

Wellness Cluster and Knowledge-Based Economy

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Abstract: *The objective of this material is to analyse the complete content of the Bulgarian Wellness cluster and its connection to the social environment for building a knowledge-based economy. The necessity for the widespread dissemination of Wellness culture within society has been established. Our focus on the Wellness Cluster divides the structural elements into reactive and proactive procedures and Wellness impacts. We explain how Niche practices and impacts stand out from the conventional healthcare sector (also known as the disease industry). The standardization of tools and definitions in the research is crucial for scientific progress in creating a knowledge-based economy in Bulgaria.*

Keywords: Wellness culture, Cluster, Business environment, Tourism, Wellbeing index

Ключови думи: Уелнес културата, Клъстер, Бизнес среда, туризъм, Уелбийнг индекс



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INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, the topics of Wellness tourism and benchmarking nations through the Wellbeing index have been widely discussed as specialised terms, yet they still seek scientifically grounded definitions^{1,2}. The business environment for Wellness tourism has not established its international standards and struggles to ensure a sustainable competitive environment, particularly in Central Europe, due to a significant shortage of specialized personnel^{3,4,5}. The demand for Wellness tourism has increased, with over 4.7 million people practicing it globally in 2023^{6,7}. Leading authors associate the development of polyvalent Wellness culture with recreational physical activity both on land and in aquatic environments. Unanimously, they all demonstrate and acknowledge its positive impact on the health

¹ Dimitrova 2019.

² Polimenov 2022.

³ GWI 2019.

⁴ Dimitrova 2020.

⁵ Ignatova 2022.

⁶ Ignatova, Iliev 2020.

⁷ Ignatova, Iliev 2022.

and quality of life of clients^{8/9/10}. Finding highly qualified personnel for Wellness centers is a major problem in the business environment^{11/12}. The industry is facing a 'war for talents,' and the situation is not improving. Many owners of Wellness centers report difficulties in finding the right combination of experience and skills in their employees. The demand for specialized

packages is growing, requiring more staff than what is currently available. This has led to an increased focus on educational, training, and certification programs for employees in the industry. The global Wellness tourism market is valued in billions of dollars, with 36 % generated by Europe, and six of the top 10 destinations are also located in Europe (see Fig. 1).

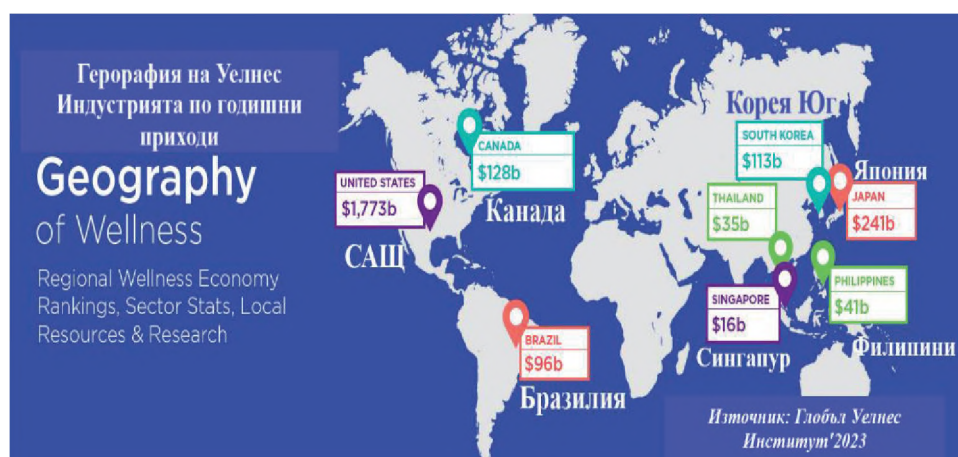


Figure 1. Geography of the Wellness industry by revenue and regions as of 2023.

