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**SPA-SERVICE DESIGN FOR A LEISURE HOTEL IN
CASE OF LA BAITA-COURMAYEUR**

Master Thesis

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays society is fast changing and demands something new and never seen before. More frequently comparing to the time when there were no social networks, smart phones, shopping online and other ordinary things people are used to today. Now it is not enough to provide good service for a good price, it has to be something more to differentiate in high level of competition with other companies that provide the same or similar services. For example, in case when two spas are right next to each other, and each of them provides exact the same procedures at the same price, service design is what makes client to walk into one and not the other one.

The topic of Master thesis is “Spa-Service Design for a Leisure Hotel in Case of La Baita-Courmayeur”. As the author of the thesis undertook her internship at the hotel La Baita, she decided to draw her Master`s thesis sample from it. The topic of service design in case of hotel La Baita is actual regarding the fact that hotel exists already 12 years, but since 13th of January 2012, owners have been changed. At the moment it works as three-star hotel, therefore future plan is increase level of service quality with new service design. La Baita is situated in the city of Courmayeur, Italy - directly on the slopes in Plan Checrouit (1704 m) and it is one of its unique selling points.

Considering the unique location of this resort town, it seems appropriate to offer different spa facilities in order to increase the array of services available to visitors of Courmayeur. Therefore, the research question of this thesis is: what kind of Spa facilities are missing in Courmayeur in order to satisfy customers needs and expectations during their stay in this particular destination?

The aim of the Master`s thesis is to analyse the Courmayeur hotel spas – to investigate present available services and then make suggestions regarding present situation and

research to hotel La Baita owners regarding service design in their hotel in order for them to develop a competitive service package to be able to offer something different, of high quality and attractive to tourists.

In order to answer the research question and to reach the aim of the thesis, the author set the following tasks:

1. To provide an overview of theoretic literature and scientific studies regarding service design and leisure services;
2. To map all the hotels with spa-facilities in Courmayeur, and introduce hotel La Baita in detail;
3. To collect data on spa-services in hotels in Courmayeur by using observation protocol and interviews;
4. To analyse the collected data by comparing spa-services offered, highlighting their pros and cons, in order to draw suggestions for the development of a new spa centre.
5. Present findings of the field research, and formulate suggestions for the development of hotel La Baita spa centre.

Research has been done in Courmayeur from 1st of January 2012 till 1st of March 2013. The author of the Master's thesis used three research methods to meet the objectives and answer the research question. The first method is a review of scientific literature and internet sources. It includes materials regarding spa service design, leisure hotels, sustainability, nowadays trends, etc. In sense to understood what should be taken into order in new spa service design project development. That was followed by hotel observation to understand the characteristics of hotel spas in Courmayeur, what facilities they offer and what could be implemented when elaborating service design for hotel La Baita. Third method, that was used, are structured interviews with tourists in Couremayeur to get a clear view on tourist expectations regarding their accommodation and spa in order to clarify what are the missing spa facilities in hotel spas at the moment. Collected observation data are analysed within the framework of comparative analysis.

The Master thesis is structured accordingly: Chapter 1 gives a brief overview of theoretical approach of spa service design in leisure hotels. Chapter 2 provides

information of the research about spa service design development in case of La Baita. Chapter 3 follows, presenting findings and suggestions for leisure hotel La Baita in spa service design. In the Appendixes are added observation protocol, list of the Courmayeur hotels, interview question guideline and overview of comparative analysis in order to show to the reader more detailed information regarding research has been done. Master thesis is ended with summary in Latvian language.

Research outcome will be forwarded to a third person (Hotel La Baita owners) with purpose to help formulating a sustainable service design for the leisure hotel La Baita in city of Courmayeur, Italy. Therefore, the outcomes of this study are not only the evaluation of exiting services in Courmayeur, but also a contribution to the prospective development of spa facilities in the area.

1. THEORETICAL APPROACH OF SPA SERVICE DESIGN IN LEISURE HOTEL

1.1.The framework of spa service design

Like most modern design disciplines, service design can be traced back to the tradition of industrial design, a field defined during the 1920s by a close-knit community of American designers that included Raymond Loewy, Walter Dorwin Teague, Norman Bel Geddes and Henry Dreyfuss. In Europe, the Bauhaus was central to the birth of industrial design. What all of these designers had in common was the drive to use new industrial technology to improve people's standard of living (Polaine, Lovlie, & Reason, 2013, p. 18).

Service orientation is a multi-dimensional subject matter. It is through the application of its design principles that its benefits are realized and that everybody can build solution logic that can be classified as being truly "service-oriented". This results in an automation environment with unique dynamics and characteristics, all of which need to be understood and planned for. When carrying out service-oriented design, a clear distinction is made between service candidates and different services (Erl, 2008).

Regarding (Mager, 2009) service design helps to improve already existing or create new services to make them more attractive for clients and efficient for organizations. Service design aims to ensure that service interfaces are useful, usable and desirable from the client's point of view and effective, efficient and distinctive from the supplier's point of view. Therefore regarding (Moritz, 2005) it is new holistic, multidisciplinary, integrative field. Service sector makes up a significant part of the economy. However, services are not as productive for organisations and as satisfying for clients as they could be. Services have a design problem.

The development of new products has been the subject of research in various scientific domains such as management, industrial design and engineering, and marketing. The most popular new product development model, by far, has been proposed by the consulting firm Booz, Allen and Hamilton Inc. They were the first to suggest that a systematic process exists or should exist in the development of new products (Avlonitis & Papastathopoulou, 2006, p. 82).

By (Avlonitis & Papastathopoulou, 2006, p. 85) the differences in the development of new products and services stem from the special characteristics of services, i.e. intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability. These characteristics can impact new service development, thus special attention is given to the execution of particular activities. The fifteen activities of the Scheuing and Johnson's model can be grouped into four distinct stages: direction, design, testing and introduction. All of these stages should be taken into order in service development processes.

Based on (Johnson, Menor, Roth, & Chase, 2000), the inherent differences between the production of goods and services, particularly the role of customer contact in service delivery, service intangibility, and heterogeneity of demand, the application of new service development models to services might not suffice in adequately describing how new services are optimally developed. The three-core service value categories - care, access, and response - define types of value that services provide to people (Polaine, Lovlie, & Reason, 2013, p. 31).

Intangible characteristics are those characteristics through which a company may achieve a comparative advantage, is service product. Service products tend to expand a product's utility and the buyers associate them with the physical product when considering alternative offers (Avlonitis & Papastathopoulou, 2006, p. 36). The fact that services are intangible makes these basic characteristics important in new service design process: 1) It must be objective, not subjective; 2) It must be precise, not vague; 3) It must be fact driven, not opinion driven; 4) It must be methodological, not philosophical (Mc Graw, 2003, p. 222). The analysis carried out in the framework of this Master thesis follows this logic, as comparative analysis of existing services, taking into account customer opinions, will provide a comprehensive overview of the opportunities for designing a new service in the area of Courmayeur.

In simple terms, service design considers services as products that need to be systematically developed with a clear focus on customer value (Zehrer, 2009, p. 337). The difference between products and services is more than semantic - products are tangible objects that exist in both time and space; services consist solely of acts or processes, and exist in time only. The basic distinction between “things” and “process” is the starting point for a focused investigation of services. To be successful new product development needs to occur with the participation of a variety of personnel drawn from across the organisation. This introduces the notion of a group of people working as a team to develop an idea or project proposal into a final product suitable for sale (Trott, 2005). The decisions about the product types to be offered represent the most critical decisions in determining the future of a company. The management must first decide what products to offer in the market place before other intelligent product decisions pertaining to the product’s physical attributes, packaging branding, and so on, can be made (Avlonitis & Papastathopoulou, 2006, p. 19).

One of the most important product-related concepts is the product life cycle (PLC) and this concept can be illustrated as a curve in a diagram. The PLC model is useful mainly as a framework for developing effective marketing strategies in different stages of the life cycle of both physical goods and services (Avlonitis & Papastathopoulou, 2006, p. 4). Therefore by (Laws E, 2004, p. 108) the service design strategy should be based on market research and should be aimed at meeting the needs, expectations and motivation of target customers. Services are delivered by employees to customers, they are heterogeneous – rarely are two services alike or experienced in the same way (Mc Graw, 2003, p. 221). For the service providers most important is to differ in positive way from competitors in this case then customers will come back and suggest the place for their friends and relatives.

Services are rendered and they cannot be possessed, because they can be only experienced, created or participated in. Products, on the other hand, are possessed. Though they are different, services and products are intimately and symbiotically linked, especially in the case of spa services, where service and products both matter and are necessary for providing the full experience of relaxation.

In the broadest terms, design is an activity that gives “form and order to life arrangements”. For design professionals, creating means there is a problem, which first has to be identified to solve. Once the problem is identified, the designer follows logical process that he applies to every phase of the project (Borje de Mozota, 2003, p. 14). Usually this problem is that there is some product or service missing to fully satisfy customers and their needs.

An emerging field, service design is a multidisciplinary approach to create more useful, effective, and efficient services. Service design, therefore, isn't aimed at creating tangible products, but developing better ways for people to access the services they need. These might range from the most mundane (renewing a driver's license or figuring out which subway to take in the morning) to the life altering (accessing quality healthcare or crop insurance to protect against a flood). A key aspect of service design is the value of understanding the user experience (Gardner, 2011). And the main idea is to satisfy everybody, not only those for whom it is directly intended. A fundamental characteristic of service is that they create value only when customers use them (Polaine, Lovlie, & Reason, 2013, p. 23). Regarding (Heppell, 2006, p. 13) often people think that the best way to really look after customer is to wow them. Wows are the simple ideas, which go a long way to make a big difference in way how customers perceive particular business. It is possible to design different spa activities and programs focusing on specific satisfactions or benefits that consumer desires. Measuring the customer satisfaction is useful in examining strong and weak programs, while providing information to revise, modify or eliminate programs with low satisfaction (Suciu & Borza, 2011, p. 302).

One needs to be aware of varying customer expectations. Regarding (Mc Graw, 2003, p. 60) customer expectations are beliefs about service delivery that function as standards or reference points against which performance is judged. The level of expectations can vary widely depending on the reference point the customer holds. Although mostly everyone has an intuitive sense of what expectations are, service marketers need a far more thorough and clear definition of expectations in order to comprehend, measure, and manage them (Mc Graw, 2003, p. 61). A customer with high social and dependency needs may have relatively high expectations for a hotel's ancillary services (Mc Graw,

2003, p. 67). This shows the value of surveys used in the research afterwards, as it will help to map the different expectations of customers in the Courmayeur area.

Service design must consider all elements of the service by taking a holistic approach to the design of a new service (Rudd & Lloyd, 2011, p. 45). For any new business, the design of services is a delicate balancing act, ensuring that not only the functional requirements but also the performance targets are met (Rudd & Lloyd, 2011, p. 44).

The process of service design highlights several core powers of the design (Borje de Mozota, 2010, p. 66):

1. Design as differentiator: a source of competitive advantage on the market through brand equity, customer loyalty, price premium, or customer orientation.
2. Design as integration: a resource that improves new product development processes (time to market, building consensus in teams using visualization skills); design as a process that favours a modular and platform architecture of product lines, user-oriented innovation models, and fuzzy-front-end project management.
3. Design as transformer: a resource for creating new business opportunities; for improving the company's ability to cope with change; or (in the case of advanced design) as an expertise to better interpret the company and the marketplace.
4. Design as good business: a source of increased sales and better margins, more brand value, greater market share, better return on investment (ROI) design as a resource for society at large (inclusive design, sustainable design).

It is clearly known, that for a successful service design, the developer needs to follow at least one of these core principles.

Joseph Schumpeter was among the first economists to emphasise the importance of new products as stimuli to economic growth. He argued that the competition posed by new products was far more important than marginal changes in the prices of existing products (Trott, 1998, p. 6). Regarding (Kunde, 2002, p. 21), the new value economy has its own rules. Entrepreneur must have either a unique product, a unique shop, a

unique service or a unique brand. If none of these, are not represented, than there is possibility that particular business will vanish into the grey mass of companies that fail to stand out from the crowd. Businesses operate with the knowledge that their competitors will inevitably come to the market with a product that changes the basis of competition. The ability to change and adapt is essential to survival (Trott, 2005, p. 4). In this case is important to differ from competitors with unique idea.

