Indigenous Knowledge, Artificial Intelligence, Green Technology and Sustainable Development

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Dr. S. Ramya

www.indigenousgames.org

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INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, GREEN TECHNOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

S.No.	Contents	Page No.
	PREFACE	5
	INTRODUCTION	6
1	YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ***MS. S.SREENIDHI AND DR.M.UMAMAHESWARI***	7-11
2	THE ROLE OF THE WELLNESS AND SPA CONSULTANT IN BULGARIA IN PROMOTING HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ***IRINA PETKOVA-NESHEVA***	12-18
3	INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, GREEN TECHNOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A COMMERCE AND BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE ***DR.N.DEEPALKSHMI AND MS.B.SANGEETHA***	19-26
4	APPLYING BASIC SPORTS-SCIENCE CONCEPTS TO THE ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES ***DR.G. REDEMPTA NISHANTHI***	27-33
5	SMART VILLAGES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT ***DR. P.THANGAVELU, DR.S.SRI DEVI AND MS.S.BHARATHI***	34-40
6	GREEN GEOSPATIAL INTELLIGENCE: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE ***ANJANA A S***	41-51
7	TRADITIONAL MEDICINE AND WELLNESS ***A.BHARATH KUMAR***	52-59
8	LEARNING TO HUNT THROUGH BOARD GAMES ***DNDA STELA MARIS FERRARESE***	60-67
9	FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION: APPLYING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ASSESSING THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF SCENT MARKS ***BÙI ANH THƯ, NGUYỄN THỊ CHÚC AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR.DR. PHAN QUỐC NGUYEN***	68-78
10	BENEFIT-SHARING FOR TRADITIONAL CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE GENERATIVE AI ERA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF INDONESIA, MALAYSIA AND VIETNAM UNDER THE WIPO IGC DRAFT FRAMEWORK ***DANG MY HA AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR.DR. PHAN QUOC NGUYEN***	79-91
	PTO	

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INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, GREEN TECHNOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

S.No.	Contents	Page No.
11	AI ETHICS AND INDIGENOUS DATA SOVEREIGNTY: FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ***DIPTARUP MALLICK***	92-104
12	ROLE OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION: AN INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER STUDY ***DIPTARUP MALLICK***	105-115
13	ONE HEALTH APPROACH: COMBINING INDIGENOUS ZOONOTIC KNOWLEDGE AND AI FOR PUBLIC HEALTH SURVEILLANCE ***DIPTARUP MALLICK***	116-128
14	INDIGENOUS GAMES AS CULTURAL HERITAGE, YOUTH EMPOWERMENT, HEALTH, PEACE, AND COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY ***MOMINA IFTIKHAR, AREEG FATIMA, MUHAMMAD SHAHZAR, MARYAM KHALID, SALMA ROMAN, ZAHRAH KHALID, MUHAMMAD MUDASSAR***	129-137
15	CHAMPION FIRST - A PEOPLE-CENTRED FRAMEWORK FOR EXCELLENCE, CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE IMPACT ***Dr. THIYAGU NAGARAJ, PhD***	138-151
16	THE ART OF EFFECTIVE COACHING: BUILDING SKILLS, CONFIDENCE AND CHARACTER ***Dr. THIYAGU NAGARAJ, PhD***	152-171
17	POPULAR GAMES AND SPORTS IN THE HERITAGE OF THE NOMADIC BEDOUINS OF THE MOROCCAN SAHARA ***DR. CHARKAOUI HAMMA AND DR. JAOUAD ELBAKILI***	172-188

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PREFACE

The book Indigenous Knowledge, Artificial Intelligence, Green Technology and Sustainable Development brings together important perspectives on traditional knowledge, technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and inclusive development.

Indigenous knowledge represents generations of experience, wisdom, and practices developed through a close relationship with nature and communities. It offers valuable insights into areas such as biodiversity, agriculture, natural resource management, traditional practices, climate adaptation, and sustainable living.

