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Promoting e-learning educational programs for wellness and SPA therapies

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Abstract

Promoting lifelong learning in the field of health is the result of continuous professional skills development through accessing the most recent knowledge and large data bases of specialty. Spa treatment is integrated with kinesitherapy and rehabilitation medicine and it is a methodical and therapeutic specialty for studying and applying into practice physical means (warmth, light, electricity, etc) and natural therapeutic factors (climate, mineral waters, mud) combined with physical exercise under its prophylactic, therapeutic and rehabilitation aspects.

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1. Introduction

The term “spa” represents water treatment and it is used for therapeutic purposes. Spa towns or spa resorts (including spring resorts) typically offer various health treatments. The belief in the curative powers of mineral waters goes back to prehistoric times. Such practices have been popular worldwide, but are especially widespread in Europe and Asia. Day SPAs are also quite popular, and offer various personal care treatments [1].

Spa treatments are becoming an integral part in the health system and natural therapeutic factors are considered indispensable in obtaining prophylactic or therapeutic effects. We argue in this sense the concern over the past years of the World Health Organization (WHO) for the use and exploitation of natural therapeutic factors. Spa treatment is integrated with kinesitherapy and rehabilitation medicine and is a methodical, therapeutic specialty studying and applying into practice physical means (warmth, light, electricity etc.) and natural therapeutic factors (climate, mineral waters, mud) combined with physical exercise under its prophylactic, therapeutic and rehabilitation aspects [2,3].
The quality of life comprises economic, political aspects related to the health status and the relation to the geographical and social environment. Spa treatments are known for promoting wellbeing, thus contributing to maintain or increase people's quality of life [4].

There are some indicators used to assess the quality of life. Regarding the quality of life and healthcare they are summarized as: being – belonging – becoming (3B) – which refer to: acute injuries that are not life-endangering and chronic injuries that are not life-threatening and are not in terminal stages.

Promoting lifelong learning in the field of health is the result of continuous professional skills development through accessing the most recent knowledge and large data bases of specialty. According to specialty EU statistics, the immediate results after spa treatment reflected significant improvements in subjective and objective symptomatology. Also an important echo was registered after using economical indicators of effectiveness, respectively on temporary incapacity to work, determined by the health conditions for which those spa treatments were being used [5].

2. Purpose

The aim of this study is represented by identification, diversification, reorganization and modernization of physical therapy strategies and tourist services using e-learning products from a Leonardo da Vinci project to the level of treatment facilities within health resorts. The main countries involved in the project with the acronym e-TRAWELSPA are Romania, Bulgaria, Austria and Greece. As European countries the “SPA” resources of these countries are well known and usually there are spread on their territory and associated with typical and specific climate factors.

3. Material and Methods

To set up the background information in support of our research purpose, we investigated the balneary and touristic potential, as well as SPA and wellness realities, necessities and strategies in countries involved in the project [6].

Romania is a country situated in the south-east of Central Europe. There are 160 resorts and balneary places in our country holding mineral resources for spa treatment, out of which 24 are viewed as of national importance, being recognized at European level as well [7]. The 24 resorts having national importance have been ranked based on the classification system in Romania depending on their endowment degree. Romania is represented in this project by University of Pitesti and University of Craiova.

Bulgaria is a country in South-Eastern Europe. There are 25 Spa destinations in Bulgaria which comprise hydromineral sources and complexes for accommodation and relaxation. Bulgaria is represented in this project by Burgas Free University and IL-59.

Austria is a landlocked country situated in Central Europe. The official statistics comments that there are 84 communities are summarized as therapeutic spas and health resorts and represent in the statistic data the area of spa tourism. Austria is represented in this project by Institut FBI, The FBI Centre.

Greece is situated in the Balkan Peninsula. Greece is represented in this project by Telecommunication Systems Institute, Technical University of Crete.

The identification of specific training needs in SPA and wellness centers and the training appropriate directions were made based on the application of a questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed so that it subsequently can be completed and adapted to be applied by all partners. The survey was conducted by distributing the questionnaire via e-mail or directly by visiting SPA and wellness centers but also hospitals, medical centers and pre-school education institution.
4. Findings and Results

With regard to In Romania the questionnaire was filled in by 30 employers, and the results showed that 30% are employers working within the hospital, 20% in Spa hotel, 20% in pre-school education institutions and 10% in medical centres and Spa centres.

In terms of skills assessment used in order to employ staff, 80% of the employers use both practical and theoretical assessment, and just 20% use theoretical assessment.

If we refer to the manner of training employees, we notice that 40% are trained by a different member of the staff, who shows them what to do, 30% benefit from theoretical and practical experience of colleagues, 20% are trained in a different enterprise having similar profile and only 10% are trained in specialized qualification centres.

