**Wellness spa hotel experience:
Evidence from spa hotel guests in Serbia**

Abstract
Purpose: Using the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework, this study develops and tests a model of the wellness spa hotel experience. The model proposes that experiencescape dimensions (sensory, functional, social, natural and hospitality culture) are important antecedents of guest satisfaction with a wellness spa hotel experience. The study also tests the relationship between satisfaction, wellness-induced wellbeing, experience co-creation and word-of-mouth.

Design/methodology/approach: Data were collected in the post-pandemic period, during September to November 2022 from 567 domestic guests who had stayed in a wellness spa hotel in Serbia.

Findings: Besides the social experiencescape dimension, all other dimensions of experiencescape (sensory, functional, natural and hospitality culture) were found to be positive drivers of guest satisfaction with a wellness spa hotel experience. The relationship between satisfaction, wellness-induced wellbeing, experience co-creation and word-of-mouth (WOM) was also supported.

Originality: This study emphasises on the role of experiencescape in concurrence with the antecedents in cultivating guest satisfaction with a wellness spa hotel experience, which further influences wellness-induced wellbeing, experience co-creation and WOM.

Keywords: wellness spa hotel experience, satisfaction, wellbeing, experience co-creation, word-of-mouth, Serbia

1. Introduction
The wellness industry is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 6.4% from 2021 to 2025, reaching a market size of $123.2 billion by 2025 (GWI, 2024). In the post-COVID-19 era, many hotels include wellness experience programmes as part of their offerings (Chi et al., 2024) – particularly spa hotels – as consumers increasingly seek out wellness experiences and prioritise their health and wellbeing (Mikulić et al., 2024; Pinos Navarrete and Shaw, 2021; Sthapit et al., 2023). In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the absence of international guests made it necessary for spa hotels to refocus on day visits by residents and domestic tourists (Rančić Demir *et al*., 2022). Towards the end of the COVID-pandemic, increased demand for wellness programmes rejuvenated the wellness hotel market, particularly those offering spa services to the domestic market (Ding et al., 2024; Mikulić *et al*., 2023). Thus, investigating the domestic tourist's market in the context of the repositioned role of wellness spa hotels was found to be increasingly important.

The growing demand for wellness hotel programmes has highlighted the need to further examine guests' wellness experiences, the place-based nature of experience (external stimuli) and guest response to the experience (internal stimuli) (Chi et al., 2024; Dillette et al., 2021). Thus, previous to previous studies, our study considers both perspectives (external and internal) to secure comprehensive approach of evaluating wellness spa hotel experience. Existing studies

have mainly used Bitner's (1992) servicescape perspective, that is, a physical setting incorporating different atmospheric cues that offer individuals with several sensory stimuli (visual, olfactory and auditory) to help create an overall perceptual image of the service organisation, in examining hotel guest satisfaction (Lian et al., 2024; Sthapit et al., 2024). However, departing from this perspective, Pizam and Tasci (2019) proposed the concept of 'experiencescape' based on a multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary approach. This concept overcomes the limitations of the servicescape perspective by extending beyond sensory (hedonic) and functional (utilitarian) aspects and drawing on the social, natural and cultural components of the specific consumption context (Mossberg, 2007; Pizam and Tasci, 2019) – in this context a wellness spa hotel. An experiencescape is a kaleidoscope of five different components; social, cultural, sensory, functional, and natural (Pizam and Tasci, 2019). Experiencescape is particularly important for its strategic role in effecting desirable customer outcomes (Line and Hanks, 2021; Mason and Paggiaro, 2012; Mody et al., 2017) and in the context of this study, guest satisfaction with a wellness spa hotel experience. Despite the importance of experiencescape in tourism and the hospitality industry, very few studies to date have linked experiencescape with guest satisfaction (Mody et al., 2017; Awan et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2023). Thus, focus of our study are most notable satisfaction outcomes such as wellness-induced wellbeing, experience co-creation and word-of-mouth (WOM). Regardless of the value of advancing from servicescape to expereincescape, our study also widens understanding of experiential setting by pointing out its capacity to trigger transformational experiences. Our standpoint is in line with recent Kandampully et al. (2022, p. 335) future research recommendation that "future [expereincescape] research should investigate transformative experiences", as wellness spa hotels setting certainly is.

By utilising the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model, this study incorporates alternative antecedents of wellness spa hotel satisfaction beyond Bitner's (1992) servicescape perspective and examines the relationship between experiencescape dimensions (sensory, functional, social, natural and hospitality culture) and wellness spa hotel satisfaction. The experiencescape components were chosen to secure the comprehensive insight into wellness spa hotel tourists beyond sensory and functional aspects of environment and giving a preference to social and cultural components as well. In this way, scape context was not perceived as static setting yet as socially and culturally derived, providing additional layers in understanding of the complexity of experience co-creation. Previous research has examined conventional outcome variables of guest satisfaction in a hotel context, for example, revisit intentions (e.g., Kim et al., 2020; Nazarian et al., 2024), whereas this study also investigates possible outcome variables of wellness spa hotel satisfaction; wellness-induced wellbeing, experience co-creation and word-of-mouth (WOM) to enhance its complexity and depth. Our study position itself within the actual manifestation of transmodernity (wellness spa hotel) and its urge to (co)create experiences that might trigger human-centric positive changes, such as wellness-induced well-being.

