

Arab Clients in the Spa Town: Culture Shock, Stereotypes and Prejudices

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Abstract

Tourism is not only economic activity, but also a cultural phenomenon. It is a cultural complex with a specific content, features and functions. Forms and types of tourism are determined by geographical and socio-cultural parameters. The spa town of Piešťany (Slovakia) is the flagship of the Slovak (former Czechoslovak and Austrian-Hungarian) spa industry. Internationality and high number of spa clients is still a significant feature of the town. Probably the most different and most contentious spa clients are Arabs. Different way of their life and specific cultural patterns cause various, both positive and negative emotions on the side of the domestic population and also a certain part of European clientele. In the 70s, people of dark skin, dressed in long robes, appeared in the streets, parks, shops and hotels. Veiled women were always accompanied by a man. All of them spoke an unknown language. Their behavior in many situations was different, peculiar and difficult to explain. Local people experienced culture shock. But many providers of accommodation, taxi drivers, prostitutes and employees of spas, hotels and restaurants have become friends with Arab clients. Economic profit resulting from spa tourism caused partial transformation / modification of certain stereotypes and prejudices about Arabs / Muslims which were commonly spread in the Euro-American socio-cultural area. Personal relationships are an effective tool of improving intercultural communication, building of tolerance and formation of a true, unbiased multiculturalism. Due to business relations, two equal categories were formed in a spa environment – service providers (fo-

cused on economic profit) and consumers of spa treatments and services (aimed at healing or alleviation of diseases). This relationship, although it is diversified, is relatively equivalent and does not generate any substitutions. Current relations between locals and foreigners should not be too idealized, but these stereotypes and prejudices are only secondary, without much practical significance.

Keywords: spa tourism, intercultural communication, multicultural spa society, Arab clientele, culture shock, culture adaptation.

Introduction

Tourism is not only economic activity, but also a cultural phenomenon. It is a cultural complex with specific content and functions. Its implementation, forms and types are determined by geographical and socio-cultural parameters. Tourist destination is a place where local people meet with tourists-foreigners who are different religiously, ethnically, racially, socially, professionally and culturally. Spa town is the environment in which the spa tourism, as one of the oldest segments of tourism, is realized. Spa treatment usually requires long-term (at least three weeks) and repetitive stays, which cause that the contacts between locals and „foreigners“ get more intense and more specific, in a certain way. Relationships gain more permanent character and quality.

The spa town of Piešťany (Slovakia) is the flagship of Slovak (former Czechoslovak and Austrian-Hungarian) spa industry. Internationality and the high number of spa clients is still a significant feature of the town. Factors such as local thermal and mineral waters and peloids (mud), tourism infrastructure and the marketing strategy led to the stabilization of a certain type of clientele. These clients are present for a longer period of time. They change and influence the local society and its culture. Probably the most different and most controversial spa clients are Arabs. Their different way of life and specific cultural patterns cause various, both positive and negative emotions on the side of the domestic population and a certain part of the European clientele.¹

1. A neo-conservative commentary magazine devoted some attention to the Ontario's Arbitration Act, under which the Sharia law could be allowed as an "option" or "alternative" for Muslims, in terms of family disputes. Tolerance and equality are important aspects of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Some opponents argued that Sharia law in

The need to identify and distinguish generally elicits reactions and attitudes, expressed in stereotypes and prejudices which may result in conflicts. Such behavior is cultural universals, which is inevitable in the process of identity formation. The question is where the limits of enforcement of our standards are and what the ways of this enforcement are. Since when and for what reasons are Arabs present in the town? In what way do they interfere in creation of the local culture? What is their perspective? Were the western stereotypes and prejudices about Arabs changed under the influence of providing services by local people to Arab clients in the small central European spa town?²

