Development Prospects for Enotherapy-Based Health Tourism in Azerbaijan

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Abstract

This study assesses the development prospects of health tourism based on enotherapy in Azerbaijan. The relevant research was conducted based on Azerbaijan's viticulture and winemaking traditions, climate diversity, and spa and sanatorium infrastructure. The study used official tourism literature, international experiences on the subject, academic sources, and existing market indicators. According to the research, enotherapy in Azerbaijan can be combined with the existing enotherapy infrastructure, health tourism, and spa activities and developed as a new niche tourism product as a special interest tourism and presented to the market. We can include Ganja-Gazakh, Shamakhi-Absheron, Gabala, Naftalan, Lankaran, Nakhchivan, and Sharqi-Zangezur in the list of Azerbaijani regions that are promising for this area. Despite the existing potential, it is important to consider certain limitations and gaps for the formation of such a tourism product in Azerbaijan. The existing limitations include the weakness of health tourism as a brand, lack of specialized personnel, a legal framework in the relevant field, lack of standards, and incomplete preparation of sanitary and health mechanisms. According to the results of the conducted research, through proper planning and marketing policy, investment, and personnel training, enotherapy can lead to a competitive advantage in the health tourism market of Azerbaijan. The development of such a type of tourism can create a source of income in the regions and give impetus to the development of the non-oil sector. Such an approach can contribute to the transformation of Azerbaijani health tourism into a brand on a global scale.

Keywords: enotheraphy, wellness tourism, wine tourism, Azerbaijan.

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1. Introduction

Enotherapy, or wine therapy, has a history spanning millennia. Even Plato compared wine to milk for elderly people, while the French claim that wine cures everything except alcoholism. The Babylonians, in the 6th century BCE, recognized the medicinal properties of wine, and ancient physicians used it as a primary means of restoring vitality. Wine contains components that help the body combat harmful environmental influences such as polluted air, stress, and cigarette smoke (Beldycka-Borawska & Zuchowski 2025). From ancient Greece and Rome through the Middle Ages, people used wine for everything. It killed bacteria in drinking water, acted as a digestive aid, cleaned wounds, relieved pain, and cured lethargy (Guilford & Pezzuto 2011).

Wine tourism, as a dynamically growing segment of tourism, combines the theme of wine with recreation, offering tourists unique experiences. Among the various forms of activity in this field emerges the concept of

“enorecreation” (wine-based recreation), which, despite growing interest, remains under-researched”. Enorecreation” integrates recreational activities related to wine in both tourism and everyday leisure, forming a key element of wine tourism offerings (Sidorkiewicz 2024).

Health tourism, which has been developing rapidly in the world market in recent years, is not only about relaxation, but also about physical and psychological recovery, stress reduction through natural healing resources and experiences. In addition to their economic importance, the therapeutic benefits of wine and winemaking products are also known. Since the acidity of grape juice is close to the acidity of gastric juice, grape wines are promising in wine therapy – enotherapy (President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2018). Today, the development of wine tourism in the world is a priority and a profitable direction of the tourism market (Santos et al. 2022).

These are the main reasons why this type of tourism is relevant. Services such as enotherapy and spa are presented to the market as a niche category that creates higher added value, differentiating it from traditional tourism services. Enotherapy includes grapes, grape skin, oil, and wine-based spa and health activities. Relevant health activities include wine baths, massages with grape seed oil, grape skin scrubs, facial care, and otherhealth-oriented adjacentservicepackages (Smith & Puczkó 2014).