This paper contains the following: a theoretical overview of the theories and concepts of importance for the study, hypotheses development; a methods section; findings; a discussion of the results; the proposal of theoretical, practical implications and limitations; and future research recommendations

2. Literature review and hypotheses formulation

2.1. Theoretical foundation

The theoretical background of the study was based on Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) S-O-R model, which suggests that stimuli in the service environment evoke cognition and emotional reactions that feed through to consumer behaviour. The basic assumption of the S-O-R model is that consumers are passive in their response to the environment. In contrast, this paper proposes that consumers actively react to stimuli in the wellness experiencescape, activating satisfaction, which then leads to different types of behavioural response (wellness-induced wellbeing, co-creation and WOM). In addition, as response to the previous interpretations of the S-O-R model, not only that consumers are actively engaged in the process, that has been enforced by the introduction of co-creation variable, yet they also examined in the context of the diverse consumer behaviour outcomes, human-centric and conative. In this study, the stimulus component of the S-O-R model consists of five components of the experiencescape (sensory, functional, social, natural and hospitality-culture components), satisfaction (as an effective response) is positioned in the centre as the organism component, while wellness-induced wellbeing (human-centric outcome), co-creation of experience and WOM (conative response) constitute the response component (Figure 1).

** Figure 1 near here **

2.2. Wellness, wellness tourism and wellbeing in the context of the hotel industry

The concepts wellness and wellbeing, though closely related, are also distinctly unique terms (Dillette et al., 2021). The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines wellbeing as 'the state of being or doing well in life; happy, healthy, or prosperous condition; moral or physical welfare (of a person or community)' and wellness as 'the state of being well or in good health'. In addition, wellbeing is more closely associated with happiness, being both subjective and psychological, whereas wellness is a behavioural result of a search for health (Ardell, 1986) and is closely associated with the prevention of disease and good health (Dillette et al., 2021).

Wellness tourism is defined as wellbeing acting as the primary purpose for travel and is linked to achieving wellness through a holistic approach without medical treatment while on a trip (Sthapit et al., 2023). Contrary to medical tourism, which usually includes travelling for medical intervention to treat or cure illness, wellness tourism is a personal lifestyle choice where tourists look to attain an integrated state of health (body and spirit) during their holidays (He *et al*., 2023). Besides offering pleasurable and satisfying consumer experiences that boost personal wellbeing, these wellness trips can lower stress, balancing body, mind, and spirit (Backman et al., 2023). Today, the demand for wellness tourism is growing amid ever increasing stress levels (Fickel et al., 2018) and offers new opportunities for businesses and destinations around the world.

The wellness concept is widely embraced by the tourism and hospitality industry (Sthapit et al., 2023), with wellness spa hotels an attractive choice for tourists (Lee et al., 2019). The InterContinental Hotel Group, for example, acquired Six Sense Resorts, a distinctively wellness-focused brand (Lehto and Lehto, 2019). The number of wellness hotels has grown because of increasing demand for wellness; however, this phenomenon has been largely overlooked in existing literature (Chi *et al*., 2020). There are relatively few studies linked to wellness hotels, for example, Huh *et al*. (2019) segmented spa-goers in luxury hotels in the US, while Ahn *et al.*

(2019) examined the impact of different types of experiences on satisfaction and wellbeing in the context of resort hotels. In another study, Chi *et al*. (2020) proposed a conceptualisation of wellness-focused hotels based on environmental, physical and mind wellness dimensions delivered by a hotel. Lehto and Lehto (2019) argue that experiences such as staying in a wellness hotel can induce transformation by stimulating positive changes in life. Kim and Yang (2021), argue that restorative experiences can be viewed as a trigger for transformative change in those who co-create wellness experiences. In contrast to previous studies, our study interwinds the wellness and wellbeing concepts by assessing the antecedents and outcomes of pursuit for the wellbeing in the wellness spa hotel environment, offering the wider context for further understanding of this complex phenomena.

2.3. Experiencescape dimensions, satisfaction, wellness-induced wellbeing, experience co-creation and word-of-mouth

In the context of this study, wellness spa hotels operate with the intention of enhancing the wellbeing of their guests. The spa hotel wellness environment has developed over time, initially being perceived as external stimuli in the form of servicescape. It is now considered an experiencescape – an environment capable of triggering internal stimuli and enhancing the wellbeing of guests. This contrasts with Kotler's (1973) use of the term 'atmospherics' and Bitner's (1992) umbrella term 'servicescape', both of which focus on physical aspects of the service environment (Buxton and Michopoulou, 2021). Taking into account the evolution of the theoretical understanding of the scape that has undergone from from service to experience, our study provide the model that consider also internal stimuli to supplement the external.

Servicescape focuses on the physical environment as a determinant of the consumer experience, while the experiencescape concept deploys a wider and more holistic approach. This study follows Kandampully et al.'s (2022) argument that servicescape and experiencescape concepts should be investigated together rather than separately, since servicescape was used as the 'theoretical backbone' of the experiencescape. The exploitation of the experiencescape is perceived as a holistic approach to realising the value of the experience setting, which consists not only of elements of the physical environment but also employees and other tourists (Mossberg, 2007). This concept was extended by Pizam and Tasci (2019, p. 34) to include "sensory, functional, social, natural and cultural stimuli in a product or service environment, surmounted with a culture of hospitality, all of which accrue to an experience for consumers, employees, and other stakeholders and result in positive or negative cognitive, affective, and behavioural reactions toward products, services, brands, and firms". Tasci and Pizam (2020) looked at relationships between experiencescape components (sensory, functional, social, natural and hospitality culture) and explored their cognitive, affective and conative responses – especially those that might be perceived as human-centric, inducing transformation in guests. Thus, experiencescape as an environmental setting capable of triggering transformative experiences should be further investigated taking into account Pizam's previously discussed affective and conative responses: particularly the contribution of each of experiencescape dimensions to the whole transformative process, starting with the affective dimensions of the wellness hotel experience such as guest satisfaction with wellbeing as a human-centric outcome, and conative responses such as co-creation and WOM. In this way, our study initiates the critical discussion of not only antecedents of experience, yet their outcomes as well, in particular proposed as transformative process.