When Augé (1999) speaks about the anonymity of current urban environment, he is mostly thinking about metropolitan conglomerations, networks of multinational companies or tourist facilities. He understands them as a space for anthropological research of the present. As individual entities, they are equalized, standardized, impersonal and globalized. But paradoxically, if they are studied as global institutions of culture, it is possible to discover the features that form – according to Lechner and Boli – world culture. World culture means all sorts of systems adopted by different societies / cultures with no regard to traditions or geographic space. Lechner and Boli give examples of some cultural systems (sport, culture of employees working in airport companies, international legal norms, etc.) or events (Olympic Games, World Cup, UN summits) which, accepted and applied, synchronize seemingly incompatible cultures. World culture is created

a certain ways denied the Charter of Rights, because it is discriminative against women, does not provide a real opportunity to choose and therefore should not be included in the Canadian legal system. Furlong (2004) stated: “Decades of consensus about a multicultural society have been thrown into question recently as leading German politicians suggest that minorities living in the country need to do fit in [...] The notion of multiculturalism has fallen apart [...] Anyone coming here must respect our constitution and tolerate our Western and Christian roots”, said Angela Merkel. The debate centres largely around the three million-strong Muslim community – mostly Turkish, with Bosnians making up the next largest group, followed by people of Arab origin –. About seven million immigrants are currently living in Germany and it is the largest absolute number recorded in EU countries.

2. Eagleton emphasizes the difference between culture representing universals and other specific cultures, representing a certain contextual content (e. g. ethnic, national, postmodern, etc.). Universal is not the opposite of individual, but it is its paradigm (Eagleton, 2001: 67). Neo-functional pragmatism of Lawless (1996) sees culture as a tool to achieve certain parameters necessary to survive in a particular environment or to use the potential of the surrounding environment. Knowledge is transmitted, accumulated and generated by the society through culture, which has an executive, selective and axiological dimension.

on the basis of the global adoption of certain systems (Lechner & Boli, 2005). A man can build a relationship with this institution. He becomes a member of the particular society – he forms (creates or changes) and he represents (accepts) its way of existence – a specific culture. What is important is not the particular subject or a particular area, but the type of institution. Airports with functionally standardized airport lounges or hotel chains with identical rooms in different parts of the world are perceived by a man as one and the same entity. A particular airport or a particular room is not important – because the culture is identical.

The spa town is another example. Spa towns are original, but also the same – standardized and globalized –. Their functionality, geographic conditions, architectural trends and traditions, technological development, any many other parameters, paradoxically, eliminate the differences. For the local population, a spa town is an important aspect of self-identification and the creation of local identity. For foreigners (clients, tourists, patients), it represents one of the preconditions for adaptation to foreign environments and it is also the first signal of (cultural) otherness. Culture of a spa town represents a system of coexistence which fulfills the various objectives of different groups. The “spa character” of the space clearly defines and identifies specific social roles, status and social places of the individuals involved in the social structure. The “locals” are expected to provide services. They can benefit from facilities, institutions and events originally intended for spa clients – and thus they are under the process of adaptation –. The “foreigners” use services: a) according to their original cultural background – e. g. German clientele is interested in classical music, Arab clients in shopping malls and entertainment centers –; b) according to behavior patterns in a spa setting (activities recommended by doctors and suitable for their health – walking, sports, healthy diets, prescribed medical treatments –); c) depending on the particular offer of the spa resort (hiking, water sports, golf, hunting). Surrounding environment and its parameters can be very determinative – in relation to the above mentioned activities –. Diverse relationships of those involved in the common and shared spa culture can be effectively covered by the concept of multiculturalism.³ But it seems that the relationship is more crucial than the content.

3. The issue of multiculturalism and its inconsistent interpretations is also discussed in Barker (2006), Bauman (1999), Fay (2002), Sartori (2005), Watson (2000), Wieviorka (1998).

Methodology

Information was gained by heuristic research in years 2005-2010. The most important data were obtained in the archives and the library of the Museum of Balneology (balneal-geography, balneal-history), in the archives of the company Health Spa Piešťany, Inc. (statistics), through observation and a field research –interviews with informants (tourism services providers and spa guests)–. Theoretical approaches and ideas are included in the text of the study, mostly in the form of notes.

