a stable demand for the suppliers, which is easier and more directly available. Therefore when developing the service or designing the communication elements or setting the price, it would be advisable to focus on their needs first, especially by offering them affordable and accessible solutions. In addition to that as the secondary target group, it would be wise to focus on foreign guests and visitors from other regions, for whom the local people would be some kind of reference group, since people like to travel to places where the local residents feel also good.

### ***3.4. New scientific results***

#### **T1. The comparative analysis of theoretical models, in relation to the definition of wellness.**

Based on the literature, I have explored the common points of the wellness models and completed other relevant aspects. The theoretical overview of the topic guaranteed that the primary research would be based on solid concept, and that the research objectives are relevant. In my thesis I have presented different approaches to wellness concepts and a summary of the analysis. I also revealed that in the majority of the models, a common group of factors can be found; therefore quite a few special features could be added to a service in the region.

**T2. The examination of consumer opinion about wellness.** Based on the results of the primary research, I came to the conclusion that wellness services can play an important role in the development of a region. Given that there are several consumer opinions about a healthy lifestyle, health awareness, wellness concept, therefore I examined how these specific features can be characterized. I also analyzed how consumers feel about the spa services in general, to understand the concept of all the areas. Despite the immature preferences, by using factor analysis, I managed to identify which factors are included in the consumers' value judgment when selecting a wellness resort. These factors were as follows: adventure, pampering, active lifestyle (environment-friendly), child-centered, long rest, comfort and healing, travel abroad.

#### **T3. The examination of wellness as a tool to regional development.**

Based on the research results it can be declared that the main strength of the region are the high-quality wellness hotels, family friendly environment and welcoming residents, but the region's judgment - in comparison to its competitors - is dissonant, since almost the same number has chosen the region as preferred holiday resort than rejected.

Looking at the service selection criteria, the following factors were named: family-friendly, pampering services, communication factors, activity, adventure, comfort.

**T4. The development of consumer segments, that are either like or dislike the health tourism services of the Southern Great Plain region.**

The segmentation was based on the emotional (affective), cognitive and conative components of attitude towards the South Great Plains' wellness services. In this context, the definition and analysis of well-separated segments were based on consumer opinions and attitudes. These segments were as follows: unconvinced, opened toward the Southern Great Plain region, rejecting wellness.

Consumer attitudes can give a good basis to determine the regional development strategy and the marketing tools. These segments can be treated according to their attitudes toward the region and its facilities.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1. Key findings

The key findings of the study are presented on the basis of hypotheses (Table 7). Regarding the main hypotheses I had two basic assumptions. In this regard, I separated hypotheses related to the wellness and the region. The first (H1) was accepted as the first phases of the research results truly show that there are interest in wellness services and it will likely increase as well. A further question is where, on what level and for how much will the consumers find them acceptable. The second main hypotheses (H2) could be accepted only partially, because it cannot be stated unequivocally that the Southern Great Plain region would be entirely positive regarding consumer perception. In this area one can improve more.

**Table 7.: Testing of hypothesis**

<b>Research hypothesis</b>		
<b>H1</b>	<b>Wellness tourism is a popular type of tourism and contributes to preserving health.</b>	Accepted
H11	Consumers' opinion about wellness is not equal to its true meaning.	Accepted
H12	The primary motivation when enjoying wellness services is relaxation.	Accepted
H13	Wellness and health preservation are linked in the consumers' mind.	Accepted
H14	The wellness experience is identified with water.	Accepted
H15	The preference of wellness service selection is affected by socio-demographic characteristics.	Partially refused
<b>H2</b>	<b>The overall assessment of the Southern Great Plain region is positive. Negative attitudes of visitors are not typical of the region.</b>	Partially accepted
H21	The perception of the region is affected by the socio-demographic characteristics of the consumers.	Refused
H22	The refusal to travel to the region is due to the lack of good infrastructure.	Refused
H23	The consumer perception of the region is not clear. There is no clear image of the region.	Accepted
H24	The main competitors of the region can be determined on territorial basis, in terms of geographical approach.	Accepted

Source: own compilation

As shown in the research the concept of wellness is clear to the consumers, they know what to expect from wellness, but it turned out that the main motivation is mainly relaxation. It is the factor that determines the choice of provider and the nature of the holiday. (H12 accepted)

In this case, however, it is likely that the spa experience is not what they look for primarily, but also for recreation and relaxation experience that is hard to imagine for them without thermal water. (H14 confirmed, accepted)

Consumers however, also understand well that the wellness is about relaxation and regeneration in order to preserve health. (H13 accepted) Their consumption will be suited to meet the needs of the above.

