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**THE WORKFORCE QUALIFICATION PROBLEMS  
IN WELLNESS AND SPA INDUSTRY, CASE  
STUDY OF HOTEL SPAS IN GEORGIA**

Master Thesis

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This Master thesis has been compiled independently. All works by other authors used while compiling the thesis as well as principles and data from literary and other sources have been referred to.

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## INTRODUCTION

Service industry is unconditionally associated with human capital. In other words, it can be characterized as one of the most dependent industries on live workforce, their skills and professionalism. While speaking about service, it is inevitable to mention tourism industry, as one of the biggest and profitable fields of service, which consisted 30% of service exports in a year of 2016, with one employment place out of 10 (World Tourism Organization, [UNWTO], 2017, p. 6).

In recent years, together with the changing life style of population, the purpose of travel changed quite a lot. There became a big cluster of travelers whose main goal is health, wellness and spa tourism – visiting particular places with the aim of increase their well-being and pamper themselves by different spa and wellness procedures. The Global Wellness Institute (2017b) defines wellness as “the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health” (p. iii). Hence, wellness tourists’ main purpose of travelling is improving their wellbeing and quality of life by getting pampered. Dimitrovski and Todorović (2015) note that “the spa sector in Europe consists of two segments: those who visit spas and health resorts primarily for medical reasons and those whose motives for visits are more compatible with the motivations of traditional tourists” (p. 260). This fact highlights that spa sector is not limited by only wellness and spa facilities, it includes visiting health resorts, mineral water destinations, etc. The tourist with other interests can visit spa facilities during the trip in order to get to know with local spa culture, or just for relaxation. Such kind of places are visited by local population together with international visitors, but their main reason of visit can be various depended on the characteristics of place (medical purposes, leisure and relaxation, etc.).

Hence, spa and wellness service providers are not limited with only spa and wellness resorts. The chain hotels all over the world offer above-mentioned facilities for their guests in order to enhance the feeling of luxurious stay and take care of relaxation of

visitors. The facilities based on mineral waters offer relevant service to the guests with accommodation opportunities as well.

The service industry, in general, stands in front of a huge challenge – the lack of qualified and educated workforce (O’Lawrence, 2017) who do their best to offer the high-class service to the clients and satisfy their needs in a best possible manner. The cluster of wellness industry, as part of the service provider, shares the problem and suffers from unqualified staff. This can be assigned as global challenge.

Georgia – the country that lies on the border of Europe and Asia is not exception in this situation. It would be very interesting to find out the situation of specific developing country with relevant background and potential of spa and wellness industry. Taking into consideration the strategic geographical location, beautiful landscapes and cultural heritage sites, centuries of winemaking, diverse history and indigenous culture, the country’s tourism potential is huge. Due to the natural resources, the foresight and future of Georgian tourism can freely become health, wellness and spa tourism. The case of Georgia will be researched in the paper – the post-Soviet country on the border of Europe and Asia which is in the process of further development. Erkomaishvili, Kharaishvili, Chavleishvili and Sagreishvili (2016) think that due to abundance of natural resources of medical usage, the country has potential to position itself as a popular medical wellness resort destination in the world. This argument is discussed in details in the empirical part of the study. However, plethora of natural resources is nothing if not managed properly by human resource. In the publication “Policy of tourism and opportunities of development of wellness industry in Georgia”, the authors mention workforce qualification as one of the challenges hindering the development of wellness industry and suggest to create the special educational system to solve the problem (Erkomaishvili, Gvelesiani, Kharaishvili, & Chavleishvili, 2014). Currently, after four years, the recommendation has stayed in the same manner and nothing has been done in this direction. Therefore, the problem is still actual and that is the reason and research problem of this paper. As the industry stands in front of this problem, it would be significant to find out what the management of the field think about it, how big is the talent gap in Georgia and how they handle the existing situation in human resources market.