According to Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) S-O-R model, experience stimuli in the wellness experiencescape (sensory, functional, social, natural and hospitality culture) induce positive emotional reactions, such as satisfaction. Stimuli are not exclusively external, yet also internal, commonly manifested as emotional responses to participation in a specific activity. Based on Tasci and Pizam's (2020) examination of satisfaction as an effective response of experiencescape, this study adopts satisfaction as the organism in the S-O-R model. In other words, satisfaction is an outcome of an experience, especially if consumer expectations are surpassed (Su *et al*., 2022). Satisfaction is one of the most common antecedents that arise from the hospitality experience. Within servicescape studies, the most common dependent variable is satisfaction (Park et al., 2019). For example, Park et al. (2019) identified positive relationships between servicescape and satisfaction. Conversely, there are few studies examining the relationship between experiencescape dimensions and satisfaction. In a recent study by Gunasekar et al. (2022), sensory and natural dimensions of the wine experiencescape were identified as important drivers of wine tourist satisfaction. Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive study that has determined which expereincescape dimensions are capable of triggering satisfaction in wellness spa hotels.

Customers perceive and interpret the physical environment through a range of sensory cues provided by the setting, in this context, the wellness spa hotel. When customers perceive the atmosphere as favourable (for example attractive design and layout, pleasant music and comfortable lighting), such visual and sensory stimuli have the potential to enhance their on-site experiences (Chen, 2024). The sensory component of the experiencescape includes olfactory, tactile, aural and visual dimensions and an ambiance factor (Pizam and Tasci, 2019). Since sensory component is one of the vital aspects of the wellness spa hotel expereince, it is expected that sensory expereincescape of the wellness spa hotel will positively affect the hotel guest's satisfaction.

H1: The sensory experiencescape component has a positive effect on satisfaction.

Functionality refers to the ability of the same items to facilitate performance and the accomplishment of goals (Bitner, 1992). Spatial layout and functionality comprises the size, shape, and arrangement of furniture equipment and other items in a service environment (Bitner, 1992). Other studies have incorporated design, layout, space and signage as part of functionality (Ellen and Zhang, 2014). According to Pizam and Tasci (2019), the functional component includes the size, shape and arrangement of furniture, equipment and other items in the service setting. Hotels, and in particular wellness hotels, give significant attention to the functional aspects of the experience setting, thus, it is expected that this aspect of the expereincescape will have a positive effect on satisfaction.

H2: The functional experiencescape component has a positive effect on satisfaction

The social dimension was not initially part of Bitner's (1992) servicescape but used by other studies (Jang *et al*., 2015). This dimension includes social interaction among and between customers and employees including crowdedness. The social component was introduced by Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011), stating its effect on physical, mental health and wellbeing by

"relieving consumers from fatigue, stress, burnout, depression and other mental issues" (Pizam and Tasci, 2019, p. 30). The social interaction was always perceived as important driver of the experience satisfaction in hospitality, regardless if it is interaction between hotel experience providers and guests, or guests among themselves. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The social experiencescape component has a positive effect on satisfaction.

Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011) included a natural dimension to servicescape. They emphasised the significance of the natural dimension by stating its potential for physical, mental health, and wellbeing by relieving consumers from fatigue, stress, burnout, depression and other mental issues. The natural dimension is of particular significance in destination contexts, including geographic areas such as cities and towns and large area such as resorts and wineries (Pizam and Tasci, 2019), in this context, a wellness spa hotel. Since nature was historically been perceived as important aspect of the wellness experience, thus, following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The natural experiencescape component has a positive effect on satisfaction.

Pizam and Tasci (2019) defined hospitality culture as "a system of shared norms, values, beliefs, traditions and expectations whose ultimate goal is to provide exceptional service and memorable experiences to all the organisation's stakeholders." (p. 31). Since the study was conducted only among domestic tourists, national and ethnic symbolic meanings were not in its remit; examining cultural representation from an organisational perspective in the form of hospitality culture was considered a more appropriate use of the concept of culturescape specific to the hospitality context. Since the ultimate aim of the hospitality culture is to create the memorable experiences for the hotel guests, it could be expected that it will have a considerable effect on the guest's satisfaction with wellness spa hotel experience.

H5: The hospitality culture experiencescape component has a positive effect on satisfaction.

Nowadays, achieving satisfaction is not sufficient to trigger consumer behaviour (Campón-Cerro et al., 2020), thus, the effect of satisfaction on wellness-induced wellbeing should also be addressed. In the context of this study, wellness-induced wellbeing is subjective wellbeing that has been enhanced as a result of the exposure to the wellness spa hotel experience. This is closely linked to subjective wellbeing (SWB) (Vada et al., 2019). SWB is defined as a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his/her life (Diener et al., 2004). Tasci and Pizam (2020) called for further investigation of human-centric outcomes (transformation, wellbeing, and quality of life) by hypothesising that positive effective responses could trigger human-centric responses such as wellbeing. Thus, our study contributes to the existing knowledge, by advancing understanding of the expereincescape outcomes beyond satisfaction, acknowledging that satisfaction have capacity to trigger human-centric transformation of the wellness spa hotel guests. In the line with the previously stated the following hypothesis was proposed:

H6: Satisfaction has a positive effect on wellness-induced wellbeing.