From my questions on determination of the region it is shown definitely that the region is a popular destination from the tourism point of view, but not sure that would be the primary choice for many reasons (H2).

It also became clear during the research that there is still room for development in wellness opportunities for the region, according to the consumers (H23 accepted). There are attracting factors, but the spa and wellness hotels are not one of them, the target audience stated.

It is worth noting that the region is known for the favorable level of prices, which can definitely be exploited for competitive advantage.

Based on these results, it appears that the socio-demographic characteristics typically do not affect the Southern Great Plain region's attractiveness in terms of wellness destination image (H21 rejected).

Age was the only factor that had relation to the results. This segmentation criterion can be applied in the development of differentiated marketing strategy for the region. (H15 partially rejected)

The research showed that wellness content is well understood by consumers and could be added to the image of the region. (H11 accepted). They also found, however, that water leads the order of preference, which means they only enjoy wellness services when some type of water is involved in the experience. (H14 accepted)

Although accessibility is not negligible in terms of tourism, but my research clearly indicates that it is not the most important factor when choosing the destination. The cultural programs, busy nightlife or great service prices are considered to be more important. (H22)

Altogether the region is considered to be a popular destination, but there is strong competition so the relevant hypothesis (H2) is partly accepted. The competitors are identified on a regional basis by the consumers. (H24 accepted)

The research has also revealed that a clearly identifiable uniform image is not present in the consumer's mind about the region. This may be the target of a marketing strategy. (H23 accepted)

#### ***4.2 Recommendations and practical applicability***

My research has shown an increased interest in the last decade about the spa services. More and more wellness facilities have been built and this plays a big role and tends to bring awareness to this form of recreation. Even though many of the consumers state they have positive attitude towards wellness, we still cannot speak about a great deal of people arriving to the region just to enjoy wellness services.

Despite the favorable trends one need to rethink the understanding of the spa services and the tasks again. My suggestions are primarily valid on the particular field of research, but because of their nature they can also be generally useful elsewhere.

**J1.** In my analysis - as well as in my previous research phases - I come to the conclusion that there are a lot of myths and the negative association regarding the term wellness. Many think that these are only fashionable or trendy. While others think, wellness is specifically for the elderly, or it is a program for families with children.

Since wellness can only contribute to the development of a city or region when it is clearly defined and it is understood by the consumers, it becomes important to point these out in the communication messages. People need to be aware that the wellness is not for the elderly and for people with children, so special attention should be paid to addressing the young target audience.

**J2.** Speaking of the consumer perception of the Southern Great Plain, it turned out in my research that the main advantages of the region are the great value for money of the wellness services and accommodations, family-friendly environment and the hospitality of the people in the region. Therefore, the marketing communication strategy should be geared towards these USP's (hospitable residents, cheaper accommodations and wellness services, family-friendly environment). It is a competitive advantage in comparison with other regions.

**J3.** Although looking at the South Great Plain Region, the advanced wellness tourism is not necessarily typical in the neighboring countries - Croatia, Romania, Serbia - so it is important to communicate to those markets that the facilities would meet their level of expectations and can even compete with

western competitors as well. My research confirms this: the domestic level of wellness is on almost the identical level than the foreign competitors'.

**J4.** The majority of the region's wellness service users (86 %) said that they would be happy to come back, but the utilization of these establishments is still quite low for a variety of reasons.

This suggests that most of the tourists realize the benefits and positive characteristic only when arriving to the destination. Therefore, it is important to rebuild the image of certain service provider and the renewal of their marketing tools.