The goal of the master thesis comes out from the research problem and sounds as following: to analyze the spa managers and/or human resource managers view about the workforce quality in wellness and spa industry and to give the recommendations for improving the current situation. The research questions were implied from the goal of the paper and they are divided in two parts:

1. an analysis of the quality of human resources in the spa and wellness field in Georgia;
2. to provide recommendations for improving and enhancing the support for spa and wellness field workers.

In order to achieve thesis goal and answer the research questions, the following research tasks were fulfilled. The first part of the paper uses literature review tool in order to find out the current trends in general human resource management, following with specification at tourism and concretely in wellness and spa industry. The research methods chapter shows the tools used to answer the research questions and to achieve the goal of the topic. The hotel spa managers and human resource managers were interviewed to get in-depth answers from them. The research includes seven face-to-face and two e-mail interviews. To sum up, the recommendations from the author are given in order to eliminate negative aspects, improve the current situation, and make further and possible achievements in the field of wellness and spa in Georgia.

# **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **1.1. The global importance of human resources in service sector**

Despite the globalization and technological advancements of 21st century, there are number of challenges hindering the world to become a better place for its most important dwellers – human beings. Together with the increasing number of population and their shifting needs and wants, the service sphere is subject of permanent changes, such as creation, development, sometimes even failure or disappearance of various particular services. The increased number of services implies that the demand for people who can handle suitable work is increased simultaneously. Every company, who has ambition of operating successfully wishes to see qualified and educated employees in their businesses and demands them as well. O’Lawrence (2017) in the publication “The workforce for the 21st century” talks about the three main economic advantages for the industries and nations that are technology, natural and human resources, among which human capital is the most significant factor. Literate and well-trained workforce is able to manage the natural and technological resources in a relevant manner, which is an important step for the nation to become competitive within the world economy (O’Lawrence, 2017, p. 68). The statement is quite logical as every state consists of industries and enterprises at business level, which are consisted with concrete group of people on the other hand – united with similar skills and common aim. Together with the increase of complex and interrelated processes at workplace, the skills such as creativity, coordination and good strategic orientation become essential tools for modern workforce (Hecklau, Galeitzke, Flachs, & Kohl, 2016).

Choosing the right people for the right job is kind of art, tightly connected with psychology that needs a solid professional experience from the side of employers. As the requirements and specific skills for the particular jobs are matter of rapid changes, plethora of human resource managers have trouble in finding the right person for the right

place. The idea of “right person” is very controversial and has individual characteristics dependent on every particular workplace. Klimplová (2012) states that “Adequately skilled workforce can be defined as knowledge, skills, habits, experience or professional competencies (human capital) that are required by employers for exercises of certain professions at certain time” (p. 50).

As mentioned above, the task of finding talents is an obligation of human resource team. Human resources management has great influence on every business and industry regardless of the sphere of activity. Human resource management involves following aspects: recruitment, selection, training and development, performance management, promotion, outplacement, creating flexible work practices, etc. (Gill, Gardner, Claeys & Vangronsvelt, 2018, p. 6). According to this, it becomes clear that the idea of human resource management is huge, as it has to fulfill careful selection, recruiting, taking care of the existing staff and their professional development, and solve any kind of problem related with them.

Human resources department of the company is described as unique self-developing and self-regulatory system in the paper by Mikhaylov, Kolesnikova and Salyakhov (2014, p. 330). This statement is correct at some point, but it should be mentioned that the idea of self-regulation is not necessarily true for every company.

While talking about human resource management, it is significant to mention the idea of human capital as it brings together the person as such, uniting its educational and practical background, characteristics like devoutness to work and impulsion, which is not in a direct ownership of the company (Kianto, Sáenz, & Aramburu, 2017). Vardarlier (2016) argues that time by time, the companies have started to analyze and appreciate the great importance of human resources, therefore, they tend to look after their teams increasingly.

However, finding process of the right employee has become subject of difficulty due to following factors: lack of literacy in the concrete field, absence of suitable practical experience, unwillingness of professional development from the side of current and potential employees, either too high or too low requirements for potential staff, etc.