According to Vargo and Lusch (2004), the customer is never a passive recipient of pre-existing value. This is because they play an active role in deciding what to do, interact with service providers at the destination, influence other tourists/guests and choose how to satisfy their various needs and wants (Mathis et al., 2016). The concept of experience co-creation recognizes that value is co-created with consumers, who interact with the experiencescape to generate their own customised experiences (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Kandampully *et al.* (2022) argued that the bidirectional exchange between the consumer and the experiencescape might enhance the value-creation process, using each of the experiencescape dimensions as a value proposition. According to Kandampully *et al.* (2022, p. 334) in a "socially immersed experiencescape", common in hospitality, co-creation plays a pivotal role in social interactions, especially those between customers. However, how wellness-induced wellbeing effects on the experience co-creation of different stakeholders is largely ignored (Tasci and Pizam, 2020). It is therefore proposed that in this study, wellness-induced wellbeing, triggered by the wellness hotel experiencescape, will initiate the experience co-creation process between guests and others, including employees. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Wellness-induced wellbeing has a positive effect on experience co-creation.

Kim and Kim (2019) cited a positive relationship between wellbeing and WOM behaviour in some tourism and hospitality studies. In another study, Lee *et al.*'s (2014) study on wildlife tourism argued that customer wellbeing has a positive effect on travel outcomes such as customer loyalty in the form of WOM behaviour. In addition, Fan *et al.* examined the sequential mechanism from experience to wellbeing to eWOM intention in the context of experiencescape of resort hotels, concluding that both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing influenced eWOM intention. In contrast to Fan *et al.*'s (2023) study in which wellbeing is perceived as an organism (O in the S-O-R model), this study follows the initial experience guidelines of Tasci and Pizam (2020), who consider wellbeing as a response in the form of human-centric outcome, within the response element of the model. The positive relationship between wellbeing and WOM is supported by existential authenticity theory (Chen *et al.,* 2023) and emotional contagion theory which claims that positive emotional experiences can lead to favourable behavioural intentions (Chang, 2016). As wellness-induced wellbeing influences behavioural responses (co-creation and WOM), in line with the S-O-R model, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: Wellness-induced wellbeing has a positive effect on word-of-mouth.

3. Method
3.1. Questionnaire development
An online self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from domestic tourists who stayed in a wellness spa hotel in Serbia. Spa wellness is Serbia becomes increasingly popular tourism activity, in particular for domestic tourists (Živković et al., 2024). The sample consists of respondents who were guests of wellness hotels at least once post-pandemic and evaluated their hotel stay. Data were collected during September to November 2022 by a market research agency that operates in over 100 countries, including Serbia. The agency's researchers used a sampling frame with general data for hotel guests in Serbia (age, gender, education, number of

visits), but not a frame solely for wellness hotel use. Therefore, respondents, who were approached via random selection, were asked a filter question ("Have you stayed at a wellness spa hotel as a guest, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic?"). Thus, the intention was to examine the perceptions of guests after the pandemic period, since there is a belief that the pandemic changed the business concept of wellness hotels because after the pandemic, many guests visit wellness hotels primarily for health reasons and not only for relaxation and hedonism. That is why the study focusses on the attitudes of guests in the post-pandemic period. Only respondents who answered affirmatively were included in the sample. A random sampling method was deployed due to the availability of a sampling frame matched to key characteristics of the hotel's guest population.

Out of 800 initial questionnaires, a total of 567 validly completed questionnaires were collected, making the response rate 70.9%. The market research agency adopts a representative panels of consumers (depending on the purpose of the study) and offers the respondents a certain number of points for each completed questionnaire. When the respondent collects the appropriate number of points, he or she can receive a certain gift for free. This ensured a high level of motivation and the honesty of respondents when giving answers.

3.2. Research design and sampling procedure

Moreover, along the statistical common method variance remedies (such as the Harman single factor test), based on the recommendation of Podsakoff et al. (2003), procedural remedies regarding survey design were also implemented (division of independent and dependent measurement items and steps intended to secure respondents' anonymity). Since initial statements were proposed in the English language, to resolve potential translation issues before the preparation of questionnaire, the back-translation method was deployed. The questionnaire consisted of demographic variables, travel characteristics and measurement items. Measurement items scored on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The five components of experiencescape (sensory, functional, social, natural and hospitality culture) were measured using 19 items adapted from Tasci and Pizam (2020). Customer satisfaction was measured using three items adapted from Loureiro et al. (2013). Three items from Kim et al. (2012) and Kim et al. (2016) were used to measure wellness-induced wellbeing. The study measured experience co-creation using three items adapted from Carù and Cova (2007), Prebensen and Foss (2011) and Campos *et al*. (2016). WOM included three items adapted from Khan and Rahman (2017) (Appendix).

Before the questionnaire was finalised, five interviews were conducted with Serbian hotel industry experts to verify its appropriateness in the wellness spa hotel context, followed by a focus group consisting of three university professors, two representatives of the marketing agency involved in distributing the questionnaire and four hotel representatives. Pilot testing of the questionnaire was then completed, with a sample of 30 respondents.

3.3. Demographic profile of respondents

The sample included 567 domestic tourists who had stayed in a wellness spa hotel in Serbia. Most were male (58.7%) and millennials (born between the years 1981 and 1994) (n=199). Many had completed university (n=224). Many respondents had visited a wellness spa hotel more than five times (n=247) (Table 1).