Political and ideological determinants of the presence of Arab clientele

The process of nationalization in Czechoslovakia was completed in 1950. In the Act on Czechoslovak spas No. 43/1955, the spas were defined as the centers of preventive and curative care. The government of the Czechoslovak Republic issued the first statutes of spa towns –it was seven Czechoslovak spa towns, of which only one was in Slovakia, and it was Piešťany – (Šípoš, 1992). Customer focus of Czechoslovak spas on Eastern bloc countries (Russia and others) was, in the context of political and economic orientation of the state, logical. However, and unlike other spas in Slovakia, clientele coming from capitalist countries (notably Austria and the Federal Republic of Germany) was still present in Piešťany even in these times. Developments in the Middle East at that time encouraged the formation of friendly relations with Arab countries, which tended to socialist ideology or been under the influence of the Soviet Union. And thus clients from Syria, Algeria, South Yemen, Libya, Egypt (until 1982) and Iraq were coming in the 70s in the spa town.

Spa environment in Czechoslovakia gained under socialism new features and specifications –long-term prostitution and gambling was “enriched” with a phenomenon called “vekslovanie” (illegal trade in currencies - the German Mark or U. S dollar) and smuggling of imported branded goods–. Political, economic and social changes in the country after 1989 led to a gradual weakening of relations with the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. On the contrary, the “pre-socia-

list” contacts with Germany, Austria and other countries of western Europe became more intense.

Local travel agency Al-Sawan, which was the only specialized in the Middle East area, was supplemented by other travel agencies, precisely in relation to the tourism development in the geopolitical space of the Middle East (Al-Absi, 2008). In the last third of the 20th century, the spa in Piešťany recorded an increase in wealthy clients coming from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Since the 90s, the town is facing a global clientele that is diversified and changes dynamically. Isolation of some world destinations, whether it is because of ideology, visa policy, diplomatic (non) representation, was and currently still is a decisive factor for the development of tourism. Internal and international political situation is immediately reflected in the intensity, frequency and social stratification of the clientele.

Number of inpatient clients (those who use all services including treatments, accommodation and food) in the local spa is about 50,000 per year. More than 50% of clients come from abroad (Germany 40%, Austria 3,5%, Czech Republic 5%, Israel 5%, Russia 1%, Arab countries 4% – according to internal statistics of the Health Spa Piešťany –). According to these data, it is only about 1,000 Arab clients, which is not a high number. However, the amount of outpatient clients (those who pay only for spa treatments and are accommodated individually in private) is considerable and thus the actual number of Arab clients can reach thousands.

Culture shock, stereotypes and prejudices about Arabs

In the 70s, people of dark skin, dressed in long robes, began to be seen in the streets, parks, shops and hotels. Veiled women accompanied with a man. All of them speaking an unknown language. Their behavior in many situations was different, very peculiar and unaccountable. Local people experienced culture shock. Existing and new prejudices and stereotypes about Arabs were confirmed almost immediately: they are dirty; immoral (polygamy, sexual tourism, they drink alcohol despite the religious prohibition); dangerous; rude; untidy; always dissatisfied with the prices; totally untrustworthy and false; on the other hand they are still smiling and are suspiciously friendly. Some locals who had more intense contacts (mostly business and pro-

fessional) with the Arabs, were condemned by the local society. For example, hotel academy students who worked as guides for them or others, especially young and single women, were almost automatically considered or named as prostitutes. However, not in all cases this attitude was applied. Arab clients were mostly condemned for how men treated women, their attitude towards nudity, the “dining” on the ground and eating with hands, „unusual“ clothing, skin color, language – everything was somehow different –. In the spa culture, a pejorative name “Apači” – Apaches was used for the description of Arab clientele –.⁴ Inhabitants usually shared the common negative attitude to mixed marriages or to illegitimate children. If the daughter of a local inhabitant was pregnant with an Arab, it was considered immorality and great shame for her entire family. The primary framework of the Arab-Islamic culture in the whole Euro-American area, is often formed under the lack of knowledge and it is also largely influenced by media and politics, often intentionally. Society in Piešťany is no exception.⁵