**J5.** The marketing campaign to promote certain facilities such as bath or wellness hotels can be effective for them, but show weak results for the city or the region. Therefore, to improve the overall image of the particular region a coordinated marketing activity needed with the involvement of the service providers and the local government.

**J6.** The Southern Great Plain region is known for its spa services, cultural and unique culinary offerings, despite of this the perception of the region is not uniformly positive. There are many stereotype (fish soup, peppers, sausage, etc), and the cities compete with each other for the guests. For the development it is essential to harmonize the interests of the destinations, to create a unified image and to develop a regional marketing strategy.

**J7.** According to my hypothesis - which is confirmed by the experts' interviews - the Southern Great Plain region, especially Békés and Csongrád County, would make a good wellness destination in terms of macro-environmental conditions. In the region of low employment and high emigration, one chance for survival may be the creation of an attractive wellness destination. It is important to develop this even on hypothetical basis.

**J8.** The majority of the respondents in the research mentioned the region's infrastructure as a negative factor, especially in relation to Békés county. Therefore, steps should be taken to build the high way to the capitol city.

### ***4.3 Future directions of the research***

I can see from the analysis of wellness and the region that research can be continued and expanded. It would definitely be worth to extend the research to foreign consumers, such as Croatian, German, Romanian, Serbian tourists, since the largest numbers of foreign tourists are coming from there. It would be important to research how they feel about the South Great Plain region and its

wellness services. It would be worthwhile to examine what factors are identified in the region, and what influences their decisions. As a result of that the foreign communication strategy could be analyzed and changed if necessary.

Based on the methodology developed, the research could be narrowed to a county level as a future step. The region's three counties have different features and are at different levels of development, especially in terms of infrastructure. It would be useful to know what the potential customers think about each county. Based on this information a county level strategy could be defined.

Future directions of the research could be the analysis of further branches of health tourism. For example the analysis of the medical wellness services might be a remarkable way, because of its growing importance and close relationship with the wellness.

It could also be researched how the wellness tourism and its services can be extended with active elements. What services consumer demand. What else the region can offer, such as horse riding, cycling, bicycle tours. So I think this topic would be eligible for further research, while it would help defining further development directions of the region.

## 5. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PUBLICATIONS OF THE AUTHOR

### Scientific articles

#### *Scientific articles published in foreign language*

1. **Zoltán Árpási:** Attendance of thermal baths in the South Great Plain Region and its affect to the surrounding countries, *Studia Universitatis „Vasile Goldis” Arad, Seria Stiinte Economice, Partea I*, 228-234. p., 2007, ISSN 158-2339
2. **Zoltán Árpási - Ágnes Horváth - Mónika Fodor - Krisztina Árpási:** Judgement of wellness tourism services in the south great plain region and in the competitor regions. *Regional and Business Studies (2011) Vol 3 No 1-2*. Kaposvár University, Faculty of Economic Science, Kaposvár. ISSN 2061-2311. 33-45. p. (megjelent 2013.09.)
3. **Zoltán Árpási:** The Connection of the Consumer Needs in the Health Tourism Sector to Educational Programs, *Practice and Theory in Systems of Education, Pedagogical Journal of Association of Educational Sciences, Volume 6, Number 1*, p.91-99, 2011, ISSN 1788-2583

#### *Scientific articles published in Hungarian language*

**Árpási Zoltán:** Wellness turizmus lehetőségei a dél-alföldi régióban, *Területi Statisztika*, 2014, Megjelenés folyamatban

### Lectures at scientific conferences published in conference publications

#### In foreign languages

1. **Zoltán Árpási:** The opportunities of the South Great plain region in term of tourism, health- and wellness services. 6th International Conference of Phd Students, Miskolc, 2. kötet 13-17.p. 2007. ISBN 978-963-661-778-3
2. **Zoltán Árpási:** Education and medical tourism in Hungary, 1<sup>st</sup> International conference for theory and practice in education, Fürstenfeld, 13p. 2008, ISBN 978-963-06-5072-4
3. **Ágnes Horváth - Zoltán Árpási:** Characteristics of Southern Great Plain region's development in the concern of health tourism services, 2<sup>nd</sup> International Economic Conference, Kaposvár, 693-699p. 2009, ISBN 978-963-9821-08-8