At the same time, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Green Technology are creating new opportunities to address complex social, economic, and environmental challenges. Responsible integration of traditional knowledge with modern science and technology can contribute to innovative solutions while respecting cultural values, community rights, and environmental responsibility.

This book provides a multidisciplinary platform for researchers, academicians, students, Indigenous knowledge holders, technology professionals, policymakers, and development practitioners to share ideas, research findings, case studies, and innovative approaches.

The broader objective of this publication is to encourage knowledge exchange, responsible innovation, cultural preservation, environmental protection, and sustainable development for present and future generations.

We sincerely thank all authors, contributors, reviewers, researchers, and supporting institutions whose valuable efforts have made this publication possible.

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INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Knowledge, Artificial Intelligence, Green Technology and Sustainable Development

The book Indigenous Knowledge, Artificial Intelligence, Green Technology and Sustainable Development is an initiative of the World Council of Indigenous Games (WIG), an international platform dedicated to promoting and developing Indigenous Games, traditional knowledge, cultural heritage, youth engagement, and sustainable community development.

Indigenous Knowledge represents generations of wisdom, experience, skills, traditions, and practices developed through a close relationship between communities and nature. It provides valuable insights into biodiversity conservation, agriculture, natural resource management, climate adaptation, cultural preservation, and sustainable living.

At the same time, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Green Technology are creating new opportunities to address contemporary social, technological, and environmental challenges. Responsible integration of Indigenous Knowledge with modern science and technology can support innovation while respecting cultural values, community participation, and environmental responsibility.

The book explores the interconnected themes of Indigenous Knowledge, Artificial Intelligence, Green Technology, and Sustainable Development, bringing together research, academic perspectives, case studies, and innovative ideas from different disciplines.

Through this publication, World Council of Indigenous Games (WIG) seeks to encourage knowledge exchange between traditional wisdom and modern innovation, while supporting education, research, cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and inclusive development. WIG's stated mission includes promoting and developing Indigenous Games worldwide and creating knowledge-sharing opportunities.

This book is intended for researchers, academicians, students, Indigenous communities, policymakers, technology professionals, environmental practitioners, and development organisations interested in building a sustainable and responsible future.

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THE ROLE OF THE WELLNESS AND SPA CONSULTANT IN BULGARIA IN PROMOTING HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: The present study analyzes the emergence, development, and establishment of the academic specialization *"Wellness and SPA Consultant"* in Bulgaria and the role of professional education in promoting health, well-being, and sustainable development within the contemporary wellness and SPA sector. The study examines the institutional prerequisites for the introduction and development of the specialization, its academic provision, interest among prospective students, opportunities for professional realization, and interaction with the tourism, hospitality, and wellness and SPA sectors. The main professional competencies of the Wellness and SPA Consultant and their significance for the provision of integrated services aimed at promoting the physical and psychosocial well-being of individuals are analyzed. Based on data and trends up to 2025, key opportunities and challenges for the development of the profession in Bulgaria are identified. The study considers the profession of "*Wellness and SPA Consultant" as a potential factor in the development of a sustainable, competitive, and human well-being-oriented wellness and SPA sector,* in accordance with contemporary concepts of health, quality of life, and sustainable development.

Keywords: *Wellness and SPA Consultant, health, well-being, sustainable development, professional education, professional realization in Bulgaria*

Introduction

Over the past two decades, wellness tourism and its associated spa services have emerged as a significant segment of the contemporary tourism sector. In the academic literature, wellness tourism is conceptualized as a distinct segment of health tourism, with a primary focus on health maintenance and enhancement, prevention, physical and psychological well-being, and quality of life. At an early stage in the development of the concept, Mueller and Lanz Kaufmann (2001) defined wellness tourism as an approach oriented towards prevention and proactive health management, emphasizing service quality, individualized care, and the provision of health-related information as essential determinants of its competitiveness. This conceptual foundation places the individual and their well-being at the centre of the wellness experience.