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4. This name is well-known among private accommodation providers, taxi drivers and hotel staff. Origin of the word is unknown. The most probable motive is some similarity in content between the words Arabs and Apaches. Different color of skin, culture and exoticism are the features which the locals usually associate with Arabs and Apaches. Moreover, it is also possible to notice here a certain humorous or humiliating background.
 5. A good example of misinterpretation of socio-normative regulative of Arab-Islamic culture is the interpretation of the Sharia law by P. Worthington, published in an article in the *Toronto Sun* newspaper in 2005: “According to Islamic law: 1. Apostasy is a rejection of your own religion. 2. A male apostate, or murtadd is liable to be put to death if he continues (to be) obstinate in his error. 3. A woman apostate is not subject to capital punishment, but may be kept in confinement until she recants. 4. If either husband or wife renounces their faith in Islam, divorce is automatic – the marriage is dissolved –. 5. If an underage boy renounces Islam he is not put to death, but is to be imprisoned until he comes to full age when, if he continues in the state of unbelief, he must be put to death. 6. All things considered, it's small wonder that Muslims who change their religion often either deny they've changed, or won't admit it. 7. Those who have switched faith in some countries (like Bangladesh) have been killed – not by law, but by those who believe they are instruments of Allah by killing apostates –. 8. Apostasy today is punished by death in countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Sudan and Yemen. It is considered illegal in Jordan, Kuwait, the Maldives, Malaysia, Qatar and Oman” (Worthington, 2005). *Comment on this article provided by a colleague of the authors of the paper. He is a university teacher and an Arab Muslim who focuses on research of interreligious and intercultural relations:* 1. It is true. 2. There is no verse in the Quran which would say this. However, Muhammad's words can be interpreted also in this way – this is mostly done by extremely orthodox groups which are ideologically too far from the original Muslim philosophy –. 3. He has no personal experience regarding the implementation of this regulation. On the contrary, there

Culture contact, adaptation, and acculturation

Providing private accommodation is a significant, either additional or the main source of income of people in the town and its surroundings. Despite the relatively massive increase in the hotel capacity, private accommodation is – due to cost-effectiveness, specific type of accommodation and additional services – attractive to a certain segment of customers even today. Between the 50s and 80s of the 20th century, especially tourists from Eastern Bloc (East Germany and Yugoslavia) used the capacities in private accommodation massively. Clientele from Arab countries used to come since 70s. From 1990, it was also clients coming from a united Germany. Therefore many providers of private accommodation speak English, German or Arabic, or at least they can use the most common or basic phrases. In their words, there are about 100 private apartments in the town now, usually with 3 or 4 beds, in a total volume of about 350 beds. Most of them are preferred by Arabs. About 2,500 Arab clients per year are accommodated in private. Number of private apartments (and therefore clients) is actually higher, because some providers of illegal housing services wished to remain anonymous and they did not want to reveal the actual number of beds or clients. In order to fill profit-oriented purposes, facilities in private apartments are adjusted to the requirements of the Arab clientele, without regard to any prejudices or stereotypes. Some interior modifications are not only recommended, but even strongly required by these clients. They can affect the final decision whether to choose the particular accommodation or not.⁶

is a tolerance in terms of the religion of the wife. 4. It is true. 5. This is not true, children are not adults and have no legal capacity. 6. He acknowledges that there may be this attitude of converts or Muslims who do not practice their faith. According to the interpretation of Muhammad's recommendations, they are advised not to present the change in religion publicly in order not to encourage other Muslims. 7. Similar sanctions may exceptionally occur. But this is only one specific interpretation which can not be generalized – e. g. the existence of the Communist Party in some Arab countries (communists are atheists) is completely legal –. 8. It is true.

6. *Kičin* (kitchen) – clean utensils, stove, sink and refrigerator are necessary –. Microwave is not required, because they usually do not store or re-heat the food. *Toalet* (bathroom and toilet) – as they do not use toilet paper, a faucet with a handle must be at disposal for intimate hygiene –. *Tívi* (TV and satellite) – with Arabic programs (e. g. Al Jazeera) is considered as an essential standard –. Room facilities can be easy and simple. Wheelchair access is welcomed. More often, an internet connection is required. *Picnic* (roasting of lamb)



Picture 1. Exterior of the apartment



Picture 2. Wheelchair access

is an integral part of the rest. Private apartment must enable this activity and the owner must ensure the purchase of live lambs and needed equipment.



