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# THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING ON LABOR MARKET INSERTION IN THE SPA TOURISM SECTOR

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### Abstract

The rapid evolution of the tourism sector, particularly spa tourism, requires a dynamic and skilled workforce capable of meeting increasingly sophisticated customer expectations. In this context, professional training plays a crucial role in ensuring the successful insertion of individuals into the labor market. This research investigates the impact of specialized training programs on employment opportunities within the spa tourism industry. A mixed-method approach was applied, combining quantitative analysis of employment data with qualitative interviews of stakeholders, including employers, training providers, and employees. Results show a clear correlation between the completion of accredited professional courses and higher employability, job retention, and career advancement in spa tourism. Participants with formal training in wellness, hydrotherapy, and spa management were more likely to secure stable positions within hotels, resorts, and wellness centers. Additionally, employers reported increased satisfaction and service quality among staff who underwent structured training. The study also explores barriers to accessing training, such as cost, geographical distance from training centers, and lack of information, proposing policy recommendations to improve access and relevance of training programs. The findings suggest that investment in continuous professional development not only enhances individual career prospects but also contributes to the sustainable development of the spa tourism sector as a whole.

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**Keywords:** Spa tourism, labor market insertion, professional training, employability, wellness industry, vocational education, workforce development

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### INTRODUCTION

Spa tourism has emerged as a significant branch of the broader tourism industry, contributing to both national economies and local employment. As demand for wellness-related services increases, there is a growing need for qualified professionals. However, the transition from education to employment in this niche sector remains challenging due to mismatches between market requirements and available training. This research aims to analyze the effectiveness of professional training programs in facilitating labor market integration for individuals seeking careers in spa tourism.

The spa tourism industry represents a rapidly expanding economic sector, serving as a significant pillar of the economy in many European regions, including Romania. This

growth is fueled by the increasing interest of tourists in wellness services, relaxation, and therapeutic treatments. In this context, a qualified workforce becomes essential to ensure service quality and sustain the competitiveness of spa destinations.

Vocational training plays a crucial role in integrating young talents and adults into the workforce, contributing to the development of sustainable careers in spa tourism. Training programmes enable the acquisition of specific competencies, such as therapeutic massage, hydrotherapy, spa management, intercultural communication, and the use of digital technologies. These skills are increasingly sought after by employers facing challenges related to recruiting and retaining qualified personnel.

In the European Union, the tourism sector faces a shortage of skilled labour, particularly in

areas like wellness and spa. According to a European Commission report, 92% of SMEs in tourism encounter difficulties in recruiting qualified staff, primarily due to a lack of candidates. However, only a quarter of these SMEs have explored the possibility of hiring talent from other EU countries.

To address this challenge, the WeSkill project, funded by the European Commission, was implemented to develop transnational curricula and training content in the field of wellness and spa tourism. The specific objectives of the project include updating skills, forced labour mobility, aligning competencies with labour market needs, equipping young people and adults with modern skills, and using personalized teaching tools.

In Romania, regions such as Bihor, Covasna, and Mureş are recognized for their tradition and spa infrastructure, attracting thousands of tourists annually from both domestic and international markets. Cities like Oradea and Băile Felix have become attractive destinations for health and wellness tourism, offering a wide range of services and facilities. However, the success of these destinations largely depends on the quality of services provided, which is directly influenced by the professional training level of the staff.

This study aims to analyse the impact of vocational training on labour market entry in the spa tourism sector, considering both employers' and employees' perspectives. The research will address the following questions:

What is the employment rate of graduates from vocational training programmes in the spa tourism sector?

Which competencies acquired through these programmes are most valued by employers?

Are there discrepancies between the competencies offered by training and the requirements of the labour market?

What are the barriers and challenges encountered in implementing vocational training in this sector?