** Table 1 near here **

3.4. Data analysis

Data analysis was undertaken using the IBM SPSS 20 and AMOS 18 software packages. First, the reliability of the model variables was assessed by calculating the values of the Cronbach alpha coefficient. The fit of the measurement model was tested by implementing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The values of the series of fit indices were then calculated: χ2/df; normed fit index (NFI); comparative goodness of fit (CFI); Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI); incremental fit index (IFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). In addition, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) were calculated for each variable, followed by hypotheses testing using structural equation modelling (SEM). Covariance-based SEM (CB SEM) was used due to its suitability for large samples (100 + respondents) and in confirmatory studies. It is a robust methodological solution as it measures the goodness-of-fit of a model. CB SEM was utilised instead of PLS SEM, since PLS-SEM does not have an adequate global goodness of model fit measure. PLS is often recommended for exploratory research, but in this study, hypotheses were defined based on theoretical relationships between constructs, an additional reason for the choice of CB SEM. It is believed that the CB SEM is a suitable methodological approach for theory testing and confirmation (Hair *et al.,* 2011).

4. Results

4.1. Model fit results

The results of confirmatory factor analysis confirm that the model reasonably fits the data. The value of the ratio χ^2 / df is 2.62, which is within the acceptable range of 2 to 5 (Marsh & Hocevar, 1988). The values of the CFI, TLI, IFI, RFI and NFI indices are higher than the threshold of 0.9. The RMSEA value is 0.05 and this value is lower than the level of 0.08 (Hair et al., 2010). The results of the model fit are shown in Table 2.

** Table 2 near here **

4.2 Reliability analysis

Each variable was measured by several internally consistent items, indicated by the values of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Table 3). These values are higher than the threshold of 0.7 for each variable (Nunnaly, 1978). Additionally, CR values are greater than 0.6 for all variables, while the AVE values are greater than the threshold of 0.5, which confirms convergent validity (Hair et *al.,* 2010). To test the discriminant validity, we have calculated the values of heterotrait-monotrait ratio of the correlations (HTMT). In all pairs, the obtained values are lower than the level of 0.9, which confirms discriminant validity (Hair and Alamer, 2022).The results are shown in Table 4. In addition, by applying exploratory factor analysis, it was determined whether the items in the model were grouped around defined constructs in the same way as in the previous literature. After excluding one item for measuring word of mouth from the model, all items were grouped around nine factors, which is in accordance with the theory (Appendix 2). Besides, every single item loads high only with one construct which additionally confirms discriminant validity. According to Hair *et al.* (2011) discriminant validity will be achieved if an item's loading with its associated latent construct is higher than its loadings with all the other constructs. Finally, all confirmatory factor loadings are higher than 0.7.

** Table 3 near here **
** Table 4 near here **

The data were also tested for common method bias, using Harman's single factor test. Unrotated principal components were used for factor analysis and all items were adjusted around one factor, explaining 46.9% of the variance. The value obtained is lower than the acceptable threshold of 50%, hence there is no common method bias in the study.

4.3. Hypotheses testing

The relationships between the model's variables were analysed using SEM. Of the eight hypotheses, seven proved to be statistically significant. The sensory, functional, natural and hospitality culture components had a positive effect on customer satisfaction, thus confirming hypotheses H1, H2, H4 and H5. The hospitality culture component emerged as the strongest antecedent of satisfaction. Only the social component had no significant influence on satisfaction, thus hypothesis H3 is rejected (Table 6). Satisfaction had a strong positive influence on wellness-induced wellbeing supporting H6. Wellness-induced wellbeing also had a positive effect on experience co-creation and WOM, confirming hypotheses H7 and H8. The independent variables of the model have a high degree of variability in the dependent variables (Satisfaction: $R^2 = 0.84$; Wellness-induced wellbeing: $R^2 = 0.64$; Co-creation of experience: $R^2 = 0.23$; WOM: $R^2 = 0.61$). Multicollinearity was also tested. All correlations between constructs are lower than 0.9 (Table 5), thus multicollinearity is not a serious issue in the study (Hair et al., 2010).

** Table 5 near here **
** Table 6 near here **

Additionally, the indirect effects of the five components of the Experinscape model on wellness-induced wellbeing (through satisfaction) were tested. The results indicate that the effects of hospitality culture and the natural component are significant (HCC: estimate = 0.388, $p < 0.05$; NTC: estimate = 0.222, $p < 0.05$), while the other three components have no significant indirect impacts on wellness-induced wellbeing (SEC: estimate = 0.133, $p > 0.1$; FNC: estimate = 0.129, $p > 0.1$; SCC: estimate = 0.045, $p > 0.1$). The indirect effect of satisfaction on word of mouth (through wellness-induced wellbeing) is also significant and very strong (estimate= 0.641, $p < 0.05$). The indirect effect of satisfaction on co-creation of experience (through wellness-induced wellbeing) is somewhat weaker but also significant (estimate = 0.476, $p < 0.05$).

5. Discussion and conclusions

Contrary to studies replicating Bitner's (1992) servicescape model, this study extends this model by incorporating the experiencescape model with five key environmental components (sensory, functional, social, natural and hospitality culture) as antecedents of guest satisfaction in the wellness spa hotel context. Guided by S-O-R theory, the aim of this study was to propose and test an integrative theoretical model of satisfaction within the wellness spa hotel experience. The empirical results support all the hypotheses, apart from the one related to the social experiencescape dimension. A justification for this non-significant relationship might be the COVID-19 pandemic social distancing regulations.

Firstly, the relationship between the four dimensions of experiencescape (sensory, functional, natural and hospitality culture) and satisfaction with a wellness spa hotel experience were found to be significant. This finding supports existing studies indicating that experiencescape is a multifaceted concept (Pizam and Tasci, 2019) and has a significant effect on guest satisfaction (Park *et al.*, 2019) – the more appealing the sensory, functional and natural experiencescape and

the higher the level of hospitality, the more satisfactory the wellness spa hotel experience for guests.