Picture 3. Apartment - kitchen



Picture 4. Apartment - bedroom

The visitor rate reached its peak in the 80s, after the construction of a new spa complex. Since 2000, this is the first time in the history of spa, when the foreign clients are in the majority. Local people distinguish between *Jewish*, *Arab*, *Overseas* and *European* visitors. Ethnic differentiation according to official statistics defines the categories of Germans, Austrians, Russians, Israelis – Jews, Arabs and others –.

Confessional framework defines Jews, Muslims, in some cases even Orthodox. Considering the social status, there are *rich clients* (usually elite), *middle class* (the most numerous) and *the poor* (especially the seniors from Slovakia). Differentiation on the basis of only one parameter does not reflect the real stratification of the clientele.⁷ Arabs are not only Muslims. Especially in Syria or Lebanon, there are also many Christians.⁸ But the proportion of Muslims in the Arab clientele in the study site reached almost 100%. Moreover, it is important that Arab Muslims from Kuwait or Saudi Arabia are different from those who come from Lebanon, Syria, the United States or Europe. Continuous and long-term contacts allowed local people to obtain various information particularly important in terms of business (customer experience, solvency, expected costs, etc.). Through interpersonal contact, they have reached enough knowledge about their behavior, opinions, attitudes, hierarchy, aesthetic sensitivity, fashion and food preferences, lifestyle – their culture –.⁹ Based on this information, the locals formed their own opinions and attitudes. These views are different from the other part of the population which is not involved in spa tourism or has not been in such a close contact with Arabs. Providers of accommodation, taxi drivers, prostitutes or hotel, restaurant and spa staff are able to guess the social status of the client, his solvency, expected behavior, adaptability, based on e.g. clothing, employment or the number of wives. Most of the Arab clients belong to the middle and upper society class: they are mostly entrepreneurs, businessmen,

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7. For example, a certain part of the Russian clientele is orthodox, but many Russians are atheists and majority of *"those in spas"* are Jews. Jewish clientele comes mostly from Israel and many of these guests are originally immigrants from Russia. Austrians are not Germans, but the native population considers them almost identical, with no significant differences. German clients in terms of their solvency, are divided into *"the poorer Eastern"* and *"the Western richer"*. Czechs and Poles are identifiable on the basis of their relatively comprehensible language and are accepted by the locals *"as their own"*. On the contrary, Hungarian clients are considered as far foreigners, even though they were for thousand years a part of domestic population, similarly to the Czechs.
 8. There are approximately 18% of Christians in Syria (Kuminiaková, 2005). In Lebanon, the share is between 35-40%.
 9. *"When I had the Apaches [...] in July [...] I was running across the yard to the house, because it was raining. A light summer rain. And the Apaches were sitting on a bench in the garden, in the rain, in the long dress, with legs crossed. They were smoking and having a cheerful discussion. When they saw me running, they wondered why I went to hide. They said: "Rain is good, friend". Of course, it is exotic for them, because there is no rain at their home"* (a provider of a private accommodation, male, born 1973).

and freelancers, staff members from the companies or retired. Their standards and expectations are, compared with the local population, many times higher, which is commonly known about the people coming from countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.¹⁰ On the basis of the country of origin (nationality), the locals have learned to expect different behavior, various hygiene stereotypes, different solvency and other differences and specific features.¹¹

In the beginnings, most Arab spa clients were mainly men in old age with ill health. Their primary aim was the spa treatment. Nowadays, even young and healthy men are coming to the spa, but usually for completely different purposes – entertainment, shopping and sex tourism –. They want to experience European culture – spa treatment is of secondary importance to them –. On the other hand, it does not mean that they are not interested in using the spa services. If young men arrive in a group, providers can quite easily expect their subject of interest, ways of spending time and entertainment requirements. In the case of elder clients or families, a quieter and calmer stay is expected. Arab women rarely come alone and they are often accompanied by their husbands or fathers. Despite the fact that in many Arab countries polygamy is common and the average number of children is ten or more, they do not visit spas in such numerous groups. Usually, it is two or three grown men, in some cases it is an old man accompanied by a single adult or one of the wives. If it is a family, it is usually accompanied by a maid (from Indonesia or the Philippines) who makes the housework and takes care of the children. Most wealthy come in large and generationally diverse groups for a few weeks, even several times. This phenomenon stimulates the creation of proper conditions

10. *“Ali followed his brother. Their job is to assemble satellites, but they like to call it “the company”. If they had the same job in our country, they could probably afford only a cheap holiday in Croatia. Here they are kings. There is one more man, around 50 years old. It’s a retired police officer. He has such an old age pension [...] no problem”* (a provider of private accommodation provider, male, born 1973).