By answering these questions, the study will contribute to understanding how vocational training can support the development of a qualified workforce adapted to the needs of the spa tourism sector. Additionally, recommendations will be formulated to improve training programmes and create a

favourable framework for collaboration between educational institutions, employers, and public authorities.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study employed a mixed-method research design:

**Quantitative Component:** A survey was conducted among 150 individuals who completed professional training courses in spa and wellness fields between 2020 and 2024. Employment status, job type, and income level were tracked.

**Qualitative Component:** In-depth interviews were carried out with 10 employers in the hospitality and wellness sectors and 5 training program administrators to understand their perceptions of training effectiveness.

**Data Analysis:** SPSS was used for statistical analysis of the quantitative data. Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data to identify recurring themes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings revealed that 72% of respondents secured employment within six months after completing their training. Among them, 45% found jobs directly related to their specialization (e.g., massage therapy, spa reception, hydrotherapy). Employers highlighted that candidates with recognized certifications demonstrated higher levels of competence and customer service.

Common challenges cited by trainees included high course costs and a lack of practical training opportunities. Some employers also expressed concerns about the variability in training quality across institutions. Nonetheless, most stakeholders agreed that ongoing education and training are essential to adapting to evolving trends in spa services and health tourism.

The study suggests that aligning training curricula with current industry needs and promoting partnerships between training institutions and spa businesses can significantly enhance workforce readiness. Furthermore, public policies supporting subsidized training and remote learning options may expand access and inclusivity.

The results revealed strong evidence supporting the hypothesis that professional training enhances job placement in the spa tourism labor market.

### 3.1 Employment Outcomes

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72% of respondents found employment within six months of course completion.

45% were hired directly in spa-related jobs such as massage therapists, spa receptionists, hydrotherapy assistants.

60% of those employed signed long-term contracts, indicating labor market stability.

### **3.2 Career Development and Retention**

30% of employed individuals advanced to supervisory or specialized roles (e.g., head therapist, spa coordinator) within two years.

Many respondents expressed interest in continuous professional development.

### **3.3 Employer Feedback**

Employers reported that staff with certified training:

- Delivered better customer service,
- Required less on-the-job training,
- Had higher levels of job satisfaction and lower turnover.

### **3.4 Identified Challenges**

**Financial Barriers:** 40% cited high training costs as a major issue.

**Access and Location:** Rural areas lacked nearby training centers.

**Curriculum Gaps:** Some courses lacked practical components or were outdated.

**Recognition:** Non-accredited or informal training showed poor labor market outcomes.

### **3.5 Policy Implications**

Development of public-private partnerships between training institutions and spa employers,

Curriculum modernization to meet current industry trends (e.g., inclusion of wellness technologies, sustainable spa practices),

Government subsidies or scholarships to improve access,

Expansion of remote or hybrid learning programs.

### **Effectiveness of Vocational Training in Labor Market Insertion**

A study conducted in Romania assessed the impact of vocational training on employment chances. The results showed that participation in vocational training programs increased employment chances by 15%, particularly among women and individuals from urban areas. However, the employment rate of recent vocational and technical education (VET) graduates stands at 57.7%, below the EU average of 79.7%.

### **Challenges in Aligning Skills with Labor Market Demands**

A report from the WeSkill Project identified gaps in essential skills for the wellness and spa

sector, such as digital skills, intercultural communication, and client-oriented services. These gaps are more pronounced in Romania, where a lack of practical training and insufficient curriculum adaptation to market needs contribute to imbalances.

### **Local Example: "Henri Coandă" Post-Secondary School – Balneophysiokinetotherapy Profile**

The "Henri Coandă" Post-Secondary School in Oradea offers a Balneophysiokinetotherapy profile, preparing students to become specialists in medical recovery, therapeutic massage, and physiotherapy. The curriculum includes both theoretical and practical components, with internships in balneary units and clinics. This approach allows students to acquire specific competencies, such as using physiotherapy equipment and applying massage techniques, essential for rapid integration into the labor market. Graduates from this school are often employed in balneary resorts in Bihor County, contributing to the development of local balneary tourism.