On a global scale, in countries engaged in these activities - France, Italy, Georgia, and Turkey - enotourism, spa, and health centers are being developed together. The factors that create the existing potential for the formation of enotherapy-based health tourism in Azerbaijan include natural and cultural resources, ancient viticulture and winemaking traditions, mineral springs, climate diversity, and the existing spa-sanatorium infrastructure. However, despite the existing resources that create this potential, enotherapy in Azerbaijan has not yet been fully formed as a health tourism product. It has serious development opportunities for Azerbaijan in terms of preparing enotherapy packages, combining viticulture and spa activities. Although the regions of Azerbaijan - Naftalan, Sheki, Gabala, Nakhchivan, etc. - are potential destinations in terms of health tourism, enotherapy has not yet been fully developed in the country systematically. The lack of standards and legal norms in the relevant field remains the main obstacle to the development of this field. Along with these obstacles, the lack of integration of enotherapy into spa services, weak marketing at the local and global levels, and the lack of necessary personnel for this activity seriously slow down the development and full formation of enotherapy. The purpose of this study is to analyze the development prospects of health tourism based on enotherapy in Azerbaijan, to evaluate the resources of Azerbaijan, and to clarify the opportunities and limitations in the relevant field. The main research question is: How can Azerbaijan's winemaking traditions, therapeutic resources, and tourism infrastructure be transformed into the formation of enotherapy-based health tourism in the country and its introduction to the market as a tourism product? The results of the study are based on the development of enotherapy as a niche tourism direction in the country through the coalition of winemaking, spa, health, and regional tourism in Azerbaijan.

2. Methodology

In contemporary times, health is becoming a relevant issue, from the perspective of understanding it through the lens of quality of life and not merely the absence of disease (Manosso et al. 2016). The aim of this qualitative study is to analyze the existing potential of enotherapy-based health tourism in Azerbaijan and to examine the development opportunities of a tourism product that can be marketed in the future by clarifying the limitations that hinder the realization of this potential. The sources used in conducting the study include international spa experiences, academic resources, public internet resources, tourism literature, and current market indicators. The main points evaluated in the study are climate diversity, spa-sanatorium infrastructure, viticulture and winemaking traditions. The study was conducted in 2 stages. In the first stage, the concepts of enotherapy and vinotherapy were explained, and the role of grape polyphenols, grape skin extract, grape seed oil, grape-based massage, and spa activities in health tourism were clarified. The antioxidant effect of polyphenols from wines and grape seed extracts recommends the vine as one of the most important plants used in prevention and medical treatment (Nicolescu 2012). In the second stage, regions and destinations of Azerbaijan with natural resources suitable for enotherapy-based health tourism were identified. Regions such as Shamakhi-Absheron, Ganja-Gazakh, Gabala, Naftalan, Lankaran, Nakhchivan and Karabakh-Eastern Zangezur were reflected in the study for this reason. In parallel, the possibility of developing a relevant tourism product was evaluated at the legal and normative level. The goal at this stage was to discuss under what legal conditions the development of enotherapy within health tourism is possible. In this context, the current

legislation on healthcare, tourism, use of alcoholic beverages, licenses, and certifications in the country was considered. When assessing demand and market opportunities, the study considered domestic tourists, CIS countries, neighboring countries, tourists traveling from the Middle East, and European countries who may be suitable for the potential market segment of enotherapy-based health tourism. In parallel, European experiences in the relevant field were also considered in terms of comparative evaluation of health tourism and enotourism in Azerbaijan. In terms of developing enotherapy-based health tourism as a competitive tourism product in Azerbaijan, it is useful to study development scenarios, the competitive environment, and business models. This study also evaluated wellness resorts, spas, wine tours, medical recovery packages, and tourism products suitable for the relevant field. In parallel, structural financing, investment, marketing channels, and possible promising cooperation opportunities for the formation of development were evaluated. The "SWOT" and "PESTEL" models were used as analysis models in the study. The "SWOT" model considered the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and potential threats of enotherapy-based health tourism. The analysis conducted in the "PESTEL" model assessed the potential impacts of political, economic, sociological, technological, environmental, and legal issues on this area.

3. The concept of enotherapy

Enotherapy is a health activity that stems from the use of grape-derived products in health, recovery, and spa procedures. This concept is not limited to the consumption of wine as a drink, but also the use of various components of grapes - grape skin extract, grape seed oil, grape polyphenols, grape juice - for health and recovery purposes. Enotherapy services include wine baths, skin care, facial treatments, and massages with grape seed oil. Vine spas very often have a restaurant and wine bar with a sommelier, and they serve wines with extreme attention to consuming responsibly and in moderation, in a convivial environment and in the context of a Mediterranean diet as an element of a healthy lifestyle, also with kids (Berry 2019; Giacosa et al. 2016; Hrelia et al. 2022; Ogórka 2024; Santos-Buelga et al. 2021). The "French paradox" proves that the French suffer from 40% fewer heart attacks than the Americans, consuming 30% more fat, which is due to diet, including regular modest amounts of wine (Rutkowska-Podolowska et al. 2015).