Second, beyond examining the various antecedents of satisfaction with the wellness spa hotel experience, the study also identified satisfaction with a wellness spa hotel experience as a significant predictor of wellness-induced wellbeing, experience co-creation and WOM. More specifically, satisfaction was found to be a positively and statistically significant factor effecting wellness-induced wellbeing, laying the foundation for future research. This finding supports previous studies which also noted the significant direct effect of satisfaction on wellbeing (Ahn *et al*., 2019).

Thirdly, wellness-induced wellbeing appears to be a critical predictor of experience co-creation, indicating that wellness-induced wellbeing exerts a direct and positive impact on guest experience co-creation. This finding suggests that the higher the level of wellness-induced wellbeing of guests during a wellness spa hotel stay, the higher the degree of experience co-creation. Furthermore, the study confirms the relationship between wellness-induced wellbeing and WOM. This is consistent with the results of studies that indicate wellbeing contributes to WOM (Fan *et al*., 2023; Kim and Kim, 2019; Lee *et al*., 2014).

Overall, this study complements previous literature on wellness tourism and offers a theoretical model that uses S-O-R model to demonstrate both the significant determinants of the wellness spa hotel experience and the outcomes. Thus, post-pandemic hotel wellness spa experience would benefit of the strengthening the sensory, functional, natural and hospitality culture aspect of expereincescape, while social component should be further investigated, in particular if the social interaction would enhance or hinder the total wellness spa experience. The general spa wellness trend goes in the line with individual preference to inner wellness (Baccarani & Cassia, 2017) or socially immersed experiencescape (Kandampully et al., 2022).

5.1. Theoretical implications

Firstly, unlike other studies that have used the servicescape model, this model deploys the experiencescape model with five key environmental components in the wellness spa hotel context – a scarce number of hospitality studies have empirically examined this construct in this field previously. The recent experiencescape model (Pizam and Tasci, 2019; Tasci and Pizam, 2020) was used in contrast to the traditional servicescape concept, with a focus on social, natural and cultural aspects from a multi-stakeholder perspective. The servicescape model falls short of considering some important elements in service environments: social, natural and cultural dimensions (Line et al., 2018), while the experiencescape concept offers customers with experiences to match their expectations (Pizam and Tasci, 2019). The proposed study initiate further disscusion regarding the external expereince stimuli that go beyond the traditional enviroment highlighting the urge to acknowlwdge multi-cultural and stakeholder perspectives.

Secondly, the multi-stakeholder context was further strengthened with the introduction of the experience co-creation variable, highlighting the relationship between wellness spa hotel guests and employees. This finding confirms that wellness spa hotel guests cannot be considered merely passive recipients of pre-existing value and must be viewed as active and engaged co-creators of value. Interaction between customers and hotel employees leads to the creation of unique, personalized experiences. Hence, our study acknowledged transmodernity urge to (co)create experiences that might trigger transformation, rather than be perceived as hedonistic directed experiences.

Thirdly, the proposed conceptual model includes context-specific and up-to-date variables such as wellness-induced wellbeing and experience co-creation. As a result, the proposed model provides a more comprehensive overview of the O and R components of the S-O-R model, positioning satisfaction within the central O component of the model and wellbeing variable as a human-centric outcome within the response element, in contrast to Fan *et al.'s* (2023) study. Thus, our study "freshen up" S-O-R model, by adding novel variables that consider different aspects of behaviour (from human-centric to conative). By considering the wellness-induced wellbeing variable, the proposed model thus extends beyond the confinements of short-term customer satisfaction with the hotel wellness experience. The findings support the importance of investment in hotels – particularly those that are considered wellness spa hotels – in ROW (Tesse Fox, 2018). Moreover, studies that examine the relationship between experiencescape dimensions (sensory, functional, social, natural and hospitality culture), satisfaction with the wellness spa hotel experience, wellness-induced wellbeing, experience co-creation and WOM are rare. This provides a foundation for future research on tourist experience consumption in the wellness spa hotel experiencescape.

Finally, although hospitality is considered a "socially immersed experiencescape" (Kandampully et al., 2022, p. 334) in which social interactions have a pivotal role, COVID-19 pandemic social distancing regulations in hospitality has limited the contribution of the social dimension to the general wellness spa hotel experience. Therefore, post-COVID wellness has moved from crowdedness (Jang et al., 2015) to inner wellness experience, since "individual participation in a service ecosystem can [also] impact wellbeing" (Baccarani & Cassia, 2017, cited in Tuzovic et al., 2021, p. 3). Regardless of obtained findings, post-pandemic wellness spa market must acknowledge both socially immersed experiencescape and inner wellness experience in continuum, rather than as a separate offering,

5.2. Managerial implications

There are several beneficial implications to wellness spa hotel management that arise as a result of the study. Firstly, wellness spa hotel managers should focus on experiencescape dimensions: sensory, functional, natural and hospitality culture components in the design of experiential activities and promotion of high-quality experiences to be able to offer a satisfactory guest experience. In this way, environment design will match customer expectations, and what is more important initiate their willingness to be involved into experience co-creation and eventually, achieve wellness-induced well-being. For example, wellness spa hotel managers should invest more resources in sensory elements such as lighting, soothing background music and harmonious colours. Layout should be appealing, appropriate and functional so that guests feel comfortable and immersed in the environment. Use of natural elements, as part of the internal and external landscape architecture effort, should be emphasised in the physical setting to make it more attractive compared to competitors' offers and to 'wow' guests during their visits, increasing satisfaction.