11. *“Those from Saudi Arabia are the dirtiest. They drink and meet women. But only at night when Allah does not see, as they say. And those from Kuwait do it even more. Arabs from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates are wealthy. They have much money and they spend much money. They are always together in large groups. Sometimes, one makes a booking of the half of the rooms on the floor. And what a mess they make! More civilized and sophisticated are those who live in U. S., but also those from Syria and Lebanon. They are cleaner. They are also, let’s say, whiter, ordinary, normal* (a hotel employee, female, born 1975).

ensuring fairly high profits from the secondary services. Sex tourism, shopping, travelling to nearby towns – Bratislava or Vienna, recreation in the park or a barbecue – these are the most common activities of the Arab clientele. Their hosts, friends or guides are often naturally and spontaneously invited to take participation in these activities.



Picture 5. Coffee in the spa park



Picture 6. Father and his son on the Colonnade Bridge in Piešťany



Picture 7. Young Arab clients



Picture 8. Young Arab clients

Transformation of stereotypes and prejudices

Interpersonal, long-term and continuous contacts between the local population and the Arab clientele have resulted in a better mutual understanding not only of individuals, but also on a collective social platform. Original pejorative accent of the name “Apache” was natu-

rally eliminated and is now seen as the usual indication of a specific type/category of clients, without any hidden meanings and connotations. As ethnofaulism, it is no longer universal, but rather situational. What it is interesting is the fact that the local people either indicate or confirm all the prejudices and stereotypes, but mostly only in general/anonymous context. When they are asked to specify the names, the individuals or the families of Arabs they know personally, they usually tend to select, reduce or deny these stereotypes. For example: "Well, Arabs are like that, that's obvious, but Ali, Mohamed and Jusuf, who visit us for more than ten years, they are different, they are 'normal'" (provider of private accommodation, male, born 1950). Many stereotypes, existing previously solely on the basis of their external manifestations or ethnocentric interpretation of the local people, are changing or cease to exist. This process is mostly enhanced by the clarification and explanation for the "strange" behavior of the Arabs. Vileness is seen as different hygiene practice (toilet paper is replaced with water). Eating with hands sitting on the ground is not incivility or bad behavior, but an element in a different cultural model (because even the richest Arab clients eat that way). Polygamy is not a deviation, but the traditional system of marriage with its own rules. Similarly, behavior of Arab men towards women is seen as a relationship that can be built on love, tolerance and equality. Arab women may not only be servants or mothers of offsprings, but also educated, modern and self-confident partners. For these women, it is natural that they would never show up in public without a headscarf, in a mini skirt or in a lacy corset. The Arab man is not necessarily a terrorist, a fundamentalist or a despotic insane pseudo-traditionalist, but also a particular young man, a family man, with his name, an entrepreneur, a worker, or simply an old trader who has problems with lumbar joints or protruding intervertebral discs.

Many providers of accommodation, taxi drivers, prostitutes and employees of spas, hotels and restaurants have become friends with some Arab clients. Some Arabs visit the spa regularly and they enjoy the services of the same providers ("*those of ours*") for years, even decades. Friendly relations sometimes turned into love, resulting not only in good memories, but children as well. More than forty-years lasting contact of two cultures in a spa environment also caused changes even in such a stable and conservative social norms as endogamy. It is not possible to clearly confirm that mixed marriages do not attract any



Picture 9. Typical Arab women



Picture 10. Conservative Arab women

special attention, however, they are not automatically condemned. Even an illegitimate child is not publicly condemned and if the father is rich, it is considered as an effective tool to meet the needs of the child and mother (which is the attitude that is currently widespread and generally accepted, not only in a spa environment).