The concept of employee loyalty is worth to discuss in this part of the literature review, as it is not less important compared to finding the relevant human resource. The good staff needs to be satisfied in order to be maintained in a long-term prospective. Besides, happy employee is the premise of satisfied customer. According to Ineson, Benke and László (2013), customer satisfaction and success of company comes as a result of employee loyalty, as the aforesaid creates and offers a nice service to the client. After discussing above-mentioned ideas, there is no doubt that every author agrees on great importance of human capital in service sector.

As the goal of the paper should be answered, and the workforce qualification problems is not in depth discussed topic, it would be relevant to review the situation in a more concrete sphere of service, such as tourism industry before discussing the human resource challenges in wellness and spa field particularly.

## 1.2. Human resource management in tourism and hospitality

The connection of the main topic of the paper – spa and wellness industry with tourism and hospitality should not be strange as they are strongly interrelated. In order to show clear picture, there are some definitions necessary for better comprehension of the situation. There was mentioned many different terms above, which can cause the confusion within them and in the research in general. Therefore, the differentiation is given in the Table 1.

**Table 1.** Definitions of tourism directions

Health/Spa Tourism	Spa Tourism	Wellness Tourism
Provision of health facilities using the country's natural resources, especially mineral water and climate. Health tourism refers to those clients with medical conditions who travel to experience healing therapies.	Widely recognized as a basic element of health and wellness movement covering a wide spectrum of holistic curative and preventive activities.	The way of life that aims to create a healthy body, spirit and mind by positive interventions based on the knowledge acquired. A person looking for a wellness trip is generally healthy, interested in therapies to maintain health.

Source: Stanciulescu, Diaconescu, & Diaconescu, 2015, p.159

These three definitions are important to distinguish from each other at this point of the paper. But, as in every source, these explanations are quite conditional too. The thing is that the scholars have not agreed on one definition of these terms, as each of them are perceived differently by various authors. This is not surprising, because as it is clear from the table, all three definitions are strongly interrelated. Empirical part of the study will show the need of differentiation and will be emphasized on concrete concept.

The abovementioned Table 1 lacks one very important concept which is known as medical tourism. There are many different definitions of medical tourism as every author describes it differently. European Hospital and Healthcare Federation (2015) gathers nine definitions of medical tourism. The most known and popular definition is from Lunt et al. (2011): “when consumers elect to travel across international borders with the intention of receiving some form of medical treatment. This treatment may span the full range of medical services, but most commonly includes dental care, cosmetic surgery, elective surgery, and fertility treatment” (p. 2). All above mentioned definitions will help in better identification of the terms which will be helpful in empirical part later.

While the world tourism is a subject of permanent development, human resources become more and more important for the field. Together with time and destination changing, the problems and challenges of human resource management varies as well. For instance, International Labour Organization (2010) talks about how negatively the employees are influenced by the changing management and ownership system of the company, doubting that their wages can be eliminated in order to increase profits, together with new cash-flow regulation. In this case, human resource managers are the right staff who deal with problem regulation and persuade the team that nothing happens, or in worse case, have to explain why their salaries are cut and find the solutions to maintain the workers. The case is relevant for the successful companies who already have the team and have to deal with them. But the situation is not so smooth in every case. The problem for some companies, or even for industries is to find the right staff with the right skills.

Many authors have worked about the topic during decades. This fact proves the actuality of the topic and makes the sense that the field stands in front of a huge challenge in terms of human resource for a long time. It is logical that the topic was actual in older literature materials, as tourism industry was one of the fastest growing sectors of economy and

demanding increasing number of field professionals. For example, Gruescu, Nanu and Pirvu (2008) explain the importance of human resources in tourism with following words: “The story of successful tourism enterprises is one that is largely about people – how they are trained and educated, how they are valued and rewarded” (p. 169).

Depending on the different scientific sources, it becomes clear that the field was suffering from number of gaps. In most cases, human resources in tourism is discussed quite pessimistically. Baum, one of the main author in human resource management studies, in his paper from 2007 states that despite the rapid changes in world industrial standards of employment and human resources, tourism field remains exceptional as it still struggles with problems. Notwithstanding the fact, that reasonable amount of time has passed, the problem has not lost its actuality. Eight years later, in the publication with the same title, Baum (2015, p. 207) lists the changes happened after 2007. One of them is connected with globalization and tourism workforce. The idea of the point is that finding universally skilled employee is still hard job, but the ways to find them is changed. So, the problem of finding professional and educated workforce is still the main gap.