The contemporary evolution of wellness tourism demonstrates that the sector is progressively extending beyond the traditional perception of the spa as a space primarily dedicated to relaxation and recovery. Wellness services are increasingly associated with preventive strategies, physical activity, healthy lifestyles, stress management, psychosocial well-being, and personalized tourism experiences. Smith and Puczkó (2014) conceptualize health, wellness, and spa tourism as interconnected domains in which tourism experiences, health promotion, hospitality, and the pursuit of enhanced quality of life converge. Consequently, the development of the wellness sector entails not only an expansion of the tourism offer but also increasingly demanding requirements for the professional competencies of the human resources involved.

The economic dynamics of the sector further substantiate its global significance. Data from the Global Wellness Institute indicate that the global wellness economy reached USD 5.6 trillion in 2022, representing a 27% increase compared with 2020. During the 2020–2022 period, wellness tourism was among the fastest-recovering segments, with its global market reaching USD 650.7 billion**,** corresponding to an average annual growth rate of 36.2% in expenditures. Over the same period, the number of wellness trips increased by an average of 30.2% annually, exceeding the corresponding growth rates recorded for the overall tourism market in terms of both travel volume

and tourism expenditures. In 2022, approximately 819.4 million wellness trips were recorded, accounting for 7.8% of all tourism trips while generating 18.7% of total tourism expenditures. For the period 2022–2027, the Global Wellness Institute projects an average annual growth rate of 16.6% for wellness tourism, with the market expected to reach approximately USD 1.4 trillion by 2027 (Global Wellness Institute, 2023).

These indicators demonstrate that wellness tourism represents not merely an expanding tourism product but also a significant economic ecosystem in which health, human well-being, physical activity, tourism, services, and human capital development intersect. Within this context, there is a growing need for professionals capable of integrating knowledge from diverse fields and translating it into practice within wellness and spa environments.

From a destination-development perspective, wellness tourism is grounded in the integration of natural resources, cultural heritage, health and recreational opportunities, and specialized tourism services. Voigt and Pforr (2013) examine wellness tourism specifically within the destination context, emphasizing the resource base, consumer experience, well-being, and the need for integrated development of tourism offerings. This perspective is particularly relevant to Bulgaria, where wellness and spa tourism is supported by a combination of mineral waters, climatic resources, natural and cultural heritage, and well-established balneological traditions.

Within the Bulgarian context, the quality of wellness services is closely associated with the professional preparation of specialized personnel. Dimitrova (2019) examines quality standards for wellness services and the certified competencies of specialized personnel within Bulgarian niche tourism. Based on an expert survey among professionals working in Wellness, SPA, and Thalasso centres, the study establishes a direct relationship between professional competencies and service quality. The author emphasizes the importance of systematic quality standards and professional qualification for enhancing the quality and competitiveness of wellness provision. Particular attention is given to the interaction between the natural environment, innovative wellness services, and the formation of a culture of health and well-being. This multidimensional perspective is essential for understanding the professional role of the Wellness and Spa Consultant, whose preparation should enable the integration of diverse components of the wellness experience rather than being restricted to individual procedures or services (Dimitrova, 2019).

The relationship between academic education and the needs of the industry is of particular importance for the development of this professional profile. Dimitrova (2023) analyses educational policy, specialized personnel, innovation, and the development of the recreational industry in Bulgaria. The author identifies a shortage of specialized personnel in niche tourism and emphasizes the need to integrate scientific knowledge into Wellness & SPA practices. The study also examines emerging Wellness & SPA educational programmes at the National Sports Academy “Vasil Levski”, highlighting the need for closer alignment between higher education, professional competencies, and the actual requirements of the sector (Dimitrova, 2023).

An important component of contemporary wellness is the integration of natural and cultural heritage into innovative wellness services. Angelcheva and Tomova (2023) examine apitherapeutic heritage and the application of honey and bee products in preventive and wellness practices. They highlight innovation opportunities in certified Bulgarian spa and wellness centres and the importance of specialized wellness education. Their findings demonstrate how traditional knowledge and natural resources can enrich contemporary wellness practices.

