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# The international trends of inner wellness and its feasibility in the North Great Plain region, Hungary – a systematic review

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**Abstract:** In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there is an increased need for physical and psychological well-being. Inner wellness is a new form of wellness, which primarily focuses on active meditational practices and techniques in order to reduce the stress associated with daily living. The primary purpose of our study was to examine the international trends and current status of popular inner wellness activities such as Yoga, Tai Chi and its feasibility in Hungary's North Great Plain Region. The secondary purpose was to briefly investigate and summarize the mental and health benefits of Yoga and Tai Chi through systematically reviewing relevant literature, using scientific databases (Scopus, PubMed, Web of Science). Yoga and Tai Chi retreats have become more and more attractive among travelers. It would be necessary to establish several more resorts such kind in Hungary, in order to fulfill the needs of domestic and international visitors. After systematically reviewing related literature, we may conclude, that most of the studies found in major databases, examining Yoga or effect of Yoga therapy were conducted in a clinical setting. Traditional benefits of Yoga therapy are well-documented, however more high-quality, evidence-based research would be necessary to conduct in the future. In addition to that, these investigations should involve populations from recreational settings too, in order to examine the effect of Yoga on overall health status, and quality of life.

**Keywords:** Inner wellness, trends, yoga, tai chi

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## **Introduction**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is an increased need for physical and psychological well-being. Traditional ways of services such as spa, sauna and other medical therapies are still popular among wellness tourists. Inner wellness is a new form of wellness which primarily focuses on active meditational practices and techniques in order to reduce the stress associated with daily living. This way one may increase self-awareness and enhance emotional intelligence, mindfulness. Wellness hotels are trying to offer new activities for visitors seeking inner peace such as Yoga and Tai Chi. Today, a number of spas and wellness hotels transform into an eco-lodge or Yoga, Tai Chi retreat, and further develop a wide range of wellness, rehabilitation, beauty treatments and activities related to psychophysical relaxation (Scopel, 2011). Yoga and Tai Chi sometimes called either mind-body practices, therapies, interventions or fitness in the related literature (Chaoul et al., 2014; Kozasa et al., 2010; Morgan et al., 2014; Woodyard, 2011)

## **A brief history of yoga**

Yoga has gained its conceptual origin from ancient Indian philosophy. It is a complex system comprises physical postures and movements (asana), relaxational and meditation practices (dhyana) and coordinated breathing techniques (pranayama) to improve overall health. One of the great benefits of yoga is the increased awareness of our body, reduced level of stress, which may be achieved by utilizing active meditational techniques. The complex beneficial effect of Yoga as described by a number of authors. According to Atkinson - Permuth-Levine (2009) „Yoga is recognized as a form of mind-body medicine, that integrates an individual's physical, mental and spiritual components to improve aspects of health, particularly stress-related illnesses". Yoga is more popular than ever, not only in Asia but in the Western World too.

## **A brief history of tai chi**

Tai Chi, sometimes also called Shadow Boxing, is a form of traditional Chinese soft martial art. Ancient Taoism provides a philosophical background for Tai Chi, which stresses the perpetual balance, the complementary nature of the two opposite elements of yin and yang. Tai Chi is an exercise system equally balanced between yin and yang, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, its popularity has not diminished yet, especially in Asia and across the World. The practitioners of Tai Chi may feel increased self-awareness, enhanced mindfulness - a so-called active meditational state - through executing slow, balanced and harmonic movements (Tai Chi for Health Institute, 2018).

## **Methodology**

### **Purpose of the study**

The primary purpose of our study was to examine the international trends and current status of popular inner wellness activities such as Yoga, Tai Chi and its

feasibility in Hungary's North Great Plain Region. The secondary purpose was to briefly investigate and summarize the mental and health benefits of Yoga and Tai Chi through systematically reviewing relevant literature, using scientific databases (Scopus, PubMed, Web of Science).

### **Data sources**

Among the two selected movement and philosophical systems, Yoga has the highest representation in the relevant literature. First, we conducted a comprehensive abstract, abstract title, a keyword search using the Scopus database. Key search terms included Yoga, Yoga therapy and Tai Chi. Search strings such as Yoga or Yoga therapy resulted in 7674, Tai Chi 2740 documents. A secondary search conducted on biomedical database PubMed resulted in 4518 hits for the search string Yoga or Yoga therapy the word Tai Chi resulted in 1970 hits. Finally, the results of another search involving Web of Science was also assessed. The tendencies were very similar as previously observed, Yoga or Yoga therapy was highly represented with 4512 hits, searches associated with the word Tai Chi yielded 2312 documents. We were specifically focusing on review articles on the topic of Yoga or Yoga therapy and Tai Chi.

