

UNDERGROUND MICROCLIMATE OF SALT CHAMBERS IN THE WIELICZKA SALT MINE: ITS VALUES AND WAYS OF EXPLOITATION

Marek Koprowski and Jan Kubas

Wieliczka Salt Mine, Underground Medical Rehabilitation Center

The Wieliczka Salt Mine is a unique object, whose current functions are based on tradition dating back to the 13th century. At present it hosts, among other institutions, the Underground Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre, at which active rehabilitation is provided to patients with respiratory diseases. Initiated in 1950s by prof. Mieczysław Skulimowski, subterranean therapy, i.e. underground climate therapy, is continued up to this day. Conditions treated at the Center include asthma, COPD, allergic rhinitis and sinusitis, and other chronic upper respiratory conditions, allergic as well as non-allergic. Active rehabilitation provided in unique circumstances of underground salt chambers results in improved course of chronic diseases, with decreased number and severity of exacerbations, reduced use of "emergency" medications and less frequent use of antibiotics due to respiratory infections, as confirmed by the patients. For optimum effects, several courses of subterranean therapy are recommended, repeated every 6-12 months. Overnight stays in a salt chamber are also possible and recommended in prevention and treatment of respiratory diseases. Treatment methods to be introduced in the future include hydrotherapy (saline baths) and peloid therapy. Subterranean therapy remains a valuable treatment option, supplementary to pharmacotherapy.