At the same time, each service design process is in need for creative thinking in order to differentiate. Service design is a new and an extremely effective tool that can be applied to the design of innovation, systems, business processes, and the design of business themselves. Design, as a process and as an output, has greater opportunity to add value to the bottom line than any other business function- that design processes, principles, and solutions can be used to solve any problem (Borje de Mozota, 2010). Therefore, according to (Gardner, 2011), each company, which works in field to create service designs for different purposes and needs over-arching goal is to help their clients create services that are inclusive, efficient, technologically appropriate and, ultimately, empathic. Service design has the potential to shift the focus from tools and technologies to people and relationships - a re-orientation that can help create a lasting change.

Based on (Capellini, 2010, p. 43) hundreds of individuals and different companies offer consulting services in the spa industry. Some specialize in concept and design, others in treatment menu and staffing, and others in finance. A small number provide all of these services, plus on going spa management that is outsourced to them by resort, hotels, and country clubs. The field has become so well-established that some spa consultants are even offering training services that certify other people as spa consultants. The development of national standards is an important goal that should be at the forefront of this effort. Such standards will allow for more credible research on what is still an evolving industry. Otherwise, words like *fragmented* will continue to plague the spa business, preventing both aesthetic and medical-aesthetic components from moving forward in the best possible way (D' Angelo, 2006, p. 29).

Regarding (Capellini, 2010, p. 555) when it comes to designing a spa- revenue-generating space is the holy grail of professional spa designers, and they keep in mind

when building anything from tiny day spas to mega-large resort spas. Basically on revenue-generating space is focusing the future success of spa.

Spas are usually situated in quiet, beautiful surroundings and are invariably impressively designed, decorated and appointed. The relaxing spa environment is a complete change from the everyday stresses and strains of life (Crebbin-Bailey, Dr Harcup, & Harrington, 2005, p. 188). Regarding that spas are primary places of relaxation and tension release, they help many conditions, especially those which are stress-related (D` Angelo, 2006, p. 189).

Based on (Ransley, 2004, p. 122-135) is very important to understand the content of FF&E (Furniture, fittings and equipment. The components of a hotel bedroom or spa, which are “loose”, or not structural in origin.) and OS&E (Operating supplies and equipment.) because they are some of the most misinterpreted elements of a project cost estimate and ones that lead to most cases of cost overruns or omissions on hospitality projects. In hotel and spa project development processes is need to attract professional team, in order to avoid unnecessary mistakes and loos of money.

The characteristics of products and services, as well as spa service design process highlighted in this chapter will be used to analyse the case of Courmayeur as a whole, and to elaborate recommendations for leisure hotel La Baita project. However, in order to fully understand the framework where the new service needs to be developed, the fallowing key concept of the case are analysed – different types of spa hotels, needs to be addressed. The following section proceeds with that.

1.2. Different types of spa hotels

Despites its long and exciting history, spa in its present form is a relatively new business. A spa is a place where, through design and targeted management action, people are encouraged to develop awareness of both the spiritual and physical factors which effect, and benefit, their feeling of well-being (Crebbin-Bailey, Dr Harcup, & Harrington, 2005, p. 195).

Water's ability to heal is the central theme that runs through explanations of how the word "spa" originated-reflecting water's importance not only in ancient centres of healing but also in early European spa culture. The term "spa" was subsequently used to describe natural springs and health resorts offering water therapy. Taking the water's, or drinking or bathing in sources of water for therapeutic or medical purposes, was a fashionable social pastime in the 18th and 19th centuries (Lee, 2004, p. 11).

In 21st century spa industry is very large, dynamic and it's growing. Regarding (Cohen & Bodeker, 2008, p. 4) the global spa industry is a melting pot for a range of products and services that enhance health and well-being. In many parts of Europe, the term "spa" still retains its strong historical associations, and many restrict the definition to establishment that focus on hydrotherapy: that is, the therapeutic use of water. However, the term is understood to encompass a wider approach to health and wellness, rest and relaxation that aims to treat the body, mind and spirit. And the modern spa is typically perceived as an establishment that integrates a range of professionally administered health, wellness and beauty treatments and services (Lee, 2004, p. 11). Also according to the International Spa Association, a modern spa is a facility that is "developed to enhancing overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit" (Capellini, 2010, p. 20).

Regarding (Capellini, 2010, p. 21) in recent years, spas have become specialized, with certain types of spas featuring specific offerings and catering to specific audiences, such as weight-loss spas, outdoor adventure spas, hydrotherapy spas, and others. All of this specialization has made education a priority in the spa industry.

Along with tracking demographic trends and client needs, one of the biggest questions currently being raised in the spa industry is "What defines a spa?" With everything from destination and day spas to wellness centres, medi- spas, and even "quickie" and kiosk spas, it almost seems that no two spas are alike these days. In broad categories spas including: day spas, destination or resort spas, wellness centres, and medical spas (D' Angelo, 2006, p. 30). In nowadays the European spa experience has broadened, adapting to changing times and increasing global influences and regarding (Capellini, 2010, p. 42) each spa has its own philosophy.

Not all spas are created equal. The seven categories described by the International Spa Association (Burt & Lechtman, 2001, p. viii):

1. Club Spa: Primarily a fitness facility, with services offered on a day-use bases.
2. Cruise ship spa: Aboard a cruise ship, professional treatments, personal training, an salon services are offered on an a la carte basis.
3. Day spa: Professionally administered services offered on a day- use basis.
4. Destination spa: Focused on lifestyle improvement and health enhancement through professionally administered services, physical fitness, educational programs, and on- site accommodations.
5. Medical spa: Individuals, solo practises, groups, and institutions comprised of medical and spa professionals whose primary purpose is to provide comprehensive medical and wellness care in an environment that integrates spa services with conventional and complementary therapies and treatments.
6. Mineral spring spa: Hydrotherapy treatments that use natural mineral waters, or seawater, from an on-site source.
7. Resort hotel spa: Located within a resort or hotel, professionally administered spa services, fitness and wellness components, and spa cuisine menu choices are available on a daily or multiday basis.

All of these categories could be combined as well.

Three categories of medical hotels currently exist, each catering to the specialized needs of health facility users. The first type is simply a standard hotel located proximate to a medical center; the second type is a hotel that has tailored facilities or services to serve the healthcare segment but may not necessarily be owned by the hospital organization; and the third type is a hotel that is physically integrated into a medical facility, may provide on-site medical services to hotel guests, and is likely owned by the hospital organization. The advantages to owners of medical hotels over those of other hotel property types are their strong occupancies, lack of seasonality, and relatively low marketing costs given the strong demand generated by the hospital (Wu, 2013, p. 51). Therefore by (Lee, 2004, p. 12) medical centres in Europe have conventionally offered the water cure. These include balneotherapeutic centres which use mineral water and muds; thermal spas that use thermal water; German Kneipp centres that administer water and other natural therapies based on pioneering hydrotherapist Sebastian

Kneipp's theories; thalassotherapy centres that focus on the use of substances derived from the sea; and climate therapy centres that take advantage of the purer air at higher altitudes for healing or relaxation. The Nature Cure movement gained momentum following the popularity of the health packages of Priessnitz and Kneipp and gave rise to a complementary medical system still practised today (Crebbin-Bailey, Dr Harcup, & Harrington, 2005, p. 25).

By (D' Angelo, 2006, p. 34) the wellness centre is a relatively new concept gaining in popularity. Wellness centres integrate a variety of health-based philosophies with spa therapies to promote an inclusive wellness program. Although they typically include a broad spectrum of holistic, complementary, or alternative health care practices, such as acupuncture, chiropractic health care, naturopathic medicine, energy or body work therapies, and herbal remedies to prevent and/or treat illness. Yoga, meditation, lifestyle, and longevity programs are some of the modalities that can be subjective in their approach to preventative care and healing. Spas and wellness centres or programs address the social, psychological, spiritual, physical, and behavioural components of health and well-being. They have been a key driver of hotel guests' satisfaction for the past 20 years and are increasingly serving as profit centres (Wu, 2013, p. 52).

An alpine environment, while phenomenally beautiful, can provide distinct health challenges. Although some individuals will not experience symptoms, getting acclimated to high elevations can take days to weeks, during which time the body may experience dehydration, sleeplessness, and even swelling of the hands and feet. To enjoy the beauty of the mountains and become acclimated gradually, Banff Springs (Banff Springs Hotel- Solace Spa) recommends taking it easy for a little while, increasing water intake, using high SPF sunscreen and lip balm, and limiting caffeine and alcohol consumption (Burt & Lechtman, 2001, p. 51).

In different spa hotels are available different facilities, different varieties of saunas, pools and treatment offers. Types of baths most frequently occurring are sauna or Finish bath, Hammam or steam bath and Bania or Russian bath. According to (Lee, 2004, p. 44-50) Bania or Russian bath has been more widely chronicled than its Finish counterpart and is widely credited for the Russians' reputation for robustness. A Russian Bania has a more boisterous atmosphere than a Finish sauna. Bathers may whip

each other with venniks (switches made of birch, oak, eucalyptus, linden or juniper twigs), with an aromatic scent emitting from the oils of the twigs. Therefore Hammam is experience starts with basting the body in heat, followed by a vigorous massage.

The characteristics of different types of spa hotels, as well as spa trends highlighted in this chapter will be used to analyse the case of Courmayeur as a whole, and to elaborate recommendations for leisure hotel La Baita project. However, in order to fully understand the framework where the new service needs to be developed, the following key concept of the case are analysed – spa services in leisure hotel and spa trends – needs to be addressed. The following section proceeds with that.

1.3. Spa services in leisure hotel and overview of spa trends

The world's largest service industry, tourism and hospitality contribute an estimated 5 per cent to worldwide Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ around 234 million people worldwide, corresponding to 8.7 per cent of the total global workforce which implies substantial impacts on society and the environment. The industry is therefore forced with a range of increasingly pressing challenges (Sloan, Legrand, & Chen, 2013, lpp. 14). Over the past 50 years or so, the tourism industry has developed rapidly (Briggs, 2001, p. 33), and people start to understand how important is their leisure time on a daily basis. Leisure is a concept of time, where tourism is an activity and hospitality is concerned with the provision of services (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2005, p. 26). Leisure is a term that has been used to encompass a whole series of experiences that people can undertake in their free time (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2005, p. 22). It is the time that is not spent on compulsory activities like employment, education, running a business and household chores. The distinction is not strict, since necessity can be larger or smaller, and things may be done for pleasure as well as for longer-term usefulness (Nazareth, 2007, p. 14). A spa-service, if successfully designed, can encompass both – pleasure and usefulness, as different spa-treatments are good for one's health, appearance, and psychological state, as well as provide relaxation.

The leisure industry is composed of a number of overlapping organizations that provide leisure opportunities either at home or out of the home, either in the regional, national or international context. The leisure industry consists of organisations that provide products and services, which are used during people's leisure time (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2005, p. 24). The international market for leisure products has been developed by organizations of different sizes (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2005, p. 47). Hotels located in recreational areas provide a great opportunity for developing leisure activities, and spa-services, if offered, will serve as a selling point for people choosing to spend their time in the respective hotel. Therefore, according to (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2005, p.47), the hotel industry is increasingly making a global push to attract the world's top business and leisure travellers. Europe has, in recent years, witnessed the growth of resorts. Indeed, they have been one of the fastest growing sectors of leisure (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2005, p. 226).

There are several factors that will influence to offer of leisure opportunities in a hotel. Seasonality is identified as one of the most visible characteristics of modern tourism, and most destinations experience some kind of seasonal pattern (Bigovic, 2011, p. 16). Moreover, different cultures may view the same resources differently and, as societies change through time, their perceptions of resources may change or new technologies may be developed that allow resources to be exploited, which hitherto had not been possible (Bull, Hoose, & Weed, 2003). Hence, when developing a leisure-oriented service, such as a spa-centre, the hotel management needs to consider seasonal patterns of travel and the characteristics and expectations of visitors.

Nowadays the spa industry is into a multibillion-dollar business that is changing the way people think about health, beauty, and wellness. Whether the topic is nutritional skin care, spa body treatments, the increasing number of men receiving spa services, or the integration of medical and holistic health practises, the world seems to be fascinated with spa therapies (D' Angelo, 2006, p. 15). The perception of spa-services has shifted.

If the gym and spa have traditionally been positioned as mere "amenities" (locked up in the hotel basement), now those walls are being conceptually (and literally) broken down (Ellis, 2013). And in nowadays it gives wilder service design possibilities regarding facilities, which are included in spa.