Every author has their own ideas how to overcome this existing problem and eliminate the amount of unqualified staff. According to Herman (2015), “Already in planning of human resources it is essential to make a good plan about what type of and what degree of education, knowledge and skills are necessary for each position, and by choosing employees the management should be guided by the above-mentioned criteria in order to reduce the fairly large amount of unqualified staff in tourism” (p. 186). This will be the perfect situation if not the complication by the fact, that tourism is perceived as an industry not requiring many various skills and literacy to become employed. There is stereotype within people about the ease of finding work in the field, even without proper education or practical experience. Therefore, the people who want to become involved in the tourism field, apply for the position because they think that they are able to do any job in the field, as it is very easy and does not require the knowledge of any specific task. From the author’s point of view, this idea is very controversial, and far from the logic in today’s world of tourism. Especially, in the accommodation sector. Even the lowest position workers need a kind of educational or practical background in order to create quality product. Fortunately, this idea is not accepted by the field professionals who have

experienced much in theoretical as well as practical part of tourism studies. The prove of this can be following author, Ioniță (2013), who states that “Worker, especially for those who come into contact with foreign tourists need to know a foreign language, however, he must behave civilized, elegant, be persuasive, be able to adapt to the mental state tourists promote and maintain a relaxed atmosphere, relaxed, reliable” (p. 382).

However, to be unbiased, the role of unskilled workers should be mentioned together with the educated personal. According to Tapescu (2015), the employment opportunities in the industry is quite diverse, there is a need of high level professionals with the range of skills, as well as employees without specific education and necessary characteristics. There is difference in working conditions and remuneration for different kind of employees too – full time or part time, seasonal or all year-round employment opportunities.

While speaking about the gap, there should be done differentiation within the requirements for employees as there cannot be similar working standards and need of skills for every tourism enterprise. Gruescu et al. (2008) differentiate tourism enterprises in big and small ones, each of them asking for various characteristics from potential employees. The same idea is sounded by International Labour Organization (2010), stating that the competence and performance of enterprises are subject of differentiation, depending on particular situation. According to them small enterprises are dependent on vocational school in terms of trainings, while big hotels provide “on-the-job-training” to their workers (International Labour Organization, 2010, p. 8). This leads to the idea that tourism is not a simple system with homogenous nature, and it demands to be treated in a very careful manner, especially in case of human capital. The character of the topic demands to make accent mostly on accommodation sector, hotels spas and spa resorts and their human resources rather than tourism companies and other fields of the industry.

Besides the above-mentioned issues, the human resource management is a subject of many various thoughts in tourism and hospitality industry. There are several examples, one of them is connected with an innovation factor. “Because of the intangible nature of services, innovation success in the hospitality industry largely depends on the attitudes and skills of employees” (Chang, Gong, & Shum, 2011, p. 812). The statement would be true in case employees are happy with the working conditions and are motivated and encouraged to create something new and innovative for the company. Another example

can be the work of Sucher and Cheung (2015) who talk about the cross-cultural competence as necessary skill in hospitality industry – “Skills, including cross-cultural communication skills, are used to customize personal behavior to interact with others from diverse cultural backgrounds” (p. 94). This statement seems more logical than the previous one. The ability to have equal communication with different nationalities is the main principle of working in tourism and hospitality, as the basics of tourism is to host the foreigner, or to travel and introduce to another culture. Therefore, the interpersonal and cross-cultural skills are really unchangeable and very significant. As for innovations, it can be true at some point, but not always. Firstly, not every employee can be innovative due to their competences. They prefer to be performers, rather than innovators. Secondly, in some cases, the employees can be innovative, but depends in which context. Too much innovation can be understood in a wrong manner by the customer and can lead to negative results. But of course, everything is dependent on particular situations.

