



## The Potential Use of Thermal Springs in Trauma Pedagogy

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### Abstract

*Education and its link to the progress of knowledge in the field of sanitation and well-being became manifest when Europe's first university prototype was established, the Scuola Medica Salernitana. When it comes to addressing experiences of traumatic nature, trauma pedagogy has become an important tool when educating and empowering family and affiliated persons of individuals affected by trauma. While the reasons for an emotional and psychological trauma can differ, an increasing number of traumatic experiences are linked to war, flight, pandemic or natural disaster. The potential use of thermal springs in trauma pedagogy may considerably contribute to the task of gaining resilience. Additionally to the aspect of sanitation and well-being, the cultural factor can be considered as well when speaking of thermal springs and European spa tradition. Last year different spa towns were appointed as UNESCO world heritage as they were the catalyst for a model of spatial organisation dedicated to curative, therapeutic, recreational and social functions. This paper focusses on possible ways to use thermal springs in different cultural settings within the framework of trauma pedagogy.*

**Keywords:** *trauma pedagogy, thermal springs, (inter-)cultural factor of sanitation, mediative empowerment, education on well-being after trauma, academic mediation*

### The role of pedagogy and consultancy in gaining resilience after trauma

"Nowhere the world is safe.

"I attract evil.

"I am dead inside.

"I am going crazy.

"My marriage will fall apart.

"I will lose my job.

"No one is there for me.

"I will never be able to live a normal life again." [1]

This is how a traumatized person might feel day after day when coping with a traumatic experience of the past. A traumatic experience causes lasting mental injury and can lead to a range of significant to severe mental as well as physical disorders. A trauma has been described as event which is experienced as horrifying and extremely threatening, combined with subjective vulnerability to a threat. [2] A trauma may be experienced after exposure to events perceived as life-threatening, such as war, flight, disease or isolation due to the outbreak of a pandemic.

Traumatic situations can also be experienced indirectly, for example when assisting someone in need or through observation as well as when listening empathetically to traumatized persons. Secondary traumatization arises from the knowledge of a traumatic event that had happened in the life of another person. [3] This might be the case with journalists, aid workers or lawyers that need to cope with stories of traumatized individuals.

While trauma *therapy* specifically aims at *curing* a person from post-traumatic stress disorder, trauma *pedagogy* (or trauma education [4] or trauma consultancy [5] as is sometimes equally used academically in some parts) focuses on giving support to traumatized individuals especially by *educating and empowering* family members, friends and the people surrounding the individual suffering from trauma. It does so by providing useful information and links to verified testimonials in scientific and professional publications that might assist individuals or groups affected by trauma to better cope with the situation. The author of this paper, who himself, as academic mediator, previously worked under potentially traumatizing conditions [6] such as war [7] and later on continued to work as



university lecturer and pedagogue all throughout the pandemic, makes an effort to contribute to the topic by collecting results of intercultural, academic observation and grass-route research linked to the potential use of *thermal springs* in trauma pedagogy – as this special topic has not been extensively researched yet, particularly not in view of its potential benefit in developing countries in the aftermath of traumatic events or areas that show some cultural similarities to these countries. Information might also be beneficial to individuals suffering from secondary traumatization (such as journalists or aid workers as mentioned above [3]) or individuals who previously overcame the effects of trauma but are prone to re-traumatization [8].

### Sanitation and trauma pedagogy

The aspect of sanitation in trauma pedagogy has a two-fold significance: Regular activities embedded in local traditional culture can help an individual to regain stability. For example, in Moslem societies the topic of sanitation itself is closely linked to the religious tradition of a weekly full body cleansing [9] and is seen as integral part of the culture. This aspect of culture does also play a stabilizing role of resilience after traumatizing events as being evident when considering the recent history of Hammam Al-Nahhasin in Aleppo, Syria. This public bath located in the center of Aleppo had to close as it was in the middle of the battle zone during the war. When efforts were made to reopen it again, locals were glad to be able to regain a part of their normal weekly family routine [10].

Image 1

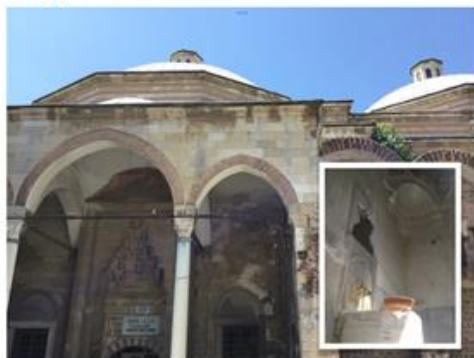


Image 2



Image 3



Image 1: example of public bath: Sokullu Mehmet Pasa Hammam, Edirne, Turkey, picture taken 2021

Image 2: Hammam Al-Nahhasin, Aleppo, Syria, picture taken 2009

Image 3: Loutra Edipsos public thermal bath, Evia, Greece, picture taken 2021

### Aspects of culture as well of mental and physical well-being

In some countries mostly with Muslim background, traditional public bath houses or hammams use water of local thermal springs. Visitors frequent these hammams both for the purpose of following the tradition of cleansing as well as therapy for relief from pain. Two of these hot springs developed as public baths will be introduced under the following subheading, both of them are characterized by the circumstance of having a medical institution in their vicinity linked to the thermal water. Yet, a number of other hot spring baths in different countries, sometimes located in remote villages, in mountainous regions or in the desert, can be found in some places that are mostly visited by the local population for seeking relief of various remedies. To what degree the use of these thermal springs bear a potential in trauma pedagogy is the subject of on-going intercultural research. A special focus in this research is laid on hot springs being frequented by individuals that live in areas that were previously hit by crucially traumatic events: It aims at collecting testimonials from these areas and using this local expertise for the benefit of a broader circle of individuals also suffering from traumatic experiences.