Overall, the spa industry has experienced powerful growth over the last 15 years, even clocking gains over the brutal recession, as other industries have suffered (Ellis, 2013, p. 55). Ten years ago a SPA area used to be a competitive advantage. SPA areas were even considered the perfect marketing tool. However, many hotels have followed this trend. SPA guests are quite experienced and expect innovations (Schletterer, 2013, p. 1).

Spas are now riding the wave of the baby boomers and the Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) and conscious consumer movement. A spa business model has been built based on personal service, human connection and a growing wellness ethic combined with the aspirations of luxury, spirituality and personal transformation (Ellis, 2008, p. 446).

To make a good, sustainable and interesting spa for customers, author of Master's thesis needed to make research regarding trends – what's popular in general and what's new in this field. Tracking trends can also be inspirational, as it is one of the best ways to motivate, stimulate and encourage people. Possibly most exciting of all, analysing trends may result in the rewarding opportunity to help shape future trends.

Although interest and support for sustainable development are growing continuously, critics of the movement and sceptics still exist (Sloan, Legrand, & Chen, 2013, p. 23). Sustainability, however, is an “essentially contested concept” that is, a concept the use and application of which is inherently a matter of dispute. The reason for this is the degree to which the concept is used to refer to a “balance” or “wise” use in the way in which natural resources are exploited (Hall & Lew, 1998, p. 13). For sustainable and tourism services an important factor is that destinations have to offer beyond basic tourism facilities. There is a growing awareness of the impact of visitors on host destinations, so sustainable and ethical tourism are becoming more important (Briggs, 2001, p. 35).

In terms of sustainability is worth to think in sustainable way. Green Key is an international eco label for accommodation establishments that was first used in Denmark in 1994, in Estonia it was initiated in 2001 by Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications in cooperation with the Centre of Tourism Development of the Estonian Regional Development Agency of Enterprise. The Green Key is used

altogether in 9 countries – in addition to Denmark and Estonia also in France, Greenland, Lithuania, Sweden, Belgium, Holland and Portugal. And it is a well-known quality standard in the entire world, which is proved with certification. By (Sloan, Legrand, & Chen, 2013, p. 285) certification is a procedure by which a third party, the certifier, provides a written insurance that a system, a process, a person, a product or a service have conformed to the requirements specified in a standard or a reference them.

Although spas are more popular with women, they are attracting an ever-growing number of men as well. Spas cater to a mere 30 interest male audience, but that still signifies over \$3 billion in sales to men per year (Capellini, 2010, p. 23). Another aspect to take into account is the increasing consumption of skin-care products. Experiencing double-digit growth every year in the last five, it's expected to keep surging through 2016. All the components from women's skincare lines are getting rolled out in a whole new "shelf" of man-focused products as anti-aging and anti-acne creams, concealers, moisturizers and powders (Ellis, 2013, p. 50). Baby boomers who are now aged between 48 and 66 are the first "refuse to age" generation - and they have massive spending power as well (Ellis, 2013, p. 51). That can be seen in high-class spas, where usually mane customers are in these ages group.

At the same time, there are some characteristics of spa-centres, that are time-less, and even innovative spa service design needs to incorporate these. For example, a swimming pool nowadays is considered part of the standard equipment (Schletterer, 2013, p. 2). But the offer of a variety of swimming pools – for hydrotherapy or underwater massages – can make this older trend into an innovative service.

Another one is linking the area of the resort with a specific set of traits. All destination marketers have an arsenal of tools to use in appealing customers. These tools have come to be known as the "Ps of marketing" which McCarthy first designated as the "4Ps of marketing" including product, price, place and promotion. Several authors have argued that the traditional 4Ps do not fit as well to tourism as they do for physical products. Morrison adds four other Ps (packaging, programming, partnership and people) to address the unique aspects of marketing tourism and hospitality services (Morrison, 2013, p. 72).

The Alpine region is considered a place for rest and calmness (Schletterer, 2013, p. 2). Hotel guests who choose the Alpine region as their destination want to experience refreshment for body and mind. This also shows the importance of looking at target groups' social backgrounds and their cultural conventions. This trend is caused by a stressful work environment. An important factor is the guests' desire to temporarily escape the humdrum of everyday life. Here it is important to offer efficient ways of relaxation (Schletterer, 2013, p. 2-3). A spa-centre can offer such relaxation, therefore it seems reasonable to assume that developing a spa-centre in hotel La Baita will be useful.

Guests in all times will choose a hotel that attracts them most. From the perspective of hotel development the first difference between chains and unaffiliated hotels is in the strong point. There is no standard starting point, but for unaffiliated hotels the development process typically starts with a site, which means that the city, the country and the economy in which the venue is located is determined (Ransley, 2004, p. 74). Usually customers pre-book for them the most appropriate accommodation place. Regarding the guests of the Alpine region, they are very well informed and spoil a wide product-range. As a result, hoteliers constantly have to look for new ways to create a sensation of well-being and relaxation. SPA hotels can stick out from the competition with a special product range and better expertise (Schletterer, 2013, p. 13). In general, the Alpine region is characterized by three forms of specialization (Schletterer, 2013, p. 3-4):

1. Hotels are built around a central theme – the architecture will be supported by specific accessories to convey special themes, such as nature;
2. Hotels focusing on a specific target group, and when developing a spa-center, it is crucial to define the target group meticulously in order to develop the necessary range of services;
3. Low-function hotels that can at the same time be boosted by providing a vast array of services elsewhere.

Hotel La Baita, as exemplified in detail in the next chapter, has chosen to follow the second form of specialization – by focusing on a specific target group of skiers/rich foreigners. That points to the need to target also all of their services, those already

offered and those still to be developed to this respective group, also taking into account the specialization of other hotels and customer expectations. Therefore, the different spa services in leisure hotels and spa trends theory will be taken into account when developing a new service design in case of La Baita. The thesis proceeds with a detailed overview of the case, a description of methodology, and an analysis of the data gathered.

2. RESEARCH ABOUT SPA SERVICE DESIGN IN CASE OF LA BAITA

2.1. Overview of leisure hotel La Baita

This chapter presents the case of hotel La Baita in detail, first, by providing an overview of the main characteristics, organisational structure, target groups, micro and macro environment at the hotel, and the sustainable activities of the hotel, based on the observation carried out on-site.

Hotel La Baita is situated in Italy, in City of Courmayeur, directly on the slopes in Plan Checrouit (1704 m). This location gives an excellent chance to the hotel guests - to enjoy the beautiful landscape and to go skiing in the morning. Hotel has an ideal location for skiing holidays with family or friends. The hotel is surrounded by beautiful nature, mountains, forests and breath- taking views of the Alps (Marmor, 2013).

Access to the hotel from the village is possible by the cable car from Courmayeur or Dolonne. Cormayeur Funivia is working between 8:30 till 24:00 and the Dolonne cable car from 8:45 till 17:00.

Hotel La Baita at the moment is a three star hotel with eight rooms (6 doubles, 1 triple and 1 family room that can accommodate six persons). All rooms have a balcony with panoramic view, bathroom with shower, safe, hairdryer and for the use of all the guests there is elevator, ski storage, restaurant (80 seats inside and 100 seats outside in the terrace), bar, terrace, and WI FI available in the hotel.

The vision of hotel La Baita is to be the first hotel in Courmayeur directly on the slopes, which offers variety of additional services such as spa, accommodation, restaurant, bar, and special events. As there are no other hotels that are located on the mountains and offer all above mentioned services, it gives them this unique opportunity and advantage

at the same time.

Mission of hotel La Baita is to build a spa with the purpose to meet guests' needs and expectations on the highest level. The hotel's aim is to build customer loyalty and make close relationship between employees and the guests. Hotel La Baita goal is to become one of the best hotels in Courmayeur, offering variety of professional services to satisfy every guest and exceed their expectations.

At the local level, hotel La Baita has plans to start collaboration with other hotels and also offer opportunities for locals and their customers. It plans to offer to enjoy local Aosta Valley food and wellness service facilities in the mountains, in the middle of ski slopes. It plans to develop also a service for young people in collaboration with local pubs and clubs by offering after-ski entertainment services with dinner and afterwards downhill skiing at night. This is an example of targeted service design, as the prospective services are planned according to the groups of clients already present, as well as those still to be attracted. However, the size of the hotel at the moment is not suitable for large groups of younger visitors.

Furthermore, the offer of services needs to be seen in the context of pressures created by seasonality. The peak season for the hotel is from late November until early April. The rest of the time the hotel La Baita is closed for visitors. If additional facilities and services would be developed, other natural resources of the mountain area such as the fresh air could potentially be used to attract customers also during other time periods. However, a careful cost effectiveness analysis should be carried out for that. This is a task not performed in the framework of this thesis, but can still be suggested to the management.

The organisational structure of hotel La Baita changed recently, when Plan Checrouit Ltd bought the hotel from its previous owners on the 13th January 2012, with a valid renting contract until 29th September 2012. La Baitas new owners started to manage the hotel - restaurant on the 1st December 2012. In fact, the current organisational structure is not yet fully developed due to these changes, despite the fact that it is important for proper functioning of the hotel.

As Triin Marmor, who owns and manages hotel, is responsible for all operations in hotel. At the moment under her supervision there is staff, that consists of twelve international employees: in office - assistant of manager, who helps to operate hotel; in the bar – two bartenders; in the restaurant – two waiters; in the kitchen – three chefs and one dishwasher; one housekeeper and one head of household. Each staff member needs to give reports to his/her manager regarding their duties (see Figure 1).

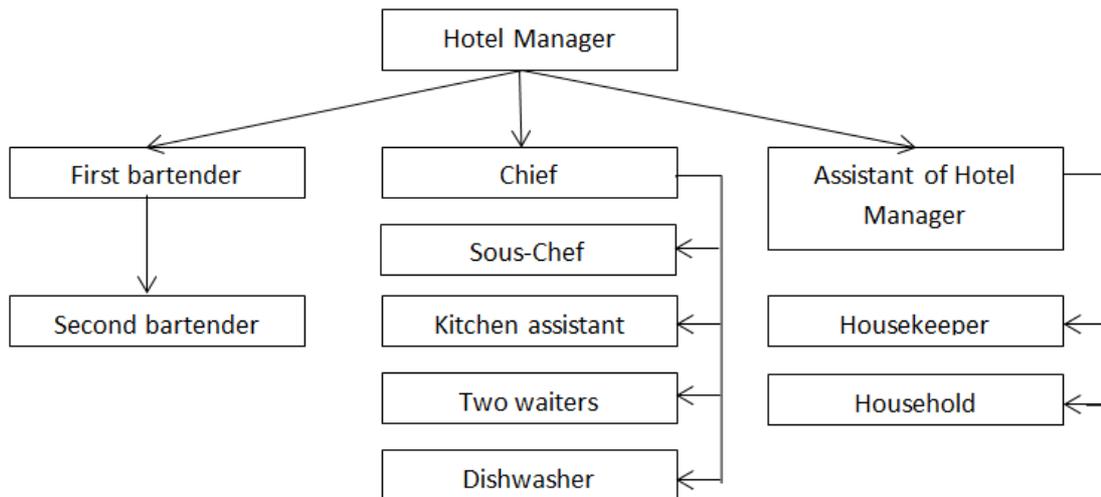


Figure 1. Organizational structure of Hotel La Baita (created by author)

Situation in the macro and micro environment has been changed as well and also will be changed in future when new project of La Baita will be finished. Macro environment includes all external influences with which the business comes into contact and which do not fall under its direct sphere of influence. They are largely out of the control of the business, and often require changes in operating, management, production, and marketing. These factors are political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal (Kroon, 1995).

Political macro environment factors include tax policies, government-issued safety regulations, the availability of government contracts, and even shifts in the controlling political party. In Italy, it is very important to obtain a wide range of permits for construction¹, as, if the laws are not adhered, the owner will face heavy fines and there

¹ Construction permits- dealing with construction permits takes an average of 13 procedures and 231 days, at a cost equivalent to 253.6% of income per capita. List of construction permits: to obtain

is also possibility that the business is closed. No specific rules are applicable to hotels (CMS, 2008, p. 36). However, the process is very time-consuming, and needs to be taken into account when designing a new service in order to assess the losses associated with close or partial opening of the business.

Economic policy in the organization depends on competitor prices regarding accommodation in the town and restaurant price level up the hill. In the future, this policy will be depending on nature of economy, trade cycles, economic resources and also of economical well being of loyal Courmayeur guests.