After the long discussion that the industry has genuine problem of finding the right staff, it is important to identify the reasons why travel and hospitality field experiences such a big gap. Despite the fact, that there are lots of educational institutions towards tourism and hospitality, both – at higher and vocational level, still, it seems that something is done in a wrong manner, as the problem of unqualified staff is very obvious and remains as one of the main challenges. According to Solnet et al. (2014), “Tourism education and training focuses on the quantity of output rather than the quality of training and skills development, and the pressure from employers is on reducing the length and intensity of training” (pp. 701–702).

World Travel and Tourism Council in its report from 2015 “Global talent trends and issues for the travel & tourism sector”, identifies the key factors of staff deficiency. These are: career attractiveness and pathways, competition, retention, uncompetitive pay, educational supply, structural characteristics (gender bias), practice and training, government policy and engagement, and economy (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015, pp. 16–19). It is noteworthy that at first sight, competition and uncompetitive pay seems to be the mutually exclusive concepts, but reading further, it becomes clear that the problem in competition subchapter is about the rivalry from other fast-growing industries, not inside the tourism itself, as for the uncompetitive pay, it is in the tourism, particularly.

Thus, the solution for this huge challenge seems to be hidden in above-mentioned factors. From author's point of view, the two most important factors are interrelated with each other. These are educational supply, which can be seen as pre-employment phase, and practice and training, already post-employment activity. Ackehurst and Loveder in their paper from 2015 – "Building the capabilities of the travel, tourism and hospitality workforce" talk about the importance of negotiation between the businesses and educational institutions:

Skill development that is more aligned to current and future travel, tourism and hospitality requirements, including upskilling of existing workers and developing information and communication technology capabilities, are all essential. Stronger partnerships between training providers, business and industry peak bodies will be vital to these developments. (Ackehurst & Loveder, 2015, p. 14)

Therefore, the summary of this subchapter in one sentence will be following: Human resource managers obligation in tourism field is to find the educated staff and develop them with further practice and training opportunities.

### **1.3. Human resource management challenges in spa and wellness industry**

The spa and wellness industry, as mentioned in previous chapters, is one of the fastest developing spheres of tourism. Before starting the discussion about human resource in spa and wellness, it would be relevant to find out the importance of spa center functioning for the accommodation sector. As the title of the topic shows, the accent is made on the hotel spas. The definition of hotel spa given by Suttikun, Chang and Bicksler (2018) sounds as following: "Hotel or Resort Spas: This type of spa provides a variety of services for customers such as facial massage and body treatment. Some places may include fitness facilities and healthy food for customers" (p. 2). Therefore, it is very interesting to see the picture in terms of hotel spas – especially how important they are for the lodging enterprises. According to Rančić, Popov-Raljić and Pavić (2013), hotel customers expect more and more from the spa and wellness centers. Even though they do not use it in a permanent manner, the hotel with spa and wellness center has a big advantage in highly competitive environment. "Contrary to the low use, some hotel operators rather than

minimize, expand recreational facilities and very aggressively marketed them, in addition to providing accommodation” (Rančić et al., 2013, p. 49). As the spa and wellness facilities in different hotels tend to increase and flourish time by time, it is obvious that the demand on the people who can serve the guests in this environment will be increased simultaneously. Likely to tourism enterprises in general, the role of employees is huge in this field as they create the product of wellness and spa – the treatments and procedures to improve the person’s well-being and make him/her pampered. According to Smith and Puczkó (2009), “any form of health and wellness tourism and facility need better skilled employees than, for example, mass tourism facilities would” (p. 157).

Actually, one can find abound of material describing the industry in general, in different aspects, but human resource management in the spa and wellness industry is quite neglected topic. The reason for this can be the sphere limitations preventing the human resource managers to conduct general human resource practices while searching and recruiting new staff. The hindering factors are discussed in details in subchapter given below.