### **Exclusion and inclusion criteria**

After reviewing relevant literature, we decided to exclude the term Tai Chi while executing various searches. The reason for the exclusion was the relatively low representation of Tai Chi practices or classes in the Hungarian recreational and wellness setting. We further narrowed our search and focused in peer-reviewed abstracts or journal articles available on Scopus, PubMed, and Web of Science as this electronic database were found the most comprehensive, suitable for our goals. We only retrieved open-access, articles published in English. First, we included search terms Yoga and review, later we refined our search by adding the word recreation, in order to limit our investigation to the health and recreational setting.

### **Results**

There is an increasing number of wellness facilities in the World transforming into so-called eco-lodges or Yoga, Tai Chi retreats. These facilities beside offering traditional wellness options such as spa, massage, sauna etc. also have some active meditational classes or sessions. According to the results of recent database searches, there are only a very limited number of wellness facilities offering Yoga and Tai Chi classes or a kind of retreat in Hungary especially at the North Great Plain region (Bookyogaretreats, 2018). The results of our own questionnaire also supported the above-mentioned assumptions. Yoga is represented predominantly in some large wellness hotels in Western and Central Hungary (Danubiushotels, 2018), among them, facilities in Budapest and Héviz are the largest of its kind.

### **Review of related literature**

Our first search using Scopus database including the terms Yoga and review resulted in 1842 documents. Out of them, according to the exclusion and inclusion criteria, 112 were further analyzed. By adding search words health and recreation,

we found two open-access records, but none of them were eligible for our future goals. We revised our search strategy and focused only on PubMed and Web of Science database records.

The Yoga, recreation, review search strings resulted in 13 free full-text review article records, using the PubMed database. These articles are specifically focusing on the possible benefits of mind-body therapies related to the nervous, musculoskeletal, immune, or metabolic systems of the body. Only a limited number of records may be related to either general health promotion, well-being or quality of life. A comprehensive review by (Woodyard, 2011) was intended to explore the therapeutic effect of Yoga on the quality of life. The author concluded, that Yoga is indisputably designed to improve physical and mental health, through achieving inner-peace and overall well-being. After reviewing relevant literature Lauche et al., (2016) examined the effect of Yoga practice on changing body-composition. The researchers suggested, that Yoga is considered a safe and effective method to reduce body mass index in overweight adult individuals.

Finally, a similar search was conducted on the Web of Science database, two records were found to be eligible for our study. One of it by Kerr, Dattilo, and O'Sullivan (2012) was investigated the impact of recreational activities such as Yoga on coping chronic stress and other mental health disorders. Another study was conducted in China, examined the role of urban community spaces on physical activity behavior patterns. The examination using questionnaire method was intended to set up preferences among recreational activities such as walking, cycling, jogging or Yoga (Wu, Qin, and Zhou, 2018).

Out of all review articles, Jeter et al., (2015) provided one of the most in-depth overviews of Yoga therapy research in clinical populations between 1967 and 2013. The researchers conducted a comprehensive, bibliometric analysis, ten major electronic databases a total of 486 articles were systematically examined. These studies represented 28.080 participants from 29 different countries. Jeter et al. observed a three-fold increase in a number of publications in the past 10 years. A total of 63 percent of the studies published were using controlled trials, the majority of them were randomized too, a smaller proportion, 37 percent were an uncontrolled examination.

## **Conclusions**

The fast pace, the increased level of stress involved in our life makes active meditational options, mind-body practices, Yoga and Tai Chi retreats more and more attractive among travelers. It would be necessary to establish several more resorts such kind in Hungary, in order to fulfill the needs of domestic and international visitors. According to the Hungarian Society of Yoga Instructors currently there are 263 certified instructors available, but of course, that is not the complete number of persons teaching yoga in Hungary (Magyar Jógaképzők Szövetsége, 2018). So available personnel teaching Yoga classes is not a problem when establishing a new facility. It is difficult to provide realistic numbers about the number of professionals teaching Tai Chi in Hungary. Several kinds of styles exist (Chen Tai Chi Chuan, Yang Tai Chi etc.) available sessions and classes sometimes mixed with other martial arts. As Yoga has gained a

significantly higher popularity, than Tai Chi, the authors suggest, that the number of instructors in Yoga also greatly outnumber, the ones teaching Tai Chi in Hungary.

After systematically reviewing related literature, we may conclude, that most of the studies found in major databases, examining Yoga or effect of Yoga therapy were conducted in a clinical setting. They are specific in nature focusing on particular aspects of mental and physical health status (Büssing et al., 2012; Cramer et al., 2014; Khalsa, 2004; Kirkwood et al., 2005; Smith and Pukall, 2009). Traditional benefits of Yoga therapy including a complementary treatment option for depression, anxiety, various musculoskeletal, immune system, and metabolic disorders are well-documented, however more high-quality, evidence-based research would be necessary to conduct in the future. In addition to that, these investigations should involve populations from recreational settings too, in order to examine the effect of Yoga on overall health status, and quality of life (Jeter et al., 2015). More research is needed to compare data originated from other regions across Central Europe.

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