Social-demographic factors include changing attitudes, expectations and mores of society. Such as: age, sex, education level, income level, marital status, occupation, religion, birth rate, death rate, average size of a family, the level of education. In author's opinion, at the moment and also in the future this factor is not influenced by the target group, because the target group of hotel La Baita are high paying customers, business and famous people, men and women in different ages and social statuses, with or without kids, who seeks and appreciates high quality products and services.

Technological macro environment factors can influence business organization. In nowadays technologies, internet and communication development are important factors for most of the businesses. At the moment the hotel uses internet sources to communicate with potential customers and partners. In the future when the spa will be reconstructed, a spa reception tracking program and centralised control system will be installed, allowing to manipulate with all spa infrastructure like cleanness and temperature of pools, temperature of saunas and moisture of wellness areas.

Micro environment factors are close to a business that has a direct impact on its business operations and success. The microenvironment consists of stakeholder groups

clearance by the fire department (60 days), to present a Starting Activity Declaration ("Super-D.I.A.") to the municipal office (30 days); to file the structural projects at the municipal office (1 day), to hire an independent professional to test the structure (1 day), to file the Certified Notification of Starting Activity ("SCIA") at the fire department (1 days); to register the building at the cadaster (5 days); to apply for the occupancy certificate at the municipal office (60 days); to receive on-site inspection by the fire department (1 day); to apply for water and sewerage connection (1 day); to receive an on-site inspection and an estimate of installation costs of this connection (1 day); to obtain water and sewerage installation (20 days); to obtain a telephone connection (15 days) (World Bank, 2013, p. 80).

that a firm has regular dealings with. The way these relationships develop can affect the costs, quality and overall success of a business (Gillespie, 2007). Customer may feel that a particular supplier is more sympathetic towards them, or is speaking more directly to them, and therefore they will be more responsive and eventually more loyal to that supplier. The organization that fails to segment deeply enough on significant criteria will lose custom to competitors that do (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006). Obviously, the key to reach good sales statistics is a loyal customer and for each businessman one of the main tasks is to attract them and to keep them. In La Baita's case, in order to understand customer needs, the author of this thesis did a survey of customers that will be presented in the next section.

Employees are the most visible side of a company. For this reason every company's employee should be professional, with relevant skills and experience is essential. Training and development of staff plays a critical role in achieving a competitive edge. At the moment La Baita's staff is not professional enough, and extensive training is required.

Hotel La Baita has many competitors, therefore its macro-environment is characterized by comparison and looking out for the activities of others. In the city there are many hotels and restaurants. Luckily, those hotels who have a spa already would not be competitors for La Baita in the future due to the fact that their spas are limited with treatment possibilities and space.

Suppliers provide businesses with the materials they need to carry out their business activities. A supplier's behaviour will directly impact the business it supplies. Firms must decide on issues such as who to use to supply them, on the responsibility it takes for these suppliers and on the terms and conditions it adopts. (Gillespie, 2007) At the end of year 2012, when new owners moved in the hotel La Baita's building, they were dependent on suppliers for bringing the furniture, kitchen appliances, dishes, cutlery, blankets, bathroom accessories etc. on time. In future, regarding spa facilities, company will depend of spa product and cosmetics suppliers.

Another challenge for the new management, along with the organizational structure and the environment characterized by dependencies and competition, is the positioning of

the hotel in the market. This aspect is also crucial for a successful competition policy. The vision and goals of the hotel outlined above already indicate the general direction. Positioning in the market is the process of the way in which organization differs from others. Similar organizations are competitors in their customer minds. At the moment, Hotel La Baita is positioning itself as a three star hotel with unique location and services. For the moment their exclusive selling points are location, after-skiing parties and “everything is possible” attitude for the customers.

As previously mentioned, hotel is located on the slopes, which gives a unique possibility to the hotel guests – to enjoy the scenic view in the morning and all day long, surrounded by snow. It gives hotel La Baita the advantage to make a specific positioning of itself in the market.

One of the main tasks for the management in case of developing a spa-center is to incorporate such a service in their unique profile and to ensure the accessibility of these spa treatments for foreigners and locals alike. Hotel La Baita would become attractive also as a spa facility, and not only as a skiing holiday destination.

Customers at hotel La Baita represent different societal groups. The customer mix is diverse according to demographic and psychographic characteristics as different ages, genders socioeconomic backgrounds, knowledge or experience, ethnicity, what makes up their customer profiles.

Courmayeur is an international famous skiing resort, but the place has an important role in the national level. Many years Courmayeur has been a popular place among the Italians for purchasing holiday homes. One of the reasons is the closeness and effortless access from the highway, from the industrial metropolis like Milano and Torino and skiing possibilities in wintertime. Courmayeur is the only ski resort where people can arrive only by using the highway instead of a mountain road, what offers the opportunity to reach it in shorter period of time than other destinations. Courmayeur has many loyal guests who come here every year from all over the world. There are many Italians from other cities and Swiss who rent villas or apartments for the whole season.

Tourism in this part of Italy is not very popular in the summer season due to seasonality

aspects mentioned above. In wintertime, the main attractions are mountains and skiing possibilities. The core attractions for tourists in the summer time are beautiful mountain surroundings and near by located thermal spa of Pre-Saint-Didier. This spa is one of the most well-known, best thermal spas in Italy. The water quality and its healing properties are the reasons, which help to provide high quality spa treatment.

Target market is specific group of potential clients and it is important to determine, which markets make the most sense for the business to target. It is also a group or segment to which a communication is being directed (Visocky O' Grady & Visocky O' Grady, 2009). That helps to design specific strategies and techniques to promote a product among its target market. At the moment, hotel La Baita's target markets are clients from Russia, England, Estonia and also Italy, who live outside of Valley D'Aosta. Regarding personal profiles, the main focus group of Hotel La Baita are different aged people, also ski school students and their parents/relatives who spend most of the time at the bar and restaurant. Unfortunately, accommodation at the hotel is not demanded at a high rate for now, but hopefully it will change in the future. Development of spa-services can serve as an additional attraction factor that could also increase the accommodation rates.

Author predicts that in the future, main target group can be changed to the foreign ski-holiday vacationers, who are seeking for high quality and outstanding services. For this target group, one of the brightest attractions to choose hotel La Baita instead of other hotels can be the new spa project development with unique spa facilities and appealing treatment offers in combination with accommodation. In the future, the new spa appears to add great value for the hotel La Baita. This new project will divide existing target group of winter sport enthusiasts into two different target groups. One is comprised of guests, who come to the mountain for the spa treatments and enjoyment of the natural environment, and the other group are skiing and snowboarding fans, which would love to relax in the spa after active day. Moreover, in the mountains of Courmayeur, it would be unique to use the spa services in the slopes, and not in the centre of the city. Also many skiers will appreciate the opportunity to go to the spa when the weather is not appropriate for skiing, and there will be no need to commute for other activities.

Nowadays, it is also important for customers that the service provider is sustainable, and

has introduced activities in order to protect and preserve the environment. Unfortunately, the management of hotel La Baita at present isn't thinking in sustainable way. Based on the fact, that after this season, "the old building of hotel La Baita will be demolished and in its place a reconstruction will begin, therefore it is not possible at present to predict the future plan of possible actions. However, the author of the Master thesis suggests following the respective criteria and acquire different eco-labels and quality standard certifications, as Green Key and ISO 9000 for leisure and tourism establishments. It will help to organise sustainable behaviour of the hotel, and serve as a quality sign for prospective customers. Eco- labels in hotels could attract more "green-minded" people, an increasing number of tourists.

Furthermore, the author suggests thinking about building's sustainability in the process of building new project. Most probably eco-friendly lights, light sensors, auto thermo regulators and other technical things of new innovations could be more expensive at beginning, but afterword's investment will pay back. It is important to by and use the newest technologies as ventilation and cooling systems in order to save the energy. Another good idea is to put the solar collectors on the roof to reduce costs for the building heating. Such incentives should also be taken into account when developing separate services. The following sections present the research carried out in order to provide the background for service design of a spa-centre.

2.2. Research aim, methods and samples

Research design is one of the key issues in the design of qualitative research, the extent to which methods should be pre-structured (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). This thesis is concentrating on qualitative research; observation and structured interviews have been done. Research question is - what kinds of Spa facilities are missing in Courmayeur in order to satisfy customers' needs and expectations during their stay in this particular destination? The answer to this research question was the main driving force behind this research.

The aim of the Master`s thesis is to analyse the Courmayeur hotel spas – to investigate present available services and then make suggestions regarding present situation and research to hotel La Baita owners regarding service design in their hotel in order for them to develop a competitive service package to be able to offer something different, of high quality and attractive to tourists.

The research has been done in city of Courmayeur, Italy from the 1st of December 2012 till 1st of March 2013. Author of Master`s thesis did research during practical training in study process of Tartu University, Pärnu Colleague. Practical research has been started with Courmayeur hotel observation, which continues with structured Interviews. Afterwards are carried out results.

In order to develop a clear strategy for hotel La Baita during its reconstruction process, an analysis of its competitors is necessary. Market research or competitor analyses can help to establish whether there is sufficient demand for new facilities or what sort of facilities should be developed. It can help to decide how the new facilities or service would be perceived, and even how much clients would be prepared to pay for them (Briggs, 1997).

According to (Laws, Harper, & Marcus, 2003), data analysis is a process of taking things apart and putting them together again. In this Master thesis qualitative data analysis is used. When a lot of data is collected, it can be a major undertaking to get on top of the information is collected. Qualitative data are records of observation or interaction that are complex and connected; they are not easily redacted immediately to numbers. (Richards, 2010) states that qualitative research is usually used because the question asked does not clearly indicate what data is needed to reach the answer. This does not mean that observer doesn`t know what she is doing, rather that she is adopting a flexible approach to a situation to be understood. To turn an everyday life situation into qualitative data, one can`t forget that important step is to record observations. To make this process more structured, the author of Master thesis generated an observation protocol, which was guiding the research process. Observation protocol of Hotel La Baita is included in Appendix 1.

The observation technique can be used to identify how clients use a service. From

observing how clients behave many different service improvements can be considered. It is important and helpful if observation is based on objectives or specific questions (Moritz, 2005, p. 195). Qualitative observations are observations that indicate the quality of the subject (Veal, 2011). Fundamentally, qualitative researchers seek to preserve and analyse the situated form, content, and experience of social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 18). The author of this thesis surveyed and analysed all hotels, which have Spa facilities in this area. The author followed the technique of structured observation, where results typically recorded on a form and analysed. The process of observation was recorded in the observation protocol by talking notes, and afterwards performing a comparative analysis. Structured observation methods can be used to estimate the level of use of informal recreation areas, in this case, hotels and hotels with spas.

Following (Biggam, 2011), furthermore, qualitative research is linked to in-depth exploratory studies, where the opportunity for “quality” responses exist. Qualitative research involves studying “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. According to (Visocky O' Grady & Visocky O' Grady, 2009), qualitative research is a research approach that measures objective data such as variables, quantities, and measurements, and analyses the relationships between collected information sets. In general, quantitative research answers the *how* questions, whereas the *why* questions are left to qualitative research. Of course, the reality is that it is rare that professional researchers, and dissertation students for that matter, stick to only collecting and analysing either quantitative or qualitative data (Biggam, 2011).

The Qualitative approach- observation research method was selected by alleges to explore range of offers as good is possible. It gave to Master`s thesis author to see all hotels with spa and afterwards to analyse the existing spa strengths and weaknesses. This data paved the way for better project of new spa service design. Which will skip all the weaknesses author met in local Courmayeur spas.

Without Courmayeur hotel observations, author of Master thesis also carried out survey interviews, involving tourists. A survey is a tactic for collecting quantitative information by asking participants a set of questions in specific order. When a

researcher administers the questions it is called a survey or structured interview (Visocky O' Grady & Visocky O' Grady, 2009). According to (Richards, 2010) an interview is the most ordinary and the most extraordinary way of research at the same time, how researcher can explore someone else's experience. It is as ordinary as conversation. Survey interviewers are required to do more than simply ask questions and record answers. In general, they must complete four tasks, as asserted by (Singleon Jr. & Straits, 2012). First - implement a procedure for locating or contracting respondents, secondly - persuade respondents to participate, thirdly - collect information from respondents, and fourth - edit and transmit the data. Interviews are common in face-to-face surveys to randomly selected individuals from randomly chosen households from randomly chosen blocks within sampled countries or metropolitan areas.