The European Wellness industry recognizes the importance of scientific centers and the education of specialized personnel to ensure high-quality services¹³. To restore societal happiness, it is crucial to enhance individual life capacities through recreation in a sustainable business environment and maintain high-quality procedures. Currently, the sectors of the Wellness industry and Niche tourism (Wellness, Spa, Thalasso) still lack a clear vision, concept, regulated requirements, and/or standards¹⁴. Our many years of experience have established that the widespread dissemination of Wellness culture, through the initiatives and products of the Bulgarian Center of Excellence 'Heritage BG', transforms the business environment for niche tourism, providing inclusive smart growth¹⁵.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to analyze the full content and scope of the Wellness cluster in relation to the social environment for building a knowledge-based economy. To diagnose the cultural and health content of our Wellness concept regarding the content and structure of the Wellness Cluster, we applied:

- **Data Analysis** from our previous studies and/or comments on opinions in the works of global organizations;
- **Theoretical Modeling** (heuristic, prognostic, normative, evriprogrammatic, and pragmatic);
- **Modeling of Subjective Assessments** to convert them into cognitive concepts and values;
- **Systematisation and Ranking of Expert Assessments** for the purpose of subordination.

The schematic and graphical data characteristic of the global Wellness market provide a real-time in-depth view of the global state of Wellness culture, as well as best practices in the Recreational industry

⁸ Chipeva 2019: 51.

⁹ Nesheva 2023.

¹⁰ Tomova 2021.

¹¹ Tsanov 2015.

¹² Nesheva 2019.

¹³ Harizanova 2022.

¹⁴ Ignatova 2022.

¹⁵ Dimitrova 2023.

and niche tourism. Awareness of Wellness culture and achieving a good level of Wellbeing by citizens on a global scale ensures comparability at international, continental, regional, and national levels. Concurrently, the understanding of the dimension concerning community, governmental level, and nationality is developed.

RESULTS

To analyse the Wellness Cluster as a summarising structure is quite complex, decomposed by hierarchical subordination of difficulty. As seen from the structure presented below, the term includes a rich variety of indicators (Fig. 2). Most of the elements that constitute it are entirely niche procedures and directions.