4. **Zoltán Árpási:** Wellnessbildung in Ungarn, 2<sup>nd</sup> International conference for theory and practice in education, Budapest, 58p. 2009. ISBN 978-963-88422-0-6
5. **Zoltán Árpási:** Trends of the health tourism sector in the South Great Plain Region, Scientia Iuventa International Scientific Conference, Banská Bystrica, 3-9p., 2009, ISBN 978-80-8083-793-8

### **In Hungarian**

1. **Árpási Zoltán:** A dél-alföldi régió versenyképessége az egészségturizmus szempontjából, XI. Nemzetközi Tudományos Napok, Gyöngyös, 2008, 357-362.p, 2008. ISBN 978-963-87831-2-7
2. **Árpási Zoltán.:** Az egészségtudatosság trendjei az egészségturizmusban, VI. Alföldi Tudományos Tájgazdálkodási Napok, Mezőtúr, 46-50p 2008. ISBN 978-963-87874-2-2
3. **Árpási Zoltán:** Az egészségtudatos nevelés és a wellness képzés lehetőségei, Tanulás, Tanítás, Munkaerőpiac konferencia, Békéscsaba, 13-18p. 2009, ISBN 978-963-06-6485-1
4. **Horváth Ágnes - Árpási Zoltán:** Egészségturisztikai kínálatra ható fogyasztói igények a dél-alföldi régióban, International conference on tourism and sports management, Debrecen, 2010, ISBN 978-963-473-378
5. **Árpási Zoltán - Fodor Mónika - Horváth Ágnes.:** Wellness és egészségturisztikai szolgáltatások fogyasztói motivációi egy primer kutatás eredményeinek tükrében, MEB 2010 - 8th International Conference on Management, Enterprise and Benchmarking, Budapest , 2010. Óbudai Egyetem Keleti Károly Kar, Budapest, 335-347.p. ISBN 978-615-5018-01
6. **Árpási Zoltán:** A Dél-alföldi régió imázsának elemzése: fejlesztési lehetőségek a régióban a wellness-turisztikai szolgáltatások piacán, MOK 2011 Felelős Marketing konferencia, Pécs, 138.p. 2011, ISBN 978-963-642-391-9

### **Other scientific articles:**

1. **Árpási Zoltán.:** Wellness modellek Amerikában, Körös Tanulmányok, Békéscsaba, 71-78p., 2012. ISSN 1589-908-X
2. **Árpási Zoltán - Árpási Krisztina:**
3. A dél-alföldi régió turisztikai helyzete a versenytárs régiók vonatkozásában.. Perspective - Kitekintés tudományos és kulturális folyóirat, 19-23p., 2012, ISSN 1454-9921
4. **Zoltán Árpási:** Trends in the hotellerie, with focus on the medical and wellness hotels, Perspective - Kitekintés tudományos és kulturális folyóirat, 74-77p., 2009, ISSN 1454-9921

5. **Árpási Zoltán.**: A wellness turista, mint fogyasztó, magatartásbeli sajátosságainak bemutatása, Körös Tanulmányok, Békéscsaba, 98-108p., 2008. ISSN 1589-908-X
6. **Árpási Zoltán.**, Bagossy Renáta.: Emberi erőforrás fejlesztés az egészségturizmusban, Perspective - Kitekintés tudományos és kulturális folyóirat, 116-119p., 2008, ISSN 1454-9921  
**Árpási Zoltán.**: The possibilities of the south great plain region in terms of the development of a health conscious lifestyle, Perspective - Kitekintés tudományos és kulturális folyóirat, 115-120p., 2007, ISSN 1454-9921

### **Participation in other research topics**

**2012:** Egészségügyi turizmus: Románia - Magyarország - kutatási, oktatási projekt a román turisztikai minisztérium szervezésében, résztvevő partner: Dél-alföldi termálkaszter, Dél-alföldi Gyógy- és Termálfürdők közhasznú egyesülete. Témavezető: Dr. Albel Andor