Before the discussion about current issues in the field, it is crucial to identify the description of positions which will be named in the paper very frequently, such as spa manager, spa therapists, etc. ASEAN – The association of South East Asian Nations offer the ASEAN spa services standard (2016), where one can read every necessary definition, together with general requirements and standards essential for running the spa business. According to them, spa manager is “A qualified and experienced individual in spa services industry with management skills. Trained and certified worker in the spa industry whose primary role is the day to day management of the spa business” (ASEAN, 2016, p. 4). The definition of therapist sounds as following “Trained and certified worker in the spa industry that performs spa treatments or spa services for clients” (ASEAN, 2016, p. 4). The paper provides plethora of necessary information for those who willing to enter the business.

According to Singapore Workforce Development Agency, (2014, p. 23) who provide the tutorial guide for Singapore tourism industry offers, the sample job titles in spa and wellness field are divided in three levels: managerial, supervisory and operations level. Managerial level involves spa director, branch manager, and spa manager. Supervisory

level positions are spa consultant, spa supervisor, head therapist, senior therapist, and spa coordinator. As for the operational level, it includes the following jobs such as spa therapist, beauty therapist, body therapist, massage therapist, make-up artist, nail technician, manicurist. It is noteworthy that the list does not include the working positions such as spa receptionist, spa attendant, spa butler. Having the position of spa butler is optional, because not every hotel infrastructure stipulates the necessity of butlers, but receptionist of the spa and attendant who is responsible on overall cleanliness and accuracy of the environment are essential members of the spa staff. The division of these staff members will be following – the attendant can be belonged to the operational level, what cannot be said about the receptionist. It is somewhere between operational and supervisory levels, as it does not make treatments, but regulates the schedule of treatments and is the first who meet and greet the guest while entering the spa center. The above-mentioned definitions make it clear that, the qualification and training are the main characteristics for both – managerial and operational levels of the spa.

The particular case of human resources in spa and wellness industry is not researched much in details. Only few authors speak about it. According to Baum and Lockstone-Binney (2013), the demand side of wellness tourism is studied by different authors and it is quite well discussed, while the supply side – the functions of human resources in the above-mentioned field is kind of abandoned. This fact can be caused by the customer-oriented policies of many firms. Indeed, the customer should be satisfied, but making a big orientation to customer care should not be on account of employees, without them customer cannot get any service, therefore cannot be gratified. Thus, the businesses should think about having happy staff which will create high quality service for the guests and will take care of their happiness as well.

One of the pioneers in the literature to describe the spa industry in a detailed manner were Cohen and Russel (2008) who discuss human resource point and state the idea that the human resource is the product for spa industry, which requires a high level of qualification, professional skills, as well as practical background in the field. Therefore, the professional staff with relevant skills has crucial importance not only on basic but also on top levels.

This field is quite challenging for the whole spa business as such. Above-mentioned authors, Suttikun et al. (2018) argue that having only large number of clients is not enough for the spa business to operate successfully, to obtain and maintain the sufficient team of professionals is the vital thing.

However, there is only one and the most important industry research paper, tightly connected with the topic. According to Global Spa and Wellness Summit report (GSWS, 2012), the problem of recruiting is not new, but it has become actual with the rapid grow of wellness field. The report identifies three main challenges for human resource managers in spa sector (GSWS, 2012, p. 10):

1. Difficulty of finding the universal manager with business and communication skills together with the industry knowledge.
2. The shortage of educational institutions and number of educated personal compared to working places, which leads to hire the staff without relevant educational background.
3. Spa companies do not try to invest in development of their employees, in order to increase their skills and theoretical and practical background.

The report is very useful as it gives the guidance to the current or future managers in spa and wellness field and generally touches every crucial topic.

While speaking about the qualification, it is important to talk about the education opportunities for the field. In the book “Spa business strategies: A plan for success” D’Angelo (2006) has mentioned the need for the qualified personal who would take care of potential students: “To attract capable instructors, schools will need to offer more competitive salary rates” (p. 37). According to the studies of European countries with spa resources done by Georgescu and Necsoi (2013), it is clear that the spa and wellness really suffers from the lack of professional staff. There are even cases, where not only the professional staff, but also trainers who should teach the staff to become professional, is missing. Considering this, the existence of unqualified employees should not be surprising anymore. Thus, one of the reasons of the problem of having relevant instructors can be uncompetitive pay for the teachers which results in unwillingness to give courses in the spa direction.