A similar relationship between Bulgarian natural resources, innovation, and wellness services is evident in the study by Popova-Dobreva (2023), which focuses on wellness innovations based on the Bulgarian rose (Rosa damascena). The author examines aromatherapeutic applications and the potential of the Bulgarian rose as a resource for the development of contemporary wellness practices, while also addressing the role of wellness education. This approach broadens the understanding of Bulgaria's competitiveness as a wellness destination, where natural and cultural heritage can serve as a foundation for innovative services and professional knowledge.

The multidimensional nature of health and well-being as outcomes associated with physical activity is further supported by Dimitrova (2025), whose study examines psychological, physical, and emotional well-being among students practicing judo. Although the research focuses on a specific sporting population, its findings demonstrate interrelationships among physical activity, physical fitness, psychosocial development, motivation, discipline, and social behaviour. This perspective is relevant to the broader conceptualization of wellness as a

multidimensional state in which the physical, psychological, and social dimensions of well-being are considered interrelated.

On this basis, the professional profile of the Wellness and Spa Consultant can be conceptualized as an interdisciplinary interface connecting professional education, health promotion, physical activity, wellness services, tourism, and human well-being. The role of the specialist should not be confined to knowledge of or promotion of individual spa procedures, but should encompass the capacity to provide professional guidance, understand individual needs, support healthy lifestyle practices, and direct consumers towards appropriate wellness activities and services, including those designed for specific categories of tourists, such as pregnant women, within the boundaries of professional competence (Petkova-Nesheva, 2026).

Methodology

The present study examines the *role of the Wellness and Spa Consultant in Bulgaria in promoting health, well-being, and sustainable development*. Its primary objective is to analyse the development of this professional profile within the national context and to assess its potential contribution to the contemporary wellness and spa sector, with particular emphasis on professional competencies, academic preparation, education–industry relations, and prospects for professional realization.

The study employs a targeted documentary review **(desk research)** with an analytical and descriptive approach. The sources analysed include: **(a)** official websites, news, and institutional documents of the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski"; **(b)** admission guides and regulatory materials and **(c)** international reports of the Global Wellness Institute (GWI).

The data were analysed through *content, comparative, and thematic analysis* across seven key dimensions: academic development, professional competencies, health and well-being, education-industry relations, professional realization, human capital, and sustainable development.

The methodological framework follows the conceptual relationship *"Wellness and Spa Consultant → health → well-being → sustainable development."* As the first graduates are expected in 2027, the findings are interpreted as *emerging trends and potential prospects rather than definitive outcomes.*

Results and Analysis

The documentary analysis outlines the development of the professional profile ***"Wellness and Spa Consultant"*** in Bulgaria and demonstrates its potential contribution to promoting health, human well-being, and the sustainable development of the wellness and spa sector. The findings are presented according to the principal analytical dimensions of the study (Table 1), with particular emphasis on academic development, professional competencies, education–industry relations, professional realization, and prospects for sustainable development.

Table 1. Main dimensions of the documentary analysis

No.	Analytical Dimension	Primary Focus
1	**Academic Development**	Emergence and development of the Wellness and Spa Consultant professional profile
2	**Professional Competencies**	Knowledge, skills, and competencies required for professional practice
3	**Health and Well-being**	Potential contribution to health, quality of life, and human well-being
4	**Education–Industry Relations**	Interaction between academic education, employers, and the wellness and spa sector
5	**Professional Realization**	Employment opportunities, career development, and labour market needs

6	**Human Capital**	Contribution of qualified professionals to sectoral quality and competitiveness
7	**Sustainable Development**	Potential contribution to a sustainable and competitive wellness and spa sector

The Seven Analytical Dimensions

1. Academic Development of the Professional Profile - The analysis indicates that the introduction of the ***Wellness and Spa Consultant*** programme at the National Sports Academy represents a significant step towards the academic consolidation and professional advancement of the wellness and spa sector in Bulgaria. The professional profile establishes a structured educational framework for the development of specialists with interdisciplinary competencies.