Regarding the fact that this case is in Italy, and particular service design of hotel will be oriented to the visitors of the city, which includes people from other places in Italy and people from other countries, the author made selection of places in several rounds to interview people on the streets in random places. In order to "catch" the people who would be interested in and would have time to give interviews, author selected three different places. First choice was outside of the different city hotels, where people were waiting their friends or ski bus, or just came out of the hotel spa. The second place was ski lift-that goes up around fifteen minutes and people are not busy with other things at that time. And the third place, where interviews were made was up the hill, near by Hotel La Baita, where there is an artificially made relaxation area for skiers. According to (Singleon Jr. & Straits, 2012), survey interviewing is generally synonymous with standardized interviewing. For this reason, the author of Master thesis prior to interviewing made an interview question guideline, which can be seen in Appendix 2.

Interview as second research method, which supplement observation method with in-depth information author of Master's thesis chose with purpose and this selection is not unreasonable. Questioning was not chosen as research method regarding the fact that in particular environment it was not possible to give questionnaires to feel up to tourists. Influencing factors were- cold, snow, rain, people unwillingness to bear questionnaires, inappropriate spot for completing questionnaires, etc. Also master thesis author did not have any access to Courmayeur tourist e-mail addresses to have possibility to send to

potential customers questionnaires throe web sources. Interviews as “face to face” method was chosen as most appropriate method to have communication possibility between researcher and interviewee. The reason and strength at the same time to choose survey as research method is to get out the needed information from potential future service users and at the same time specify particular information if it is needed. Afterwards possibility to analyse collected information based on provided information from interviewees. In the future this analysed data gives possibility to satisfy customers with services who fully satisfy their needs and expectations. Unfortunately the weakness of this method was partly people disinclination to have conversation with “stranger” and this fact gave to researcher limitations.

2.3. Analysis of the observation

In order to perform a comparative analysis of the hotels, author of this thesis investigated how many hotels are in Courmayeur and how many of them have spa facility areas. Researcher was collecting information about at least three star hotels, which were visited during observation. Regarding the fact, that at the moment Hotel La Baita provides three star service, but in the future, when the new project of the hotel will be approved and hotel will be rebuilt, hotel management is aiming to get four star service. Appendix 3 shows the list of hotels that were observed. The following analysis includes twenty-two observed hotels in Courmayeur city and cities near by. 15 of these hotels have spas and one - Pre-Saint-Didier – has a thermal spa, which is most well known Spa centre of all Valley D’Aosta. Researcher believes that it was important to observe this spa centre to get a clearer view of destination’s offered facility variety.

In Appendix 3 there is the list of all chosen hotels in the area in which the researcher was interested. Afterwards author of Master thesis went to visit all listed hotels, to discover if they provide spa facilities. Some of the hotels were not providing these facilities. In case the visited place had a spa, the researcher kindly asked to show that area if it was possible. In some cases regarding hotel policy the spa area was only for the hotel guests. In some cases, when it was possible to visit spa area without staying in hotel, researcher used this possibility and paid access ticket to see and observe the

offered facilities. If the hotel La Baita wants to extend the range of their guests, it can be suggested to create a spa accessible also to those not staying in the hotel upon purchasing an entrance ticket.

In Valley D' Aosta there are more than 40 three-star hotels, and the researcher made a selection of them which to visit regarding level of service quality and location. Based on these criteria twenty-three hotels were chosen. Below, a comparative analysis of sixteen hotels with spa areas of twenty-three visited hotels in total is carried out. An overview of the comparative analyses is showed in Appendix 4.

In total, sixteen spas were visited with different service quality levels and different locations in the Courmayeur area. Most of the spas have been visited and observed from 9:00 till 14:00 regarding the fact that morning and afternoon is a quiet time for local spas. Receptionists requested that to avoid unnecessary disturbance of the guests during their spa visits. Two of the spas (Mont Blanc Hotel Village and Pre-Saint-Didier Thermal Baths) were visited later in order to make more detailed observation.

Most of the time arriving in the hotels was very nice and pleasant. From the outside, hotels were cleaned up and it was nice to enter them. None of the observed hotels had bad smells, or issues regarding cleanliness. Only in Pilier D'Angle fragrance of lavender was observed. Usually the first impression of the hotel interior was not replicated in spa areas; unfortunately, it changed and in some cases the expected level of the service was not reached. Completely different experience was in Pre-Saint-Didier Thermal Baths complex, which from outside looks very impressive - two big buildings, wild garden with many hot pools and two garden houses where different saunas are located. Nice surrounding - from one side it is located near by city and from other side at the feet of Mont Blanc mountain. Everything looks very stylish and modern, one can feel a light, pleasant vanilla aroma, which most probably is from candles - they were located in entire reception to make cosy atmosphere. Hence, the impression from the outside and the reception in the last spa matched the spa experience itself also.

In most of the hotels, which has spas, spa reception is not separated from the hotel. First of all, researcher met the hotel receptionist who showed around the spa area by himself to the observer, because he/she controls access to the wellness area for visitors as well.

In cases when hotel had a separate spa reception, spa staff showed spa facilities to researcher. In most of cases it was convenient, except some times when receptionist was not able to speak English.

Most of the cases, the impression about personnel was based on his/here language skills. Unfortunately, in Italy there are many locals who work in tourism field, but do not speak English. Based on that and also service quality level, there are many hotel staff members who left an impression that they are not professionals and should improve their knowledge in this field. Of course, there are also many people who work in tourism field and already know high quality importance and are well-trained professionals, who know their job and do it with the highest sense of responsibility. They proved that they are knowledgeable in all questions related with their hotel spas and service quality standards, as in the case of Grand Hotel Royal e Golf when office employee of the hotel gave the observer detailed information regarding their spa and its facilities or in the case of Hotel Croux-Meeting when despite the fact that the hotel receptionist was busy, he showed the wellness area to the researcher and spent his time in conversation with the observer.

It has been observed that most of the spa areas are located on the hotels' ground floor. According to information which the researcher got from staff members in visited hotels during spa visits, spas were not planned during the time when hotels was build, but instead were introduced in already built hotels. Hence, these facilities were located in the area of the building that was still available for new service development. It means that spa service design was done in the recent years after the spa popularity grew and more customers expected such services from these hotels. After a comparison of the hotels, the author of Master thesis can state that those spas that are located in buildings' first and second floor usually are bigger and have been planed earlier than those spas that are located on the ground floor.

Almost all the spa interiors have been made in natural and light colours. Hotel Crista et Duc spa interior is simply made in light colours where artificial lightening is used due to the fact that it's located on the ground floor of the hotel. In the same reason is behind the fact that Hotel Pilier D` Angle spa area is decorated with traditional Italian nature motives as stone, wood and light colours. Only in the case of Grand Hotel Royal e Golf

a lack of cosy feeling was observed because of small and dark rooms, and because the style of the spa did not match with hotel interior. In two hotels - Pilier D` Angle and Hotel Svizzero, hot tub facility were observed, which usually is very popular among spa visitors. In Thermal Spa of Pre-Saint-Didier outside thermal baths were observed, and a hot tub was not provided. In three cases - Pilier D` Angle, Mont Blanc Hotel Village and Pre-Saint-Didier “refreshment corners” were observed, where spa visitors can have a glass of water/juice, cup of herbal tea, fruits, etc.

Overall Mont Blanc Hotel Village has the biggest five star spa in all Valley D`Aosta, as it has enough space enrol approximately thirty clients simultaneously. Author found out that all the wellness area is divided into five parts: changing room area, sauna part, swimming pool part, outside pool area and the largest and most interestingly arranged part of the spa - “the cave”, where one can hear sounds resembling the flow of water. Pillier D` Angle has the biggest three star spa with good quality body treatment offers and excellent service quality. Also this spa is big enough and can enrol approximately fifteen clients simultaneously. In comparison with other local spas, these two hotels have unique selling points, as their area of spa is bigger than others.

One can see and note visually that in abovementioned hotels the spas were already included in the project of the hotel before its construction. Pre-Saint-Didier Thermal Spa surely is the biggest, best known, most recognizable and most capacious spa in all Valley D`Aosta. This spa is rather a complex of different water and body treatments.

In five cases of sixteen, spas, which were located in hotels, were available for all interested customers. It is important to note the fact that these spas were the biggest in all of the area. Exception was Hotel Pavillion, which had a lot of space, but it was open only for the use of hotel guests. Eleven spas from those analysed, which are located in Courmayeur hotels, provide spa treatments only for their guests.

From sixteen observed hotel spas, in eleven cases treatment cabinets were observed. In hotels as Grand Hotel Royal e Golf, Mont Blanc Hotel Village, Villa Novecento, Pilier D` Angle, Hotel Svizzero and Pre-Saint-Didier Thermal Baths several treatment rooms were observed where different body treatments rituals took place. In most of the hotels, those who are interested to have a body or beauty treatment are asked to pre-book the

procedure at least 24 hours in advance due to the fact that therapists are not in the spa if they do not have set appointments.

In spas that are located in Grand Hotel Royal e Golf, Mont Blanc Hotel Village, Gran Baita, Pillier D` Angle and of course Pre-Saint-Didier Thermal Baths, one does not need to make an appointment in advance, as therapists are available all the time and prior request is not needed. In other hotels as Hotel Crux, La Grange Meuble, Madison Saint Jean and Hotel Tavernier any treatment cabinets were not observed, most likely explained by space limitation in spa areas.

Despite the fact that relaxation area is required in the spa, in ten cases any relaxation corner or separate room was not available for this purpose. Only in six spa areas of hotels as Grand Hotel Royal e Golf, Mont Blanc Hotel Village, Gran Baita, Hotel Pavillion, Pillier D` Angle and Pre-Saint-Didier Thermal Baths relaxation areas for spa visitors were observed. In Pillier D` Angle and Pre-Saint-Didier Thermal Baths there were several individually decorated relaxation areas, where it was possible to have a light drink, sleep or listen to soothing music depending on customer needs and desires.

Customer observation in spas was also performed. Average time they spend in spa areas is two hours. In Crista et Duc, Mont Blanc, Villa Novecento and La Grange time of visits was shorter because of the fact that these spas have a limited variety of facilities, for example, in the case of Mont Blanc Hotel only a sauna facility is available. Most often observed facilities in Courmayeur spas are sauna, steam bath and jacuzzi, and these are also the most visited facilities in spas regarding that fact. In the two cases when hotels Pillier D` Angle and Hotel Svizzero have outside hot tubs, these facilities are the most used in these spas in addition to above-mentioned. In cases as Mont Blanc Hotel Village and Pre-Saint-Didier when spa is unique by itself, visitors spend there more time and use all before unseen facilities. In these two cases, sauna and steam baths have been visited less often than in other spas. That means that if the spa has a unique selling point or specific characteristic, it is the main attraction for customers and guests.

The author of Master thesis can say that it is worth to visit spas and choose accommodation based on the fact that the respective hotel offers spa facilities in hotels as Mont Blanc Hotel Village, Wellness Centre of Aubergine de La Maison, Gran Baita,

Hotel Pavillon, Pilier D'Angle, Hotel Svizzero, Hotel Tavernier. This suggestion is based on their specific characteristics, level of quality in service design and interesting offers. It is possible to visit Hotel Pavillon, Hotel Svizzero and Hotel Tavernier spas only for hotel guests. In observer's opinion, Hotel Svizzero has one of the best wellness spa examples in Courmayeur, regarding level of service quality, personal attitude to each customer and romantic atmosphere as fireplace and many candles, which are located around the entire spa. Most probably this hotel, which is located in the city centre of Courmayeur, will be one of the biggest competitors for La Baita's future hotel and spa.

Pre-Saint-Didier Thermal Baths are highly recommended to visit for all Valley D'Aosta visitors and they will be impressed with the high quality of services and impressive range of offers. Hotels as Grand Hotel Royal e Golf, Crista et Duc, Mont Blanc, Villa Novecento, Hotel Berthod, Hotel Crux, La Grange Meuble and Madison Saint Jean are not worth to choose as accommodation for those vacationers who are seeking for good, nice and cosy spa facilities in their accommodation place. These hotels will not satisfy their expectations, due to unprofessional service design, limitation of space and narrow range of offered facilities.