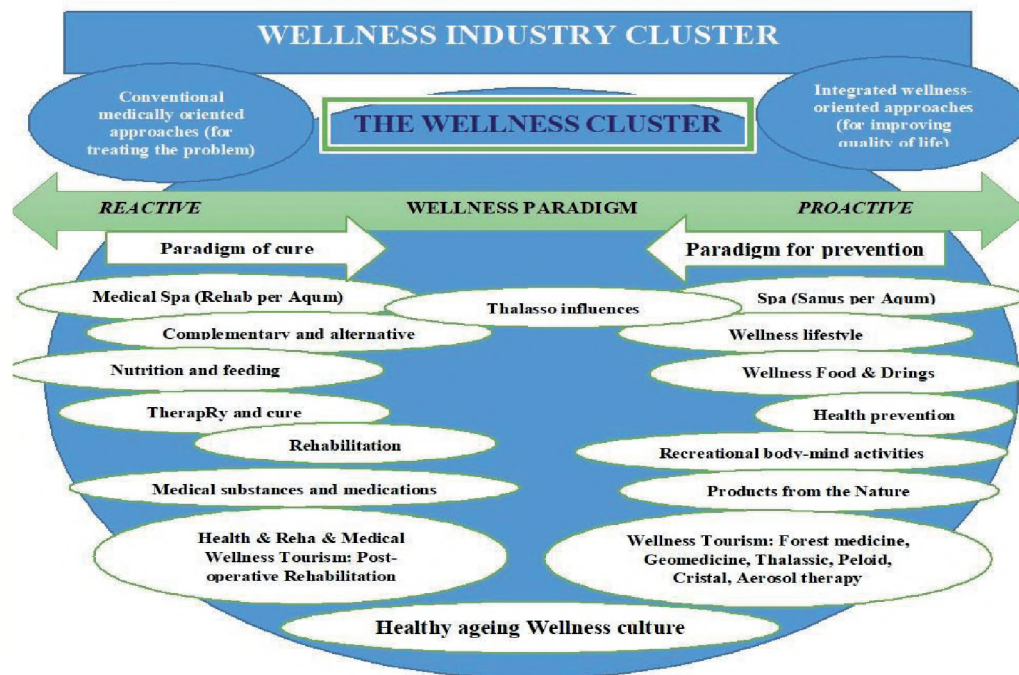


Figure 2. Reactive and Proactive Elements in the Subordination of the Wellness Cluster Content.

Each of these elements operates using different natural resources. This makes it challenging to be objectively registered and interpreted over time. Standardisation is

possible in the duration of procedures and the natural heritage that influences therapy. We make a first attempt to analyze this dynamic state using the indicators presented below (Fig. 3):



Figure 3. Subordination and Scope of Wellness Culture Indicators. Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/positive-psychology-work-robert-eiq-2-jerus-sphr>, accessed: 29.06.2024.

- Living life to its fullest and having pleasant experiences;
- Achieving balanced health parameters as a personal state;
- Achieving Wellness (Wellness) optimum through the directions listed as controlled variables: functional, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, professional, organizational, financial, social (interpersonal), ecological/planetary, cultural, health;
- Professional Wellness (Wellness) balance, motivation, achieving goals.

1. This involves life as a subjective assessment, accompanied by the functional balance of the physical body, with numerous objective evaluations in accordance with achieving professional Wellness (Wellness). These complex indicators are connected not only with subjective evaluation but also with the dynamics of each one over time, as well as the interactions between them. They do not change the fact that modern people primarily define Wellness as the new health prevention for good well-being and quality of life. The reason for such an understanding is not complicated: the general perception, and even some definitions of Wellness, are associated with achieving and maintaining a psycho-physical and emotional health balance. In this material, we clarify and enrich the substantive elements of the Bulgarian Wellness Cluster due to the great diversity of natural heritage in our country. This is the main reason for applying:

1. *Forest medicine* and therapy [forest: art, hammam, air bath, elephant eyes, forest nutrition];

2. *Geomedicine* and therapy [salt impacts, minerals, vitaminization, amino acids, gravity, hyperbaric chamber, oxygen therapy];

3. *Thalasso medicine* and therapy [sea water, sand, lye, peloid mud, algae, iodine vapors, aerosol impacts, deep breathing];

4. *Water therapy* and impacts [mineral, spring, and mountain waters, impacts through drinking, soaking, water jet with pressure, apparatus impacts in water];

5. *Manual therapy* and impacts [massage techniques, pressotherapy, acupuncture, adjustments, extensions];

6. Apparatus therapy and impacts [near-infrared light, low-current waves, ultraviolet light, vibrations];

7. Herbal therapy and impacts [essential oils, tea, extracts, cold infusions, decoctions, aerosol inhalations];

8. Healthy ageing Wellness concept (Recreational body-mind activities, wellness bio Foot)

9. Virtual therapy and impacts [VR added reality to various therapies through content from filmed Bulgarian protected natural areas].

The second term in the phrase “Wellness culture” refers to the significant aspects of humans and their environment that do not exist independently in nature. Culture is a product of human activity. In this context, we understand that wellness culture utilizes natural products and processed natural resources applied in procedures and interventions aimed at achieving a healthy way of life. It represents a collection of artificial structures and objects created by humans as supplements to natural ones, manifested through learned forms of human behavior and activities. All these elements are acquired through knowledge, self-awareness, and education and are expressed through a wealth of images and symbols in the surrounding environment.