Local Arabs

In the last quarter of the 20th century, a few Arabs settled permanently in Piešťany. Currently, there are about 30 Arabs who live in the town and surrounding villages. They own or manage restaurants, hotels, guest houses or they work in tourism business as self-employed persons (usually they motivate the Arab clients to visit Slovakia and help them to organize their stay). In business, they can successfully use their contacts with tribal structures in Arab countries. These communities can consist of 500-5,000 people and that is an interesting business potential. Their status and position in the local environment is completely different from Western Europe. They are mostly university-educated and economically active people. Their aim is to work and to live with their (often mixed) families in a stable European country.¹² In the last three decades, we could have noticed quite a massive increase in the construction of multipurpose buildings and private guest houses in the town. One of the reasons is certainly the general profitability of real estate investments in tourist centers. Sometimes the need of the rich to legalize the capital may be the motive as well. Not only local businessmen, but also Arabs invest here.¹³ This issue, however, requires a specific space and further study, because it can help to identify and interpret not only processes of adaptation, but acculturation as well.

12. More about the assimilation processes, see Michalík, 2011.

13. In 2006, twenty years old Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia named Meteb Bin Abdulaziz al Saud began his activities leading to the construction of a new complex in the village of Moravany nad Váhom. His idea was to build a clinic, a luxury hotel, convention center, five major and 11 smaller guest houses and 27 houses for solvent clients. It is expected that the complex will create two or three hundred jobs. Since 2008, there is a significant land purchase in the village.

Conclusions

Visitor-rate and spa clientele are being constantly determined by global political, economic and socio-cultural factors. War, ideology or economic crises always left their marks in the form of number, origin, credibility, ethnic or religious identity of client groups. Sometimes logically, sometimes vice versa as one would expect.

Regarding the research of cross-cultural relations, multiculturalism can be understood here as:

1. Optics of the research in spa environment and a methodological tool for the analysis;
2. Social fact indicating the diversity of the spa town;¹⁴
3. Ethical-normative matrix which determines the relations of groups / subcultures within the spa town;
4. Means of education – the platform and the ideological source of adaptation of subcultures / communities.

Multiculturalism in a spa town represents a real and potential application of values and norms on which this idea is based on. Spa environment is one of the models of multiculturalism in all its interpretations.¹⁵ Economic profit generated from spa tourism caused a partial transformation/ modification of stereotypes and prejudices about Arabs/Muslims, mostly present in the Euro-American socio-cultural space. Interesting topic for further research is the issue of adaptation or acculturation of the Arab clientele in the European spa environment.¹⁶ Face-to-face relationships are an effective tool for the better intercultural communication, building of tolerance and formation of a real, unbiased multiculturalism. The business, often perceived as a negative factor which creates the exploiters and the exploited, has formed two equal categories in spa setting – service providers (aimed at economic profit) and consumers of spa treatments and additional ser-

14. In terms of this interpretation, various groups of clients and socio-professional groups of domestic population involved in spa and tourism industry are constituted as subcultures.

15. Three dimensions of multiculturalism: 1. Descriptive – a tool for description of the specific socio-cultural reality –; 2. Normative – as an ethical-axiological, cultural-anthropological and culturological entity –; and 3. Applied – as a motive of learning, education and training (Hirt, 2005: 9-76).

16. The issue of research in the Arab environment also discussed in Čukan, 2008.

vices (aimed at the healing process or alleviation of diseases) —. This relationship, even it is diversified, is relatively equivalent and does not generate any substitutions. Relations between locals and foreigners cannot be idealized or romanticized, but these stereotypes and prejudices are now secondary, without much practical significance.

There are some spa towns and spa resorts which are not interested in the Arab clientele. Some of them reject it or simply make no efforts to attract it, despite the fact it is the wealthiest segment of spa clients. The reasons may be ethnocentric prejudices, misunderstood cultural differences, potential risk of increased costs and the lack of multicultural education of employees and the management. Knowing what “the others” do is not enough — we must understand *why* they do it —. Only in this way, we can be closer to the truth and coexist.

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