Secondly, wellness spa hotel managers should offer a variety of wellness services to enhance guest wellness induced wellbeing while at the hotel, including beauty, spa and health treatments, sports facilities, spiritual activities and massages. The equal attention should be given to both soul and body care treatments in orger to achive both spiritual and phisical wellbeing. Thirdly, wellness spa hotel employees should be trained to offer exceptional service. This would help in meeting guest's needs and training programmes would improve their competency. The

particular focus of the training should be directed to cultural and social competences such as assertive and emphatic communication with customers in order to foster "socially (and culturally) immersed experiencescape" (Kandampully et al., 2022). Fourthly, hotel guests must not be viewed as merely passive agents, they should be specifically recognised and encouraged to be active co-creators of their consumption experiences. Emphasis should be placed on training employees to encourage them to look for opportunities for guests to co-create their experiences. Providing opportunities for tailor-made wellness experiences, consisted of different wellness approaches (such as sound and reiki healing), would make the experience unique and self-centred on true need of the tourists. Frequent interaction will help capture and maintain guests' interest, thereby enabling them to get the maximum benefit from their experience. Guests should be the core of attention, with the aim being to assist them in achieving inner transformation. Lastly, ROW should be seen as the ultimate business goal of wellness spa hotels, rather than common hotel business financial metrics such as ROI.

5.3. Limitations and future research
The research outlined in this paper has several limitations. Firstly, it was limited to one antecedent and three outcomes of satisfaction with wellness spa hotels. Secondly, only domestic Serbian tourists were included, thus, future cross-cultural research could augment the findings of this study. Thirdly, the study used a web-based survey questionnaire. A comparative study of first-time and repeat and/or domestic and international tourists and further examination of purpose of the visit of wellness spa hotel visitors could yield additional meaningful insights. Finally, the concept of return of wellness (antecedents and consequences) should be further addressed.

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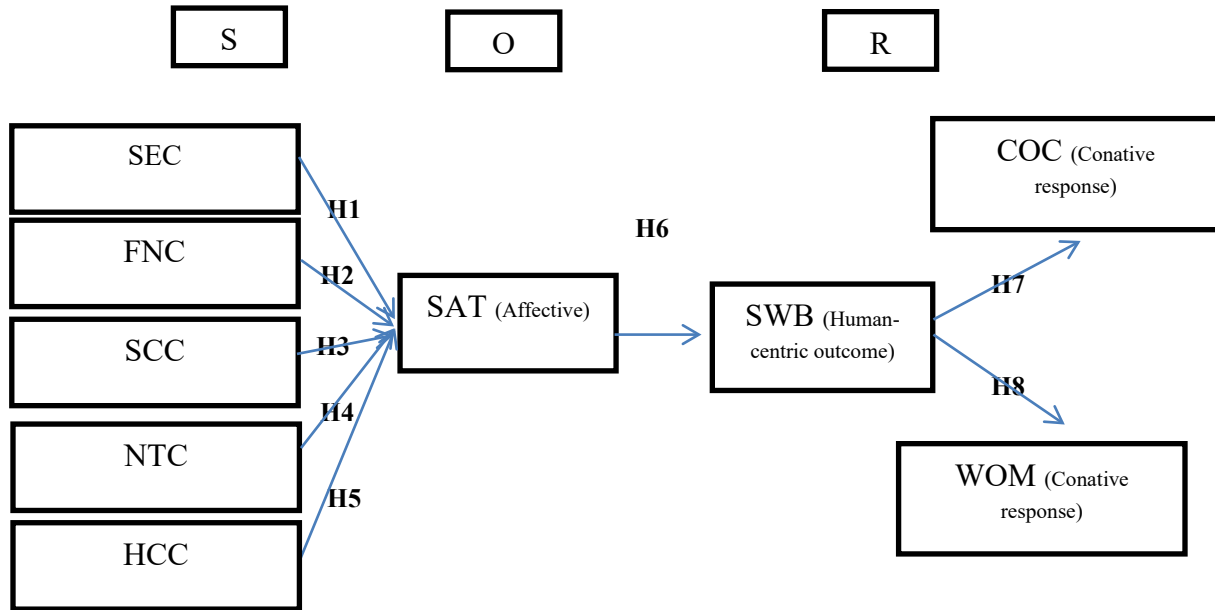
Figure 1. Research model (figure by authors)

Note: Sensor component-SEC; Functional component-FNC; Social Component-SCC; Natural Component-NTC; Hospitality culture component-HCC; Satisfaction-SAT; Well-being-WB; Co-creation of experience-COC; Word of mouth-WOM

Table 1. Profile of respondents (table by authors)

	Number of respondents	**%**
Gender		
Female	333	58.7
Male	234	41.3
Age groups		
Born before 1960 (Boomers)	61	10.8
1960-1980 (Generation X)	161	28.4
1981-1994 (Millennials)	199	35.1
1995-2002 (Generation Z)	146	25.7
Education		
Secondary school	195	34.4
College	148	26.1
University	224	39.5
Number of visits to a wellness spa hotel		
Once	53	9.3
2-3 times	163	28.7
4-5 times	104	18.4
More than 5 times	247	43.6

Table 2. The model – fit indices (table by authors)

Fit indicies	Recommended value	Measurement model	Structural model
χ^2 / df	< 3	2.62	2.96
CFI	> 0.9	0.95	0.94
TLI	> 0.9	0.94	0.93
IFI	> 0.9	0.95	0.94
NFI	> 0.9	0.93	0.91
RFI	> 0.9	0.91	0.90
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.05	0.06

Note: CFI: Comparative Goodness of Fit; TLI: Tucker–Lewis Index; IFI: Incremental Fit Index; NFI: Normed Fit Index; RFI: Relative Fit Index