### **Discrepancies Between Training and Market Requirements**

A report by Eurofound highlights discrepancies between the training provided and labor market requirements in Romania, with an insufficient number of graduates in fields like tourism and services, despite existing demand. This suggests the need for better alignment between educational programs and economic needs.

### **Initiatives and Projects for Improving Training**

The "New Skills for Jobs of the 21st Century" project, implemented by the British Council in Romania, developed a competency framework and educational materials for agricultural and rural tourism. These resources are used in vocational schools in Romania to enhance training and better respond to market demands.

#### **1. Developing Partnerships with Local and Regional Employers**

Collaborating with employers in the balneophysiokinetotherapy field can facilitate graduates' integration. These partnerships may include:

Internships at balneary resorts and rehabilitation clinics, providing students with essential practical experience.

Continuous training programs in collaboration with employers to ensure skill updates.

Career fairs and recruitment events, facilitating direct contact between graduates and employers.

These measures align with the national educational strategy, which promotes the development of an accessible and relevant vocational education system to meet labor market demands.

#### 2. Updating the Curriculum to Meet Market Requirements

To address labor market needs, the curriculum should include:

Transversal skills, such as digital literacy, intercultural communication, and client orientation, essential in the wellness and spa sector.

Entrepreneurship modules, to support graduates interested in establishing their own practices or rehabilitation centers.

Continuous training and requalification, enabling adaptation to technological changes and market requirements.

These adaptations are in line with European recommendations for inclusive and high-quality vocational education and training.

#### 3. Implementing a Mentorship Program and Post-Graduation Support

To ensure a smooth transition into the labor market, the following measures can be implemented:

Mentorship programs, where graduates are guided by experienced professionals in the field.

Continuous training sessions and workshops, for the development of soft and technical skills.

Alumni networks, facilitating the exchange of experiences and employment opportunities.

These measures are supported by European policies promoting high-quality vocational education and training favorable to inclusion.

#### 4. Promoting International Mobility and Intercultural Experience

Exposure to international practices can enrich graduates' professional experience:

Participation in Erasmus+ programs or other mobility initiatives for internships in rehabilitation centers within the European Union.

Organization of foreign language courses and intercultural training, to facilitate integration into international environments.

Collaboration with educational institutions from other countries, for the exchange of best practices and the development of common standards in the field.

These initiatives are in line with the European educational strategy for inclusive and high-quality vocational education and training.

#### 5. Active Community Involvement and Health Education Promotion

Graduates can become health ambassadors in their communities:

Organizing health education campaigns in schools, community centers, and public institutions.

Participating in local events promoting a healthy and active lifestyle.

Developing prevention and rehabilitation programs for various age groups and physical conditions.

These activities are supported by European policies promoting high-quality vocational education and training favorable to inclusion.

By implementing these measures, graduates of the Balneophysiokinetotherapy profile from the "Henri Coandă" Post-Secondary School will have increased opportunities for labor market integration, thereby contributing to the development of the health and wellness sector in the Oradea region and beyond.

## CONCLUSIONS

Professional training is a key enabler for employment in the spa tourism sector. It not only equips individuals with technical skills but also fosters soft skills essential in customer-oriented services. To improve labor market outcomes, it is vital to ensure the quality, accessibility, and relevance of training programs in this growing sector.

Professional training significantly facilitates labor market insertion in the spa tourism sector. Those who complete accredited, practical, and relevant training programs are more likely to be employed quickly, remain in the workforce, and pursue long-term careers. While training programs prove effective, their accessibility and quality vary, impacting outcomes. To ensure sustainable development of the spa tourism sector, coordinated efforts between training institutions, employers, and policymakers are essential. Emphasizing lifelong learning, competency-based certification, and regional accessibility will enhance both workforce quality and service excellence in this growing industry.

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