The aim of the enotherapy health package, which reflects such services, is to reduce stress, take care of the skin, and restore the body. Enotherapy is a type of tourism that combines various alternative types of tourism - wine tourism, health tourism, spa tourism and gastronomic tourism - and brings a new and equally diverse tourism product to the tourism market. Because a tourist who receives enotherapy services can simultaneously visit vineyards, get acquainted with the winemaking processes, see local culture, and taste viticulture and winemaking products. The most typical clients of vine spas are women around 30- 50 years old. Most often is a three-step sequence of mostly hour-and-a-half treatments designed to cleanse the skin with exfoliation, improve microcirculation, relax muscles, and apply polyphenols (Ogórka 2024). In this way, Enotherapy, which reflects various services, can provide tourists visiting the destination with a special tourism experience. The basis of the enotherapy tourism model that can be developed against the background of Azerbaijan is the country's historical ancient viticulture and winemaking traditions, mineral springs, various climate types, and spa-sanatorium infrastructure. Based on these reasons, enotherapy can be studied in Azerbaijan as a niche tourism type with development potential, combining enotherapy, gastronomic and health tourism. Enotherapy should not be seen as a field of medicine but rather should be presented to the tourism market as a type of tourism that reflects wellness and recovery services. To develop this field in Azerbaijan, specialized personnel training in relevant activities, sanitary standards, legal regulations, and strong marketing activities are needed. However, the lack of standards specifically related to enotherapy activities in Azerbaijan causes serious gaps in the regulation of this field. Thus, enotherapy is a health service that can increase the competitiveness of health tourism by using grape and wine components within spa and health tourism. Considering the natural resources and ancient viticulture and winemaking traditions of Azerbaijan, this area can have a positive impact on the attractiveness and competitiveness of health tourism in the country.

4. Results

According to the results of the study, there are significant opportunities for enotherapy and the services included in this field to be accessible to tourists as a tourism product in Azerbaijan. Enotherapy, or wine therapy, is promising and little studied. Enotherapy involves studying the healing properties of wines. As part of modern cosmetics, grapeseed oil, grape extracts, as well as natural red wine are actively used (Lebedynets

et al. 2019). From the vine comes a whole range of cosmetics such as scrubs, creams, and masks, like a prolongation of skin treatments. Also, its concentrated polyphenols (proanthocyanidins, resveratrol, viniferin) is used in treatments, although not every spa can boast its own production of them (Manosso et al. 2016).

Azerbaijan's rich natural resources, ancient viticulture and winemaking traditions, tourism infrastructure, climate diversity, and spa and sanatorium infrastructure create conditions for the formation of enotherapy as a tourism product within health tourism. Despite the listed opportunities, since this field is a new and different niche tourism direction in Azerbaijan, the transformation of existing resources into enotherapy-based health tourism has not yet been fully developed. According to the research conducted, enotherapy is not limited to spa-sanatorium services, but also acts as a bridge between wine tourism, health tourism, gastronomic tourism, and regional tourism. The main elements of enotherapy include wine baths, the use of grape seed oil in massage procedures, the preparation of scrubs based on grape skin, and facial and skin care procedures. Natural red wine is the richest source of antioxidants, resveratrol, flavonoids, tannins, polyphenols, organic acids, vitamins, among which are ascorbic acid, vitamin P, and vitamins of group B. Red wine also contains iron and other essential microelements (Lebedynets et al. 2019). Enotherapy can become a part of health tourism in Azerbaijan, increasing the attractiveness of health tourism and the competitiveness of the tourism product it offers to the tourism market.