Table 3. Cronbach alpha, Composite reliability and Average variance extracted (table by authors)

	Cronbach Alpha	**CR**	**AVE**
SEC	0.86	0.86	0.67
FNC	0.88	0.89	0.66
SCC	0.87	0.88	0.70
NTC	0.92	0.92	0.70

HCC	0.89	0.89	0.66
SAT	0.86	0.86	0.67
SWB	0.85	0.85	0.66
COC	0.83	0.84	0.63
WOM	0.82	0.83	0.70

Note: Sensor component-SEC; Functional component-FNC; Social Component-SCC; Natural Component-NTC; Hospitality culture component-HCC; Satisfaction-SAT; Well-being-SWB; Co-creation of experience-COC; Word of mouth-WOM

Table 4. HTMT results (table by authors)

	SECT	FNCT	SCCT	NTCT	HCCT	SATT	CCT	WOMT	WBT
SECT									
FNCT	0.878								
SCCT	0.677	0.721							
NTCT	0.721	0.700	0.731						
HCCT	0.767	0.820	0.821	0.833					
SATT	0.781	0.813	0.718	0.828	0.858				
CCT	0.457	0.380	0.575	0.487	0.469	0.428			
WOMT	0.611	0.678	0.527	0.532	0.643	0.729	0.322		
WBT	0.683	0.638	0.595	0.630	0.733	0.737	0.487	0.750	

Table 5. Correlation matrix (table by authors)

	WOM	SEC	FNC	SCC	NTC	HCC	SAT	COC	SWB
WOM	1								
SEC	0.607	1							
FNC	0.680	0.872	1						
SCC	0.499	0.654	0.693	1					
NTC	0.529	0.717	0.697	0.719	1				
HCC	0.649	0.764	0.820	0.803	0.832	1			
SAT	0.722	0.776	0.805	0.697	0.828	0.862	1		
COC	0.317	0.438	0.368	0.566	0.471	0.446	0.422	1	
SWB	0.745	0.667	0.626	0.568	0.614	0.724	0.727	0.456	1

Table 6. Tests of hypothesised relationships (table by authors)

Hypothesis	Estimates	Conclusion
H1: SEC → SAT	0.150**	Supported
H2: FNC → SAT	0.145*	Supported
H3: SCC → SAT	0.051ns	Not supported
H4: NTC → SAT	0.249***	Supported
H5: HCC → SAT	0.436***	Supported
H6: SAT → SWB	0.890***	Supported

| H7: SWB → COC | 0.535*** | Supported |
| H8: SWB → WOM | 0.721*** | Supported |

Note: *** Significant at 0.01 level; ** Significant at 0.05 level; * Significant at 0.1 level; ^{ns} Not significant

Appendix 1. Constructs and items (table by authors)

Variable	Items	Source
Sensory (hedonic) component	SEC1: Background sounds are nice SEC2: Colors are in harmony SEC3: Temperature is comfortable	Pizam and Tasci, 2020
Functional (utilitarian) component	FNC1: The layout is user-friendly FNC2: The furniture is comfortable FNC3: Interpretative signage is interesting FNC4: Equipment are modern	Pizam and Tasci, 2020
Social component	SCC1: People seem to be enjoying themselves SCC2: People are interacting with each other SCC3: Guests are sociable	Pizam and Tasci, 2020
Natural component	NTC1: The landscape reflects the natural flora NTC2: Natural elements are well integrated everywhere NTC3: Plants are used effectively in internal design NTC4: Natural elements make the environment attractive NTC5: Natural elements make the layout functional for different purposes	Pizam and Tasci, 2020
Hospitality culture component	HCC1: Wellness hotel meets all stakeholders' needs HCC2: Wellness hotel provides exceptional service HCC3: Wellness hotel is detail-oriented HCC4: Wellness hotel's employees go above and beyond the call of duty	Pizam and Tasci, 2020
Satisfaction	SAT1: Wellness hotel delivers an excellent service SAT2: Wellness hotel satisfies my needs SAT3: My experience at the wellness hotel was positive	Loureiro et al., 2013
Wellness induced well-being	SWB1: My psychological state has been enhanced, thanks to the recent wellness experience SWB2: The wellness experience has positively strengthen my social relationships with closest environment SWB3: The wellness experience has made me a very happy person	Kim et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2016
Co-creation of experience	COC1: I was an active participant during my recent wellness experience COC2: The wellness experience allowed me to effectively interact with other participants COC3: The wellness experience allowed me to interact with the hotel personnel	Carù and Cova, 2007; Prebensen and Foss, 2011; Campos et al., 2015; Kao et al., 2008
Word-of-mouth	WOM1: I would tell my friends and family members about this wellness experience WOM2: I would recommend this wellness experience to close friends	Khan and Rahman, 2017

Appendix 2. The results of exploratory factor analysis (table by authors)

Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
NTC3	.788								
NTC4	.775								
NTC5	.751								
NTC2	.732								
NTC1	.649								
FNC3		.725							
FNC4		.710							
FNC1		.679							
FNC2		.654							
SWB2			.781						
SWB3			.757						
SWB1			.668						
COC2				.865					
COC3				.804					
COC1				.790					
HCC4					.689				
HCC2					.618				
HCC3					.553				
HCC1					.520				
SCC3						.772			
SCC2						.748			
SCC1						.628			
SEC1							.728		
SEC2							.690		
SEC3							.638		
WOM1								.764	
WOM2								.752	
SAT2									.636
SAT3									.591
SAT1									.580

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
KMO = 0.96; Bartlett's 0 test: p =.00; All 5 factors of Experienscape explained 78.31% of variance.