Summary of observations from the comparative analysis:

1. There are a lot of hotels in Courmayeur that do not offer spa facilities for their hotel guests;
2. Those hotels, which have spa facilities, only in rare cases offer to use them to the non-hotel clients;
3. At the moment, almost all spa areas in the hotels analysed are made after the hotel was built- meaning that spa areas are limited in space and usually located on the ground floor of the hotel;
4. In these cases, the usually offered facilities are sauna, steam bath and jacuzzi only;
5. Most popular facilities in hotel wellness areas are sauna, steam bath and jacuzzi due to the fact that they are most available;
6. In some situations gym facilities are available as well and they are not separated from spa facilities, causing a clash between the two atmospheres;

7. It is better to have less facilities in the spa area, but to keep them in order;
8. In rare situations, spa areas have a separate receptionist who is a well-trained professional;
9. For a hotel that has a spa, it is important to leave a good impression on customers in order to have them return;
10. There is still is a market niche in Courmayeur for a well design spa or wellness centre in a newly built hotel where the wellness area would be brand new and meaningfully designed;
11. There is not any spa that is located in the mountains in Courmayeur yet.

The researcher made observations regarding available spa facilities in Courmayeur city hotels. These observations will help designing Hotel La Baita's future spa project by confirming the idea that building a brand new hotel with unique facilities in unique location is a plan that will make the hotel competitive in the area, as well as suggesting some aspects regarding service design, such as a separate reception and skilled staff. The next section presents the results of customer expectations survey.

2.4.The results and analysis of the interviews

While observation is a useful strategy to assess the current status of service facilities and to identify the needs in service provision, it can create a bias of institutional point of view. Therefore, the author of Master theses used also a survey and interviews to understand Courmayeur visitor needs in-depth. The researcher used qualitative interviewing based on a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix 3) "to create knowledge in the interaction between interwar and interviewee" (Hall & Hall, 2004, p. 117). As interviews have been structured, it consists of fourteen questions. Interview guideline was used in all interviews and answers to the questions were recorded in order to organize a more structured and accurate protocol.

The questions were already prewritten and structuralised before, in order to keep interviews in promised time frame and to get more structured answers. Interviewees could answer questions and make clarifications to researcher questions regarding the fact that interviews are a far more personal form of research than questionnaires. It is

something “face to face” that helped to understand tourist expectations much better, and to research the issue wider and deeper, because of personal communication and observation at the same time. Which could be not possible if researcher has been chosen questionnaires instead of interviews.

The aim of the survey was to get a clearer view of potential future customers of La Baita, to collect respondents’ opinion regarding observer issues of interest, namely, the available spa facilities in Courmayeur area, and to have the opportunity to clarify answers during the conversation. Weaknesses, which were met during the interview process, were language barrier, unwillingness of potential respondents to engage in research, lack of interviewee’s free time. This created some limitations to this stage of research.

Purposive sampling was done, where selected interviewed people were English-speaking tourists. Local Italians were not interviewed, based on fact that the main target group of the hotel is foreign tourists - skiing vacationers. Also places, where the interviews were done, were selected before regarding possibilities to catch people who would be interested in giving an interview to a stranger. Interviews were done in different places - next to visited spas, next to hotel La Baita, where it was possible to meet potential clients of the future spa, and some of the interviews were done on ski-lift track as well, in order to use the time when tourists aren’t too busy and could devote their time for a short conversation with the researcher.

In total the researcher tried to interview around sixty people of different age groups, different nationalities, and different gender. The researcher didn’t reach the expected level of responsiveness. Unfortunately, most of the time attempts to contact potential interviewees failed and they were not open to help. Only in the cases when observer had a chance to explain her task and the importance of the research, the addressed persons were glad to help and devote his/her time to researcher. From those attempts only seventeen led to successful interviews. Of these, four interviews were succeeded near hotels with spas, five of them were positive next to hotel La Baita, and seven of them were made during the time when a ski lift was used to get up the hill. Upon meeting the potential interviewees, researcher introduced herself and presented her idea and her research and its importance. What follows is an analysis of the interviews.

Most of the interviewees were familiar with Pre-Saint-Didier Thermal Baths, which is the biggest spa in all Valley D'Aosta as author of the Master thesis already described previously. Those persons, who lived in hotels where spa or wellness facilities were available, named those places as well. For example, women, who were interviewed next to the Hotel Gran Baita, could name two spas - first of all the spa in this hotel and also Pre-Sant-Didier Thermal Baths. In general, the author of this thesis can say that Courmayeur tourists do not have a lot of information about how many spas are available for relaxation purposes in the area or where they are located.

From seventeen people who participated in the interviews, the majority of sixteen persons stated that they are paying attention if the hotel has spa facilities when they choose accommodation in any destination. Especially important it is for winter vacation destination vacationers. One of the respondents noted that he is not searching accommodation based on availability of spa on it. However, if there is a nice wellness area, it is a positive point for this place, but it is not playing the main role in decision taking regarding accommodation. The author of Master thesis can sum up, that nowadays people are choosing accommodation for their vacations, based on the range of offered facilities in the hotel. Important is also the atmosphere of the hotel and high level of service quality for evaluating prospective accommodation. Even if some of the potential clients are not interested in spa facilities, as a primary need, the biggest part of interviewees appreciate this availability of additional services in their hotels.

Most of the people did not have strong opinion whether there is a need of additional services in hotel or not. It is due to the fact that they came to Courmayeur for skiing reasons, not because of particular hotel or spa. As a good benefit of location, some of the interviewees said that most probably, if there would be a new, high-class hotel with spa in this city, they and other tourists could evaluate it. Overall, eight persons didn't have an opinion regarding this question, six were thinking that Courmayeur for sure needs a new spa and it could be a good benefit if it would be located in mountains. Only three of the interviewees thought that there is no need of another spa, due to the fact that Pre-Saint-Didier Thermals Baths are close by Courmayeur city, and that this complex is big enough to satisfy needs of all tourists.

After the interviews, researcher saw that those tourists, who came to Courmayeur as a skiing destination, knew the Hotel La Baita for its big restaurant and the nice outside terrace in the middle of slopes. In total fifteen persons were familiar with La Baita .At the same time, only four persons knew that La Baita offers accommodation possibilities as well.

Only one person from all interviewees was not a “heat lover” and didn’t search his accommodation regarding availability of spa facilities, and mentioned that, as a good benefit of any hotel is a nice swimming pool. In general, all the other interviewees (sixteen persons) mentioned that for them sauna, steam bath or Hamam and jacuzzi are the primary facilities in spa area. Facilities as an outside hot tub, contrast walk or Kneipp bath and beauty treatments could be additional benefits of spa, and also no less important is the atmosphere of the place and its cleanliness; furthermore, a spa shouldn’t be crowded.

All interviewees during the interview mentioned that the factor, which stimulates their choice regarding a particular spa, is the service quality. What it means is that staff members of the spa should be highly trained professionals in their field. Receptionists of the spa should be knowledgeable to suggest particular treatments in different cases based on customer needs. Three interviewees mentioned that their expectations from the spa are to be pampered after the spa visit. In addition to the abovementioned variety of spa facility availability, spa should have good marketing in order to attract customers with unique and interesting offers.

Author during interviews listed a range of spa facilities as big pool, jacuzzi, steam sauna or Hammam, Finish sauna or dry sauna, herbal sauna, salt sauna and Russian Bania or wet sauna and asked to point out those facilities that he/she would like to visit during their spa visit. Researcher calculated that from all seventeen interviewees, all would use a big pool and jacuzzi, a steam sauna or Hammam and an herbal sauna would be used by sixteen persons, salt sauna was mentioned fifteen times, and sauna and Russian Bania or wet sauna would be used by thirteen of them. Author can sum up, that most visited areas are water facilities that are followed by Hammam and herbal sauna. Less visited would be sauna and wet sauna. In authors’ opinion, it is because the fact that dry

sauna is the most known spa facility and Russian Bania is not a familiar facility for interviewees or because of the high level of the heat in these facilities.

All interviewees already noted before, that they would like to visit these kinds of wellness facilities in different spas. As most visited and popular facilities are pointed out water facilities as big pool where is possible to swim and Jacuzzi where is possible to relax. According to the previous question of interview, to sum up that those spas, which have a wide variety of facilities are attracting more customers.

Regarding the variety of different body treatments, interviewees were questioned regarding massages, wrappings, facial treatments, peelings and mud treatments. According to the answers, the most visited body treatment is sport massage, which is followed by relaxation aroma massage. Only four women from all interviewees mentioned that for them it is important to have a facial treatment during their spa visits, ether it is cleaning of the face or a refreshing facial mask. Wrappings, peelings and mud treatments were not popular among the respondents. Some of the interviewees were very talkative and shared their opinions in addition to interview questions. Six of them mentioned that spas would be more attractive for them if they were providing beauty treatments as manicure and waxing.

From seventeen respondents only eight knew what a salt chamber was, and nine of them did not know what it means and its beneficial influence on the human body. That can be explained with the fact that they had not visited a spa that offered such a service. Those respondents who knew what a salt chamber was would be interested to visit salt chamber again in the future, but those who heard about this kind of facility for the first time, would like to try it.

In nowadays when people are able to pay more, and in most of the time they are in daily hurry they also expect that services for which they are paying will satisfy their expectations. Also in the cases when they want to visit the spa without any previous bookings and preparation, and the cost of service will include all necessary items such as towel, bathrobe, slippers, shampoos and other necessary items.

From the interviews, several preferential characteristics of a spa-centre can be derived, but also it can be seen that people are willing to try new services and would be interested in visiting spas that offer innovative or rare saunas or beauty treatments. Both the observation of offered spa facilities in Courmayeur and the interviews with tourists provides a useful ground for defining recommendations to hotel La Baita regarding a service design for their new hotel and the spa area in particular. Each of these methods adds important information to which is based new project service design. These recommendations are presented along with findings in the next chapter.

3. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR LEISURE HOTEL LA BAITA IN SPA SERVICE DESIGN

A successfully designed service is crucial for attracting new customers and preserving the current ones, as well as to be competitive among other service providers in the same geographical and service area. This chapter draws on the previous research, as well as observations and survey carried out by the author of this Master thesis, first, by outlining the strengths and opportunities of hotel La Baita, and, second, by listing recommendations for developing a new spa-service at the hotel after its reconstruction.

During literature review establishment, research author came up with finding that in new spa service design development process is very important to take into account theory. According to that, service design aims to ensure that service interfaces are useful, usable and desirable from the client's point of view and effective, efficient and distinctive from the supplier's point of view (Mager, 2009). Author did observation and interview researches to clarify offered spa facilities in Courmayeur and came up with suggestions what should be implemented in the new spa project in case of differentiation from competitors.

During the hotel observation and survey processes the author of Master thesis came up with the following findings, which fully answer to the research question "what kind of Spa facilities are missing in Courmayeur in order to satisfy customers needs and expectations during their stay in this particular destination?" It also addresses the service design of a planned spa-centre in hotel La Baita – its feasibility and predicted competitiveness.

Many organisations use a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis as the first step in developing their service design, because it is a relatively easy process, and at the same time it is a useful audit and helps to focus the mind, but is only

effective if followed up by consideration of the points it raises and actual plans on how to use the findings. Carrying out an analysis using the SWOT framework helps to focus activities into areas of strength and where the greatest opportunities lie (Moritz, 2005, p. 223). Table 1 contains the main conclusions of the SWOT analysis.

Strengths (internal origin)	Weakness (internal origin)
<p>Natural environment; fresh air; good position (located on the slopes); only hotel in the mountain area of Courmayeur; has local business partners, who know the local situation; already known as hotel; plenty of extra services- has restaurant, has bar to offer innovation and good services, organizing after ski parties; from staff- positive and “everything is possible” attitude.</p>	<p>Poor homepage; isn’t visible advertisements in town and on web; seasonal staff, staff with only Italian or only English language skills; seasonality; high operational costs; getting credit for investment is difficult; to offer variety of services in one structure, in town is other hotels with spa and wellness facilities; in influence of weather, construction works will be disturbed and planned terms are not going to be reached.</p>
Opportunities (external origin)	Threats (external origin)
<p>Technical changes; economic development; political-economical situation; new programs to promote the tourism; collaboration with Chamonix; collaboration with other tourism structures/ companies; easy access from the highway and not too far many airports.</p>	<p>Seasonality; environmental disasters; changes of political-economical situation; high competition; fast technical changes; climate changes; price increasing in the resort.</p>

Table 1. Hotel La Baita SWOT analysis (created by author)

Most of the Courmayeur visitors came to the city due to its closeness to skiing facilities in this destination, instead of choosing a particular hotel or spa as their vacation destination. Despite the fact, all interviewees were familiar with Pre-Saint-Didier Thermal Baths, which is the biggest spa in all Valley D'Aosta.