2. Professional Competencies - The findings highlight the need to integrate knowledge and skills related to healthy lifestyles, physical activity, wellness services, communication, and professional counselling. This multidimensional competency framework reflects the increasingly complex nature of contemporary wellness.

3. Health and Well-being - The results indicate a potential role of the professional profile in promoting healthy behaviours, preventive approaches, and holistic human well-being. Within the scope of professional competence, the Wellness and Spa Consultant may support informed decision-making regarding appropriate wellness services and activities.

4. Education–Industry Interaction - The analysis highlights the need for closer alignment between academic preparation and the evolving requirements of the wellness, spa, tourism, and hospitality sectors. Stronger education–industry cooperation is essential for continuously updating professional competencies and enhancing the practical relevance of academic training.

5. Professional Realization - The continued expansion of wellness tourism creates favourable conditions for broader employment and career opportunities for qualified specialists. However, as the first graduates of the programme are expected in 2027, the present analysis does not permit a definitive assessment of actual employment outcomes.

6. Human Capital Development - Qualified professionals emerge as a critical resource for the quality, personalization, and competitiveness of wellness and spa services. Accordingly, academic preparation is relevant not only to individual professional development but also to the broader advancement of professional standards across the sector.

7. Potential Contribution to Sustainable Development - The Wellness and Spa Consultant may be conceptualized as a potential link between individual health, service quality, human capital development, and the sustainable advancement of the sector.

Overall Analytical Synthesis

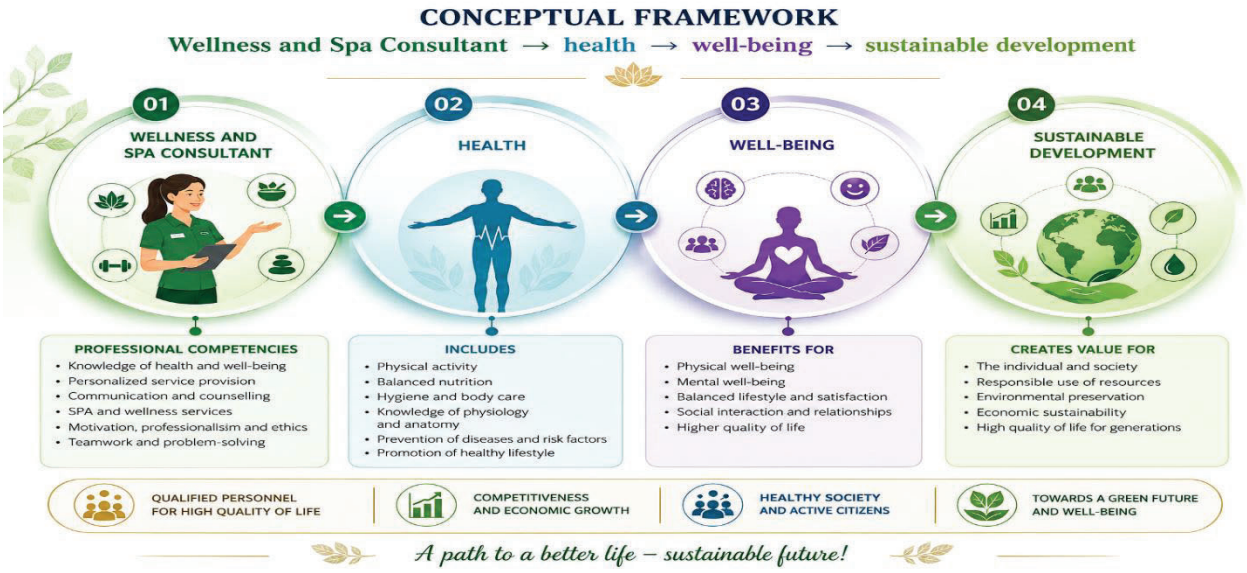
The findings indicate that the development of the ***Wellness and Spa Consultant*** professional profile responds to a growing demand for qualified specialists capable of integrating knowledge across health, physical activity, wellness services, and tourism. The analysis identifies a substantive interrelationship between professional competence, service quality, human well-being, and sustainable development, supporting the conceptualization of the consultant as a strategic interface between academic education and the evolving needs of the sector. Nevertheless, as the first graduates are expected in 2027, the present findings should be interpreted as *emerging trends and potential prospects rather than definitive evidence of professional realization.*