In terms of improvements that the employers might have want for their employees, most of them (70%) refer to the lack of specialized training programs.

In terms of knowledge of standards and models of management and good practices of the employers related to the work within SPA and Wellness centers, 20% state that they are not very familiar with them, 30% know almost all of them, and 50% are familiar with some of the most popular ones, which means that specialized staff in this field is needed.

The training courses attended by respondents are on the following lines:
- medicine – 40% of respondents;
- health – 20% of respondents;
- sport science – 10% of respondents;
- general management courses – 30% of respondents.

The following points and questions have been adapted to identify the training system and the direction of covering skills for wellness and SPA therapy:
- The closest occupation therapy using SPA and wellness is represented by kinesitherapists/physical therapists (50%), masseur (40%), occupational therapists (5%), nurse (3%) and doctor (2%);
- The skills required for wellness and SPA are represented by: hydrokinetotherapy (30%), other types of massage (30%), reflexotherapy (15%), hydrotherapy (10%), classic massage (10%) and complementary therapy (5%);
- The training system preferred to obtain skills for SPA and wellness therapy is represented by: ID/e-learning (50%), 10 – 14 weeks (39%), 20 – 28 weeks (10%) and daily courses (1%).

The questionnaire was filled in by a number of 30 employers. The distribution of the organizations’ profile was the following: health, education and tourism. From the total number of participants in the survey questionnaire, it is noticed that the experience in the medical field is predominant; respectively the health department has a training deficit in the SPA and wellness direction.

Special interest is noticed in training by e-learning and Life Long Learning to the prejudice of classical training, having compulsory attendance and directly to the courses – long distance courses using the e-learning system, which is neither used, nor popularized or known. By analyzing the profile where management functions existed, it is noticed the lack of specialized training for the manager function specialized for wellness and SPA services and a need to implement adequate professional training.

The training courses duration in management and respectively SPA and wellness directions is assessed as being accepted for a number of 120 – 180 hours.

Massage and reflex therapy knowledge are the most known and applied within resorts or SPA and wellness type centres, although it does not coincide with the occupational field, as in Romania there isn’t a recognition for SPA or wellness therapist. Hydrokinesitherapy and massage are the deficient training directions which might be accessed interestingly by a large number of people willing to work in the field or to improve their skills in this sense.
5. Conclusions and recommendations

We analyzed the touristic and spa potential in participant countries, as well as the tendencies of modernization and changes that might be favourable for implementing some new destinations for population segments which are not comprised in the initial target. The diversification of the offer of health resorts toward SPA and wellness change radically the situation of the touristic potential in Bulgaria and Romania, while in Austria we are confronting with a special situation in which the touristic product and services are very clear and distinct stated, already existing SPA trainer, wellness trainer, occupations lacking in Romania, Greece, Bulgaria and the neighbours countries newly integrated into the EU.

This is why the project that could then give specialized assistance to the improvement and building of a new occupation, which is unknown in the European area, is so important.

In Romania and Bulgaria, investments in tourism are currently very high, and the diversification of the already existent solution for leisure, wellness, treatment, but also SPA is welcome and encouraged [8,9].

The specialist’s identified as being the closest to the labour demands in accordance with the employers’ offer are: managers, kinesitherapists (physical therapists), masseurs, medical assistants, physio-kinesitherapists, specialists’ physicians in physical and rehabilitation medicine, geriatric, paediatric physicians, athletic physicians, orthopaedics, rheumatologists, etc.

There is lack of preoccupation for the wellness and SPA segment in the offer of resorts having health potential, but also the need to implement them.

At the same time, the increase in the comfort degree and accessibility in the sphere of luxury hotels, foreign tourists wishing and aiming toward this.

There is lack of funds for constructions, infrastructure, modernization and this is why private initiatives in the resorts in Romania come first, but under the expectations level and of the needs to cover the respective segment.

Specialists are being searched, but, as the report of Austria and Bulgaria show, and in Romania’s segment there is the need for specialists on the one side, and especially in 4 and 5 stars hotels for SPA and lack of specialized guidance on the other side, usually the material basis being able to access and use without specialized surveillance and guidance [10].

The need for SPA services is in counterbalance with human and financial resources. Employers want to have specialists, but they don’t want the duration of their training to be too long or too expensive. In Bulgaria, due to the explosion of touristic resorts and diversification of constructions, especially luxury hotels, the situation is as follows: foreign investments come first (Norwegian, Swedish, Russian, German districts, etc) which gives the possibility to purchase luxury and specific equipments, but there is also a lack and a need for specialists in management (due to touristic services) and in SPA and wellness

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