Based on observation data, luckily, there are no other hotels or spas, if we look from present plan perspective, which are located on the slopes in area of Courmayeur. Also there are no newly built hotels in Courmayeur, where place for spa or wellness recreational activities was planned during the time the buildings were build. That's the reason why most of spas or wellness areas are located in small, tiny rooms, usually on the ground floor in hotels existing already many years. This reason gives the unique possibility to introduce a new service – spa facilities – in the unique location of hotel La Baita. Owners of La Baita realize it, and want to use this fact to develop the new service as good is possible. At the moment, when the hotel still has its old look, there are many competitors in Courmayeur city offering accommodation and other restaurants up the hill, that might distract the owners of La Baita from planning the future and take all their attention to decrease their competitiveness in the area today. Reference to the theory by (Polaine, Lovlie, & Reason , 2013, p. 23) one of the main ideas is to satisfy everybody, not only those for whom it is directly intended and it will be one-step forward competitors.

Already in the next season, when the new building will be completed, they will start to operate with services as accommodation, authentic local food restaurant, a nice bar with a professional local bartender, cosy atmosphere, after-ski parties and other services that give a lot of positive emotions and unforgettable experiences to many customers already now. As opportunity and at the same time threats could be the technological changes and different other changes in city, which could affect the development of the new project.

At the moment, La Baita's target groups are clients from Russia, England, Estonia and also Italians, who live outside of Valley D'Aosta. The author of Master thesis sees that the already existing target group could be changed to the foreign ski-holiday vacationers, who are seeking for high quality and outstanding services and could be divided into two other target groups. The first target group's intent is to come up to the

mountain with their family and friends to spend some quality time and relax instead of skiing. The other target group could be those people who are skiing/snowboarding and after an active day would like to relax in the spa.

At the moment more or less all the hotels, which are located in Courmayeur and the cities around, give a good first impression upon arrival. It is due to the fact that the outsides of the hotels are clean, and it gives the first impression of a tidy environment. However, when one enters the spa, one is confronted with the sad reality that most of the spas are located in small rooms, usually on the ground floor of the hotel. Only in rare cases it was observed that hotels had spas designed at the same time as the rest of the building, and fitted the overall feel of the hotel perfectly. Most usual spa facilities in all Courmayeur hotel spas are sauna, steam bath and jacuzzi. In some cases gym facilities are available as well, but unfortunately then spa visitors can meet a problem of lack of space. In total the average time that is spent in spa areas is two hours.

Recently no new hotel has been built in Courmayeur that would offer spa or wellness and recreational activities. Based on results of interviews, the author of Master thesis can say that Courmayeur needs a newly built hotel with spa area and facilities. In future, one of most important spa unique selling points will be location such as mountains, interesting facility and treatment offers, outstanding service quality and professionally well-trained staff.

La Baita's owners believe that the new reconstruction project will develop hotel's facilities and the hotel can achieve four stars service level, as the new spa in the unique location will help to achieve customer expectations and needs. A salt chamber and salt sauna in combination with well design wellness area and highly professional service staff is going to be the signature of their spa treatments. These treatments are well known in Baltics and Scandinavia, but are not popular in Italy yet. As seen from the survey above, the visitors of Courmayeur area are willing to try such innovations, therefore the offer of these spa services can indeed serve as a unique selling point for attracting new customers. However, it will require additional effort to preserve the clientele.

Furthermore, the new building needs to follow the criteria of sustainability. Hotel spa service design could benefit from different eco-labels as Green Key and ISO 9000. Nowadays there are a lot of “green-minded” people who pay attention to sustainability in their own lifestyle and therefore also the services they choose.

Nowadays, also more and more people are seeking for accommodation during their vacations based on the range of facilities offered in the hotel. In Courmayeur, there still is a market niche for a well design spa or wellness centre in the newly built hotel with brand new designed wellness area. In none of the observed spas facilities as salt chamber and salt sauna were available. Therefore, there is a good chance in the future for some spa to use these facilities as signature services in combination with well designed wellness area and highly professional staff members.

Those spas that have an interesting variety of facilities are attracting greater customer influx. In Valley D’Aosta, there is not a hotel that provides services as accommodation, spa, restaurant and bar on the slopes. This gives a comparative advantage of hotel La Baita to take a competitive, specialised position in market.

The author of this Master thesis proposes the following suggestions to the owners of hotel La Baita:

1. To hire well-trained professional staff, even though costs could be a little bit higher. They will be able to give higher quality service to customers than beginners in this field and incomes of organization will grow, as all the people surveyed indicated this as one of the main criteria for choosing accommodation;
2. While hiring a more homogenous staff can facilitate team-building and management of the team, it is crucial that the staff members speak several languages, English being the minimum, in order to be able to assist the target group of the hotel – rich foreign tourists.
3. Development and training of staff members play a critical role in achieving a competitive edge.
4. Introduce unique and innovative services for this location, as it can help attracting customers if marketed purposefully.
5. Include salt sauna and salt chamber in wellness area, because these kinds of facilities are not available in none of the spa in all Courmayeur and cities

around. Also the fact that the spa will be located in the mountains and the air there is very fresh and healthy will increase the effectiveness of these procedures. Furthermore, these facilities, as well as the location should be used as unique selling points of this spa in marketing activities.

6. To install a regular swimming pool with additional hydro-massage facilities and cascade equipment.
7. To introduce other authentic body treatment offers such as Thai massage in order to stand out among competitors.
8. Following recent trends, it is wise to offer some facilities for men only.
9. To think about building sustainability questions in the process of the new project service design.
10. To install the newest technologies for ventilation and cooling systems during the hotel building process in order to save the energy. Another good idea is to put the solar collectors on the roof to reduce costs for the heating.
11. Try to get different eco-labels and quality standard certifications, as Green Key and ISO 9000 in order to create an image of a sustainable entrepreneur.
12. Establish a separate reception for the spa area in order to be able to react to customer needs and expectations immediately.
13. Even though the envisaged location for pleasure spa is the hotel ground floor, owners of the hotel should envisage a place for windows to get daylight into the complex as well.
14. Try to make a cosy atmosphere to differentiate from other spas and to give to La Baita's spa customers a unique and unforgettable experience.
15. Envisage a place for a "refreshment corner" in the spa area.
16. Separate the relaxation area from the rest of the spa to give the clients a possibility to rest in a calm environment.
17. When the new building will be finished, market it as a unique destination where human needs can meet their expectations in combination with leisure and recreation and high quality standards.
18. To suggest to the Courmayeur tourist office to do enlist and publish an overview of all hotels with spas in Valley D'Aosta, as at the moment this information is not easy reachable for potential customers.

In essence, hotel La Baita can maintain relations with existing guests and can also attract new ones after the reconstruction of the hotel, by maintaining the existing services and introduction new services and facilities. In the future, one of the most important unique selling points will be the new spa centre with attention-grabbing facility and treatment offers and outstanding service quality. Hotel La Baita will keep the previous qualities and introduce innovative services, altogether stimulating previous clients to visit it regularly and attract new clients, and with it also experiencing growth in profit. As this thesis did not address the budgetary aspects of introducing new services and facilities, it is also recommended that all the suggestions above are implemented with discretion and careful cost-benefit analysis.

CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to answer the following research question: what kinds of Spa facilities are missing in Courmayeur in order to satisfy customers' needs and expectations during their stay in this particular destination? The aim of the Master's thesis was to analyse the Courmayeur hotel spas- to investigate present available services and then make suggestions regarding present situation and research to hotel La Baita owners regarding service design in their hotel in order for them to develop a competitive service package to be able to offer something different, of high quality and attractive to tourists.

Hence, the first step of this study was to collect data on the available services, and hence a comparative analysis of 26 Courmayeur hotels and their spas in hotels was performed. It resulted in an overview of already available services, that helped to identify what services can still be developed in hotel La Baita in order to be competitive. This overview also helped to assess the level and quality of service in Courmayeur.

The core concept in thesis was service design. After a survey of scientific literature on service design and leisure it was clear that on definitional level, service design is similar to product development. In order to generate a new service, customer needs and expectations must be taken into consideration. Therefore, in the second step in the framework of this study, a survey of prospective clients was performed. Interviews were carried out with 17 respondents, followed by a summarizing data analysis that allowed identifying some trends and preferable services.

The outcome of this processes are suggestions for the service design in a reconstructed hotel La Baita. The main findings show that the existing spas in Courmayeur hotels have simple service design and facilities. Therefore, hotel La Baita has a chance to

improve the offer of spa services. Author finds that in the market there is still an open niche for a well design spa or wellness centre, which should consist from facilities as sauna, steam bath, salt sauna, salt chamber, swimming pool, jacuzzi, outside hot tub, separate relaxation area and a variety of body treatments to satisfy a wide range potential customer needs and expectations.

Nowadays it is a growing trend for spas to sell experiences instead of simple treatments. Furthermore, clients are getting more educated; their wishes and demands are constantly changing. Interior and variety of unique offered treatments are important factors in service design to attract different clients. Nevertheless, one cannot forget high quality and outstanding service.

Based on findings of the research, the author of this thesis provided suggestions to the owners of hotel La Baita regarding developing a new spa-service in the newly reconstructed hotel. These suggestions are based on the results of the study carried out in the area, and are rather conceptual. As this thesis did not address the budgetary aspects of introducing new services and facilities, it is also recommended that all the suggestions above are implemented with discretion and careful cost-benefit analysis.

Some of the limitations experienced during the research were a language barrier and the small sample for the survey does to unwillingness of vacationers to spend time on the conversation. The suggestion for next researchers, therefore, are to find a local guide to avoid difficulties regarding language barrier and to suggest the more relaxed venues where people are not in a hurry and can spare some minutes for the interview. Another option to increase the range of views available is to analyse the comments of previous customers on internet hotel booking sites. Also the research would have been easier, if the Valley D'Aosta tourism office had a list of all hotels in the area; besides, the lack of such list is an inconvenience also for the potential clients.

The research question was answered by providing a comprehensive overview of the hotels with spas and the available services there, and the overall aim to provide suggestions to hotel La Baita regarding their future development was reached by suggesting some recruitment strategies, as well as services to be included in the spa

currently being developed, such as salt sauna and salt chamber, as these services will give them a unique comparative advantage. This also needs to be marketed clearly.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Observation protocol (created by author)

Place..... Time.....

1) **ARRIVING:**

Describe the physical spot (first impression, environment- look, smell, architecture from outside and inside, etc.)

2) **MEETING PERSONEL:**

Describe professionalism of Spa receptionist (look, welcoming, spa description, explanations, knowledge about available treatments, etc..)

3) **GETTING IN THE SPA:**

Describe the physical spot (environment-look, architecture from outside and inside, etc.)

- Smells, sounds and lightening
- Saunas, pools and other spa facilities
- Cleanest and organization

4) **PEOPLE OBSERVATION:**

Average period of time people are spending in spa, how they are performing, their behaviours, etc.)

- Which facilities people attending/ visiting the most?

5) **GETTING OUT OF THE SPA**

What feelings this visit gave to me?

- Suggest or not to suggest this spa for others

Appendix 2: List of the Courmayeur hotels (created by author)

Nr.	Stars	Hotel name	Has a spa or not?
1.	5	Grand Hotel Royal e Golf	Yes
2.	5	Mont Blanc Hotel Village	Yes
3.	4	Auberge de la Maison	Yes
4.	4	Cresta et Duc	Yes
5.	4	Gran Baita	Yes
6.	4	Les Jumeaux Dipendenza	No
7.	4	Mont Blanc	Yes
8.	4	Pavillon	Yes
9.	4	Villa Novecento	Yes
10.	3	Berthod	Yes
11.	3	Courmayeur	No
12.	3	Shatush	No
13.	3	Crampon	No
14.	3	Croux	Yes
15.	3	Del Viale	No
16.	3	La Grange Meuble	Yes
17.	3	Meubles Laurent	No
18.	3	Maison Saint Jean	Yes
19.	3	Miravalle	No
20.	3	Pilier d' Angle	Yes
21.	3	Svizzero	Yes
22.	3	Tavernier	Yes
23.	SPA only	Pre- Saint- Didier Thermal Baths	Yes

Appendix 3: Interview question guideline (created by author)

Hello, My name is Santa Cabule and I am Wellness and Spa Service Design and Management student of University of Tartu. I would be thank full if you will share with me 5 min. of your time and answer to some questions related with Courmayeur and spas. This interview is confidential and I am not going to use individual answers, they will be generated and analysed for feedback to develop a new Spa in Courmayeur.