Culture in the recreational industry and niche tourism manifests as human activities for self-expression, self-awareness, and accumulation of healthy habits and skills directed towards maintaining and controlling health (Fig. 3). Complete physical, mental, emotional, and social wellness ensures balanced health and the achievement of a healthy lifestyle. An excellent example is that nowadays wellness culture represents a wealth of goals pursuing enjoyable experiences for psycho-physical harmony, vitality, happiness, and creative thinking.



Figure 4. The architecture of personal health care for achieving a Wellness lifestyle.

We conducted a psychometric experiment to prove the social significance of an authorial innovative Wellness Cluster. We used new Wellness procedures and treatments applying Bulgarian products from natural heritage. We recorded the opinions of men and women, regular users of Wellness and restorative products and services. These opinions were statistically processed using specialized methodology to determine the weight of significance for each factor/indicator. The results obtained from the preference matrices and the ranking of factors determining the social impact and internationalization of the developed innovative Wellness Cluster (as a product) are presented in Table 1 and Figures 5, and 6. Table 1 presents the number of individuals and the corresponding weight of the factor for its ranking position through the

final sum of points collected from the total of all recorded opinions horizontally. The users' opinions on the question: "Do you believe that the innovative Wellness Cluster improves its effectiveness and quality through the inclusion of natural products from Bulgarian natural heritage?" are distributed as follows:

1. Positive opinions place the factor 'natural essential herbal and rose oils' in the first position, with 69 out of a total of 75 surveyed individuals expressing this view;

2. The percentage expression for the certainty of this factor is 76 %, which is a sufficiently high value, giving scientific credibility to the established ranking;

3. The maximum number of disagreements is only 3 people, which does not exceed a 12 % fluctuation, and does not change the stated ranking from the majority.

Table 1. Preference Matrix Based on Client Opinions Regarding the Social Significance of the Newly Developed Innovative Wellness Brand Product

| <i>Indicators</i> | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> | <i>5</i> | <i>6</i> | <i>Sum</i> | <i>Rang</i> |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| | <i>/6/</i> | <i>/5/</i> | <i>/4/</i> | <i>/3/</i> | <i>/2/</i> | <i>/1/</i> | | |
| <i>1. Do you think that the innovative Wellness Cluster improves its efficiency and quality by including natural products from the Bulgarian Natural Heritage?</i> | 69 | 3 | 1 | 2 | | | 75 | I |
| | 414 | 15 | 4 | 6 | - | - | 439 | |
| <i>2. Do you think that an innovative Wellness Cluster improves its efficiency and quality by including rituals with herbal teas and herbal juices?</i> | 3 | 70 | | 2 | | | 75 | II |
| | 18 | 350 | - | 6 | - | - | 374 | |
| <i>3. Do you think that an innovative Wellness Cluster improves its efficiency and quality by including a Geomedicine ritual «Relaxation in a bio-energizing crystal or salt room»?</i> | 1 | | 68 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 75 | III |
| | 6 | - | 272 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 288 | |
| <i>4. Do you think that an innovative Wellness Cluster improves its efficiency and quality by including a Forest Medicine ritual «Aroma therapy with fresh herbs»?</i> | 1 | 1 | 1 | 70 | 2 | | 75 | IV |
| | 6 | 5 | 4 | 210 | 4 | - | 229 | |
| <i>5. Would you support the inclusion of a separate package of Wellness Rituals for Two?</i> | 1 | | 3 | | 71 | | 75 | V |
| | 6 | | 12 | - | 142 | - | 160 | |
| <i>6. Do you think that an innovative Wellness Cluster improves its efficiency and quality taking into account the time commitment of its clients (no more than 1 hour and 30 minutes for the whole package)?</i> | | 1 | 2 | | | 72 | 75 | VI |
| | - | 5 | 8 | - | - | 72 | 85 | |

The registered opinions on the question in the survey card 'Do you think that an innovative Wellness (Wellness) Brand improves its efficiency and quality by including rituals with herbal teas and juices with herbs?' are distributed as follows:

1. Positive opinions determine the second place of the factor 'herbal teas and juices (fresh) with herbs' and their quantitative expression is 70 out of a total of 75 respondents;

2. The percentage expression for the certainty of this factor is 80 %, which is a sufficiently high value, giving scientific credibility to the established ranking;

3. Disagreement is only 3 people putting it first and does not exceed a 12 % swing, therefore does not affect the stated majority ranking.