While the idea of sharing expertise interculturally can be traced back to the start of the Scuola Medica Salernitana [11], it is UNESCO's recently expanded list of world heritage which highlights the link of thermal springs – found in spa towns – to culture itself: „Whilst each spa town is different, all the towns developed around mineral water sources, which were the catalyst for a model of spatial organisation dedicated to curative, therapeutic, recreational and social functions. [...] ‘Taking the cure’, either externally (by bathing) or internally (by drinking, and inhaling) involved a highly structured and timed daily regime and a combination of medical aspects and leisure, including entertainment and social activities [...] as well as taking physical exercise within an outdoor therapeutic spa landscape. [...] Buildings and spaces connect visually and physically with their surrounding landscapes, which are



used regularly for exercise as a contribution to the therapy of the cure, and for relaxation and enjoyment.“ [12]

One particular aspect of culture, modern post-covid world traveling culture as it is, is found in the mentioning the Loutra Edipsos thermal springs on the Greek island of Evia in the New York Times in the current travel column: “52 Places for a Changed World. The 2022 list highlights places around the globe where travelers can be part of the solution“ [13], where community support for a ravaged island is helping locals survive an environmental disaster – and therefore should be added to this think tank of overcoming traumatic events in this very particular way connected to thermal springs.

### **The potential use of thermal springs to gain resilience after trauma**

As outlined earlier, examples of best practice of areas that were previously hit by crucially traumatic events form the actual groundwork of this subject of research. The customary, habitual or expected procedure or way of dealing with traumatic events in areas with thermal springs and their use in alleviating discomfort of traumatized individuals or communities will be set in focus while any cultural aspect will be of equal interest.

When it comes to balneology and the cure of psychiatric illnesses, it can be stated that “any improvement in the general condition significantly promotes the abatement of mental disorders“. [14] A guideline for gaining resilience while or after working in potentially traumatizing work settings underlines the crucial importance of getting enough proper sleep. Lack of sleep can be just as dangerous as being drunk or being on drugs. [15]

Therefore, three different goals can be pursued when it comes to trauma pedagogy and thermal springs:

1. Relaxation and calm, promotion of trophotropic processes, sleep promotion: In many so-called endogenous psychoses, as well as in schizophrenia or depression, there is an excessive level of tension.
2. In cases of illness characterized by exhaustion and general passivity, stimulating applications with a predominantly ergotropic effect can be considered. Choosing the right time of day is important for the mentally ill in order to support a healthy rhythm of life by alternating between activation and relaxation.
3. Training measures, i.e. dosed challenging tasks to improve condition. [14]

In the cases of Sokobanja and Novi Pazarska Banja, Serbia, medical facilities close to the thermal springs offer therapy plans for patients. The clinic of Novi Pazarska Banja in particular uses thermal water for the cure of nervous diseases.

The use of thermal water of Novi Pazarska Banja has a long history with travelers such as Turkish globetrotter Elviya Celebi and so its therapeutic relevance adds with a cultural one. A local Muslim community association runs the public thermal bath and makes the use of the water easily available to both men and women.

In the case of the lye mud baths near Burgas, Bulgaria, it was stated that their use is, among other benefits, useful for the cure of mental health problems. It is explained as followed: “The Black sea lye has a proven medical effect – it is used in the treatment and prophylaxis of diseases related to the overloading the locomotor system, skin inflammations and wounds, varicose veins and colds. It is recommended for arthrosis, arthritis, tendinitis, discopathy, joint dislocation and sciatica. [...] The essence of the healing mud treatment is a complex effect on the entire peripheral nervous system. Its thermal features expand the vessels and open new capillaries. Thus reducing swelling and pain, healing and wounding of scars, improving the metabolic and regenerative processes.“





## Intercultural mediation as tool for empowerment

In the history of European spa towns a particular “social character” can be mentioned, one that affected settlement planning, law and administration or social science. [16] Mediation in matters that affect communities has already been a tool for settlement for industrial companies, road construction projects or waste disposal. [17] Academic initiatives for the furtherance of thermal springs in remote communities for the benefit of traumatized individuals are thinkable to be paved by community mediation that include participation of all responsible authorities including nearby medical institutions.

Initiatives of a more grass-route type that might use intercultural mediation as tool for empowerment could be the use of social mediation structures for online self-support groups where experiences related to thermal springs are collected, translated, shared and verified for the potential use in trauma pedagogy.

Image 4



Image 5



Image 4: Novi Pazarska Banja, Serbia, pictures taken 2021

Image 5: Sokobanja, Turkish hamam, pictures taken 2021

Image 6



Image 6: Lye and Healing Mud near Burgas, Bulgaria, picture taken 2022



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