1. Do you know any spas in Courmayeur, please name them?
2. When you choose accommodation, do you pay attention if the hotel has spa facilities?
YES NO
3. In Courmayeur is need for one more spa, particularly in middle of the slopes in Mont Blanc skiing area?
YES NO
4. Do you know Hotel La Baita?
YES NO
5. What kind of facilities would be important for you that you would like to come and stay in this spa/ hotel?
6. What kind of saunas and other spa facilities you would prefer to visit?
7. What are your expectations from the spa?
8. Please, say if you would like to visit this kind of wellness facilities in the spa or not:
Big pool
Jacuzzi
Outdoor hot tub
Infrared sauna
Steam sauna (Hamam)
Finnish sauna (Dry sauna)
Herbal sauna
Salt sauna
Russian Banya (Wet sauna)
9. Witch of previous mentioned spa facilities is most important for you?

Appendix 3 continued

10. Please, say if you would like to visit this kind of body treatments in the spa or not:

Massages
Wrappings
Peelings
Mud treatments
Facial treatments

11. Which of previous mentioned body treatments is most important for you?

12. Do you know what is salt chamber?

YES NO

13. If in spa will be salt chamber, would you like to visit it?

YES NO

14. Is there anything else you would like to add? What?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix 4: Overview of comparative analysis (created by author)

Hotel	Stars	Location	Time	Arriving	Meeting personnel	Location of the spa	Getting in the SPA	Availability	Treatment cabinet	Relaxa-tion area	People observation	Getting out of the SPA
Grand Hotel Royal e golf	5	Courmayeur	12:00	Good first impression of antique style.	SPA receptionist should know English.	In the ground of the building.	Lack of cosy feeling because of dark rooms.	To everyone	Yes	Yes	Average time spent in Spa is 2 hours. Most used facilities are outside swimming pool, steam bath and fitness facilities.	SPA wasn't so good as expected.
Mont Blanc Hotel Village	5	La Salle	17:00	Very good first impression.	Staff members are well-trained professionals.	In the first floor of the building and outside terrace.	SPA area is very clean and big enough for all clients, has a snack corner.	To everyone	Yes	Yes	Average time spent in SPA area is 3 - 4 hours. Most visited areas are inside pool, outside Jacuzzi and "cave".	Time spent in SPA area was very enjoyable, will suggest to others.
Wellness Centre of Aubergine de La Maison	4	Entreve	10:00	Good and welcoming.	Meeting personnel is pleasant, professionals.	In the first floor of the building.	Small and cosy SPA area.	Only hotel guests	Yes	No	Average time spent in SPA area is 2 hours. Most visited facilities in wintertime is steam bath and on the summer time- outside swimming pool.	Have a feeling to come back to this hotel as guest.
Crista et Duc	4	Courmayeur	10:30	Good	Lack of professionalism and experience.	In the ground of the building.	SPA interior is simply made in light colours with artificial lightening.	Only hotel guests	Yes	No	Average time spent in SPA area is 1 hour and in that time all offered facilities was used.	Did not leave a good impression.

Gran Baita	4	Courmayeur	11:00	Very bad	Receptionist was unprofessional and unpleasant.	In the first floor of the building.	Modern, with separate spa reception, light interior.	Only hotel guests	YES	YES	Average time spent in SPA area is 2 hours. Most visited facilities- inside swimming pool and sauna.	In spite of the unprofessionalism, place is nice.
Mont Blanc	4	Courmayeur	12:00	Good	Nice and young English speaking receptionist shows spa area as well.	In the ground floor.	Limited with space, two finish saunas and one treatment room, yellow interior.	Only hotel guests	Yes	No	Average time spent in SPA area is 1 hour. Has two Finish saunas and they are not very visited, rare are booked massages.	Tiny spa, can't succeed guest needs and expectations.
Hotel Pavillon	4	Courmayeur	14:00	Good and pleasant.	Very kind hotel receptionist who also guided observer to see wellness facilities.	On the second floor.	Pretty much space in wellness area, has fantastic view to the Mount Blank mountain.	Only hotel guests	No	Yes	Average time spent in SPA area is 2 hours. Most visited facilities are big pool, Jacuzzi and sauna.	Left a good impression, good for swimming lovers regarding availability of big pool.
Villa Novecento	4	Courmayeur	15:30	Pleasant waiting at the hotel reception.	Responsible person for wellness area is professional physiotherapist.	On the second floor.	Spa area is combined with fitness facilities, which is not the best solution.	To everyone	Yes	No	Average time spent in SPA area is 1, 5 hours. Most used facilities are gym, steam bath and Jacuzzi.	Hotel is nice, but spa facilities should be improved.

Hotel Berthod	3	Courmayeur	10:00	Very Good	Owner of the hotel showed up everything to the observer.	Tiny relax area which is located in the first floor of the hotel.	Two separate rooms- spa and gym. Interior in white colour what makes this place cold.	Only hotel guests	Yes	No	Average time spent in SPA area is 2 hours. Most used facilities are Jacuzzi, sauna and gym facilities.	Visible that place is made in limited space, is not for wellness seekers.
Hotel Crux	3	Courmayeur	9:00	Very Good	Meeting with personal was pleasant.	Small wellness area, which is located in hotel's ground floor.	All area is in light yellow colour with some brown colour motives.	Only hotel guests	No	No	Average time spent in SPA area is 1 hour. Most visited facility of wellness area is steam bath.	Spa area did not left a good impression, quite dirty.
La Grange Meuble	3	Entreve	13:00	Very Good	Staff members are leaving good impression.	Tiny wellness area located on the ground floor of the hotel.	Wellness area has been built after hotel was built and it is noticeable.	Only hotel guests	No	No	Average time spent in SPA area is 1 hour. Most visited facility is sauna.	Spa is acceptable as one of the hotel services.
Madison Saint Jean	3	Courmayeur	9:00	Not good	Receptionist was not able to talk in English, is not professional.	Spa area, which is located in ground floor of the spa.	SPA area was made with purpose to attract more customers, but unfortunately, is not well organized.	Only hotel guests	No	No	Average time spent in SPA area is 2 hours. Most visited facilities are swimming pool with hydro massage and steam bath.	Spa area is good, but could be improved to increase level of quality.

Pilier D'Angle	3	Entreve	13:30	Very Good	Very pleasant, staff was professional and well trained.	Spa located in the first and ground floor of the building, has outside hot tub as well.	All area is decorated with Italian traditional motives as stone, wood and light colours. All around was felt the smell of lavender. Have a snack corner.	To everyone	Yes	Yes	Average time spent in SPA area is 3 hours. Most visited facilities are Jacuzzi, Turkish bath- Hammam, tropical shower and outside hot tub.	Leaves very good impression, forth to visit.
Hotel Svizzero	3	Courmayeur	11:00	Good, nice and very cozy place	Receptionist does not speak in English, she calls for owner and he is professional.	Wellness area of the spa is located on the first floor with access to yard.	Spa is cosy with interior in white and brown colours, has enough space, has outside hot tub.	Only hotel guests	Yes	No	Average time spent in SPA area is 3 hours. Most visited facilities are Hammam, dry sauna, and outside hot tub.	Forth to stay in this hotel for overnight to have a possibility to visit spa area.
Hotel Tavernier	3	Courmayeur	10:00	Confusing access in the building and finding reception.	Impression in meeting personal was very good.	Spa area is located on the hotel's first floor.	Being in this wellness area, gives a good and warm feeling to observer.	Only hotel guests	No	no	Average time spent in SPA area is 2 hours. Most visited facilities are Jacuzzi, steam sauna, and Finish sauna.	Service design is well done.

<p>Pre-Saint-Didier Thermal Baths</p>	-	Pre-Saint-Didier	16:00	<p>From outside this complex looks very impressive- two big buildings, wild garden with many hot pools.</p>	<p>Personnel is good looking, are professionals and knowledgeable.</p>	<p>Spa is located in two buildings and outside garden.</p>	<p>Everything is very organized and structured. Each of detail is thought out. The entire spa smells very nice.</p>	To everyone	Yes	Yes	<p>Average time spent in SPA area is 5 hours. All the facilities are very popular and used regularly- whirlpool baths, relaxing pools, underwater music therapy, saunas, etc.</p>	<p>Very good thermal spa, worth to visit it.</p>
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SUMMARY IN LATVIAN/ KOPSAVILKUMS

Šī maģistra darba tēma ir „Spa pakalpojuma izstrāde viesnīcai La Baita Courmayeur, Itālijā”. Maģistra darba izpētes jautājums bija „Kāda veida spa pakalpojumi jau ir pieejami un kādi trūkst Courmayeur pilsētā, lai apmierinātu klientu vajadzības un gaidas šajā tūrisma galamērķī?”. Maģistra darba uzdevums bija izstrādāt ieteikumus viesnīcas īpašniekiem jauna pakalpojuma – spa – izstrādei pēc viesnīcas rekonstrukcijas.

Viesnīca La Baita atrodas Itālijas kūrortpilsētā Courmayeur. Tai ir unikāla lokācijas vieta Monblāna kalna vidienē, kur piekļūšana iespējama tikai ar gondolu no Courmayeur centra, kas tās klientiem dod vienreizēju iespēju ziemas perionā būt pirmajiem uz kalna, baudīt svaigo kalnu gaisu un pasakainās ainavas. Vasaras periodā šobrīd viesnīca ir slēgta.

Šī viesnīca ir celta trīspadsmit gadus atpakaļ un no tiem divpadsmit gadus piederēja citiem īpašniekiem. 2012. gada 13. janvārī to pārpirka viesnīcas pašreizējie īpašnieki. Taču līdz tā pašā gada 29. septembrim tajā vēl saimniekoja iepriekšējie viesnīcas apakšīrnieki. Ar šā gada 1. Decembri tajā savu darbību sāka jaunie viesnīcas La Baita īpašnieki, kas, uzsākot aktīvu darbību viesnīcas atjaunošanas darbos atklāja dramatisko ēkas situāciju. Tā rezultātā jaunie viesnīcas īpašnieki nolēma, ka tai nepieciešama rekonstrukcija pēc iespējas ātrāk, lai rastu iespēju arī vasaras periodā veikt aktīvu darbību.

Rezultātā radās ideja, ka papildus viesnīcai un tās restorāna pakalpojumiem nepieciešama vēl cita pievienotā vērtība. Tapa ideja par spa centra iekļaušanu viesnīcas projektā, taču, lai spa centrs varētu existēt konkurences apstākļos, tam nepieciešams izstrādāt individuālu pakalpojumu klāstu.

Pakalpojuma izstrāde tika balstīta uz datu analīzi, kas tika iegūti novērojumu un interviju rezultātā. Novērojumi tika veikti tajās Courmayeur viesnīcās, kurās jau ir tiek piedāvāti pa pakalpojumi. Savukārt intervijas norisinājās trīs dažādās vietās - pie citām viesnīcām, gondolā, kas savieno Courmayeur centru ar kalna virsotni, un augšā kalnā, netālu no viesnīcas La Baita.

Novērojumu rezultātā tika secināts, ka pārsvarā visi spa centri atrodas viesnīcu pagabos, mazās un šaurās telpās, jo izveidoti pēdējo gadu laikā, kad aktualizējusies spa popularitāte. Pārsvarā jaunizveidotie spa sastāv no saunas un neliela džakūzī, retos gadījumos ir arī tvaika pirtis jeb Hammam un baseins. Ir arī izņēmumi, kad jaunākas viesnīcas savos būvniecības projektos paredzējušas iekļaut spa jau sākotnēji. Tad spa ir aprīkota mūsdienīgāk, un ir raksturojama ar augstākiem pakalpojumu kvalitātes rādītājiem. Interviju rezultātā tika secināts, ka spa apmeklētāji vērtību pievērš saunu dažādībai, kā arī svarīgs faktors ir džakūzī, baseina un āra baļļas esamība. Liela vērtība tiek pievērsta spa atmosfērai, tīrībai un servisa kvalitātei.

Maģistra darba rezultātā autors spa centra izveidē piedāvā iekļaut daļu no jau standartizētā spa ekipējuma: džakūzī, baseinu, tvaika pirti, kā arī ieviest inovatīvus papildus elementus, kas veicinātu spa unikalitāti, salīdzinājumā ar konkurentiem: āra baļļu, sāls saunu, Kneipp jeb kontrastceliņu un sāls kameru. Autors iesaka, regulārajam baseinam piešķirt papildus funkcijas, kā kaskāde un zemūdens masāžas, kas aktuālajam ekipējumam piešķirtu unikalitāti.

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Pärnu, **15. 05. 2013.**