The opinions on the question in the survey card 'Do you believe that the innovative Wellness Cluster improves its effectiveness and quality through the inclusion of a geomedicine ritual 'Relaxation in a bioenergizing crystal or salt room?' are distributed as follows:

1. Positive opinions place the factor 'inclusion of a geomedicine ritual' in the third position, with 68 out of a total of 75 surveyed individuals expressing this view.

2. The percentage expression for the decisiveness of this factor is 72 %, which is a sufficiently high value, providing scientific credibility for the established ranking.

3. Disagreement comes from 1, 2, and 3 individuals who rank it first, fourth, fifth, and sixth, with hesitation ranging between 4 % and 8 %, which does not affect the ranking indicated by the majority.

DISCUSSION

By definition, Wellness culture in the context of healthy and safe working conditions refers to a series of policies, ideas, customs, beliefs, values, and peer support that guide the workforce and are applied within a specific company or organization. The focus of Wellness culture is to promote a health-oriented lifestyle and working environment that are purposefully developed. Attention must be given to contemporary trends such as cyberculture and cultural practices in a digital environment. In the coming decades, this will be the place where mass cultural practices and activities most frequently emerge. Today,

people attribute to the computer the status of a real management information system, which serves as a physical and emotional anchor in their efforts to navigate the sea of information and help each other. It is a place for rapid adaptation syndrome, but not necessarily with a higher quality of life. It is a favorite place for sharing health-promoting programs and demonstrations of recreational physical activity. We convincingly present the "human-computer" subculture as a real perspective that to some extent coincides with and complements the real health and safety culture. New communities with their own rules are being created and developed; a new communication atmosphere arises. This creates conditions for a shift from biomorphism¹⁷ to technomorphism¹⁸ and the resulting cultural processes.

CONCLUSION

The analysis specified and enriched the substantive elements, as well as their subordination to the Bulgarian Wellness Cluster. Due to the great diversity of natural heritage in our country, it is important to publish the specifics of a complete substantive structure. At the same time, we established that the Wellness culture has its new territory for digital development. It is not difficult to predict that it will have increasing importance not only for health-conscious, ambitious people but also for the recreational business. We clarified and anticipated that it is part of the cyber-culture of users and professionals. Today and in the future, it is taken into account by the recreational business, management, economics, and politics. Based on the analysis of the results and the constructed conclusion, we formulate the following conclusions:

1. The data from the psychometric experiment proved the need to develop various purpose-oriented and price-forming Wellness rituals with Bulgarian products from the Natural heritage;

2. The analysis of the respondents' opinions showed a clear trend of transitioning from individual procedures to comprehensive rituals;

3. To improve the quality of Niche tourism, it is necessary to introduce requirements for Bulgarian product manufacturers and the competence of specialized personnel.

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Уелнес клъстер и икономика, основана на знанието

Бистра Димитрова, Богомил Ангелов

Цел на материала е да анализира пълното съдържанието на българския Уелнес клъстер и обвързаността му със социалната среда за изграждане на икономика основана на знанието. Установена е необходимост от широко разпространяване на Уелнес култура сред обществото. Концентрацията ни за Уелнес Клъстер разделя структурните елементи на реактивни и проактивни процедури и Уелнес въздействия. Разясняваме как се открояват Нишовите практиките и въздействия от конвенционалния сектор на здравеопазването (или наричан още – болестната индустрия). Стандартизацията на инструментите и дефинициите в изследването е от съществено значение за научния прогрес за създаване на икономика, основана на знанието в България.