The majority of the vine spas in the world draw raw materials from the vineyard, both for cosmetic treatments and for dishes in their restaurants (Ogórka 2014). There are regions in Azerbaijan rich in natural resources and tourism infrastructure for the formation and development of enotherapy into a competitive tourism product. These promising directions mainly include Shamakhi-Absheron, Ganja-Gazakh, Gabala, Naftalan, Lankaran, Nakhchivan and Karabakh-Eastern Zangezur. The level of compatibility of these regions is due to the viticulture and winemaking traditions of these regions, tourism infrastructure, and spa-sanatoriums located and operating in the relevant directions. Of the listed regions, especially Gabala and Naftalan can be recorded as promising directions in terms of the formation and development of enotherapy-based health tourism at the initial testing stage. Based on the analysis of market demand, the study concluded that enotherapy products may be of interest to both local and global tourists. Local tourists are mainly interested in more affordable recreation and spa packages; tourists from the CIS countries are interested in treatment, recovery, and recreation services; and tourists from European countries may also be interested in high-level health and enotherapy services. As for the seasonal nature of enotherapy, this tourism product can act against the backdrop of a year-round tourism product, encompassing grape harvesting and processing in the fall, resort services in mountainous regions in the winter, and spa-sanatorium services in the summer. Competitive analysis conducted based on the activities of competitors operating with enotherapy-based health tourism in international tourism markets shows that Georgia and Turkey, neighboring countries of Azerbaijan, as well as European countries, have experience in this field. Turkey also includes thermal and spa tourism within health tourism; the use of wines in spa services in Georgia, and various enotherapy brands in the form of enotherapy are already branded in European countries and are operating in the tourism markets. Such a situation creates conditions for Azerbaijan to gain pressure from strong and entrenched competitors in the health tourism market, as well as to obtain consistent knowledge and experiences that can be learned from them. The advantage that Azerbaijan has in such a situation is associated with its natural resources - mineral springs, climate diversity, mud volcanoes, and Naftalan. Azerbaijan can enter the health tourism market by combining its viticulture and winemaking traditions and enotherapy with the relevant listed resources, creating a consistent and competitive tourism product. The conducted research also revealed the existence of restrictions that are obstacles to the formation and development of enotherapy in Azerbaijan. These restrictions include the lack of legal standards for enotherapy in Azerbaijan, the lack of specialized spa and wellness personnel, weak interest in investing in this area, and the weakness of the health tourism brand in the country. In general, the analysis of the research results leads to the conclusion that enotherapy-based health tourism in Azerbaijan should be formed not as a spa activity, but as a tourism product combining viticulture and winemaking, therapeutic resources, regional tourism, and branding. For the relevant direction to be successful, several activities should be carried out, including public and private sector cooperation, training of qualified personnel, initial pilot projects, establishment of legal standards, marketing and promotion at the international level.

5. Conclusion and Implications

According to the research, enotherapy in Azerbaijan is a promising area in terms of diversifying health tourism, increasing service diversity and competitiveness. Although enotherapy itself directly includes spa and recovery procedures, this activity can be included as an additional health and recovery service in Azerbaijan's health tourism. Azerbaijan's natural resources, sanatoriums, hotels with spa and health services, and wine tourism destinations play a suitable base role in terms of the formation and development of this area.

According to the research, in the formation of an enotherapy-based health tourism product in Azerbaijan, climate diversity, spas and sanatoriums, viticulture and winemaking traditions, wine tourism, health tourism resources and infrastructure play a base role and prepare the ground for enotherapy to create added value within health tourism.

Despite the appropriate opportunities, certain restrictions still exist that prevent enotherapy from taking shape and developing in Azerbaijan. The restrictions that should be especially emphasized are the lack of legal standards in the field of enotherapy, the lack of personnel training in this field, the incomplete formation of sanitary and certification mechanisms, the lack of branding of the indicated local health service, and the limited promotion.

As a result, enotherapy does not appear in Azerbaijan as a special treatment area, but rather as a promising health service that can be added to existing health and rehabilitation activities. If proper planning, legal regulations, personnel training, global promotion, and sufficient investment are made for enotherapy, it will appear as a special and competitive tourism product within the health tourism of Azerbaijan.

Author Contributions

The author approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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