Discussion

The findings indicate that the role of the **Wellness and Spa Consultant** should be considered within a broader framework extending beyond the direct provision of wellness services. Professional education creates the potential to integrate knowledge of health, physical activity, well-being, and service quality with the evolving needs of the wellness and spa sector. In this context, the development of the professional profile may contribute

both to strengthening human capital and to fostering a more sustainable and competitive sector. This interrelationship is conceptually represented by the model *"Wellness and Spa Consultant → health → well-being → sustainable development"* as demonstrated in Fig. 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the Wellness and Spa Consultant's role in promoting health, well-being, and sustainable development *Source: Author's own conceptual framework.*



This professional model assumes particular significance against the backdrop of the dynamic growth of the global wellness economy. As wellness tourism becomes an increasingly important component of tourism consumption, the quality of human resources emerges as a critical determinant of service quality, safety, personalization, and competitiveness. This is where the findings of the international literature on wellness tourism intersect with Bulgarian research conducted at the National Sports Academy on professional qualifications, standards, wellness culture, and educational programmes.

The introduction and development of professional education for the ***"Wellness and Spa Consultant"*** at the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski" should therefore be considered within this broader scientific and professional framework. It provides an opportunity to systematize knowledge and competencies related to healthy lifestyles, physical activity, recreation, wellness services, and professional communication. Academic preparation creates potential for closer interaction between higher education and the wellness and spa industry and for developing professionals capable of responding to the evolving needs of the sector.

Within this framework, *professional competence represents the essential starting point; health promotion and prevention constitute the immediate areas of professional contribution; well-being represents the broader outcome for the individual; while sustainable development places individual well-being within the wider context of society, the economy, natural resources, and future generations.*

Accordingly, the role of the Wellness and Spa Consultant should be considered not only from a labour-market perspective but also as part of a broader process of professional development and quality enhancement within the wellness and spa sector. In this model, human capital becomes a connecting element between scientific knowledge, professional education, individual health and well-being, and the sustainable development of the tourism and wellness industries.

Conclusions

1. The ***"Wellness and Spa Consultant"*** professional profile represents a promising pathway for the academic and professional development of the Bulgarian wellness and spa sector, creating conditions for the preparation of qualified professionals with interdisciplinary competencies.
2. The analysis demonstrates a clear conceptual interrelationship between ***professional competence, health, human well-being, and wellness service quality***. Within this context, the Wellness and Spa Consultant has the potential to promote healthy lifestyles, informed decision-making, and individualized wellness practices.
3. The development of this professional profile offers potential for strengthening ***human capital and the sustainability of the Bulgarian wellness and spa sector;*** however, its actual impact on professional realization and the industry should be assessed through subsequent empirical research following the graduation of the first cohort of specialists.

Conclusion

The development of the wellness and spa sector is placing increasingly demanding requirements on professional education and the quality of human resources. In this context, the ***"Wellness and Spa Consultant"*** has the potential to emerge as a significant professional profile linking scientific knowledge, health promotion, service quality, and individual needs.

The analysis indicates that academic preparation can contribute not only to the professional realization of specialists but also to enhancing the quality and competitiveness of the sector. This is particularly relevant for Bulgaria, given its rich natural resources, established balneological traditions, and growing wellness tourism sector.

Ultimately, *investment in qualified professionals is a key factor in transforming Bulgaria's natural and tourism potential into high-quality, sustainable, and people-centred wellness and spa services.* The actual contribution of this professional profile remains to be evaluated through future research and by monitoring the professional realization of the first graduates.

Note:

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was declared by the author and the institution.

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