Another problem is connected with conflict of financial and human resources – “Employers want to have specialists, but they don’t want the duration of their training to

be too long or too expensive” (Georgescu & Necsoi, 2013, p. 364). Such kind of attitude from the side of stakeholders, of course, only worsens the situation and deteriorates the motivation and encouragement within the employees. In order to get the qualified employee, it is essential to invest in their professional development.

Some hotel spas use the technique of outsourcing in order to operate spa centers within the hotel. The reasons of outsourcing can be different, such as hotel’s desire to give the spa center to the company who will manage the department better, to increase the revenue or to get more quality service by allowing others to operate within the hotel. The reasons can be united, but mostly the main goal is to obtain the professionals who can handle the situations in the spa in a high level and become guarantee of guest satisfaction (Hodari, Waldthausen, & Sturman, 2014). The choice of accommodation sector is wise in this case, when they have realized the importance of spa center functioning for the hotel and want to offer their clients high level service in this direction.

Having the great responsibility towards both – the company and individuals, the management of the spa and wellness center should be always in action. “A spa business must have the ability to renew knowledge, create new ideas and be innovative. This requires a workforce with multiple skills, competences and problem-solving abilities” (Rawlinson, 2017, p. 157). As spa and wellness is part of the tourism industry, the common and significant skills demanded from employees are the proficiency at foreign languages, good communication and interpersonal skills, ability of sufficient team work, etc. The concrete skills like the competency at spa treatments, educational background and practical experience are the characteristics typically for spa and wellness workers. That is one of the main challenges for the human resource managers as they have to take into consideration not only basic knowledge of languages and good manners of employee, but also all the additional skills significant for the spa center employee. The above-mentioned ASEAN (2016) offers the list of standards for qualification and training for spa, as well as working practice points. The list is given in Table 2.

The abovementioned author – Rawlinson (2017) talks about the development potential of worker which include the necessity of informal and formal learning for the spa workers. The difference between them are quite big – formal learning is about the traditional way of studying outside the working environment, while informal learning is vice-versa – it is

the knowledge accumulated from looking at others and from personal experience (Rawlinson, 2017, p. 158). Literally, both of them are essential, first one is mostly concerned with theoretical experience, while second comes from practical experience and gives ability of personal and professional growth. In some cases, the informal education becomes more important as it allows person to deal with day to day activities and is the base of become expert of the field.

**Table 2.** The standards and requirements of spa management in terms of people

1. Qualifications and Training
1.1. The staff working in the company should be certified and qualified.
1.2. Every employee must complete the orientation program of the firm and get to know general standards, requirements and protocol.
1.3. Every employee must have experience and training at specific products and services before starting the work with clients.
1.4. Every employee shall participate in an on-going periodic assessable in-house training program to ensure maintenance and development of knowledge and standards.
1.5. The staff should have possibility of professional development given by management
1.6. Top management must be sure that every member of the staff is aware of procedures what they are required to do.
2. Working Practices
2.1. Cleanliness and safety are essential factors for working environment
2.2. Professional and ethical attitude towards work should be priority for staff

Source: modified from ASEAN, 2016, p. 17

The wellness industry shares some aspects of human resources in tourism but is different in a way. Baum and Lockstone-Binney (2013) state that wellness tourism unites different fields like medicine, tourism, wellness, leisure and hospitality fields and shares the values of each. This is the reason why finding the spa and wellness workforce is so difficult.

After the speaking about the problems, their solution ways have to be discussed as well. Two years later, due to the results got from the industry paper of 2012, the Global Spa & Wellness Summit (GSWS), introduced and announced the opening of three mentorship program which were “Spa mentorship”, “spa internship”, and “spa as a career”. (GSWS, 2014). Designated for spa managers and everyone who was willing to join spa industry, the program was designed to eliminate the gap caused by unqualified personal in the field.

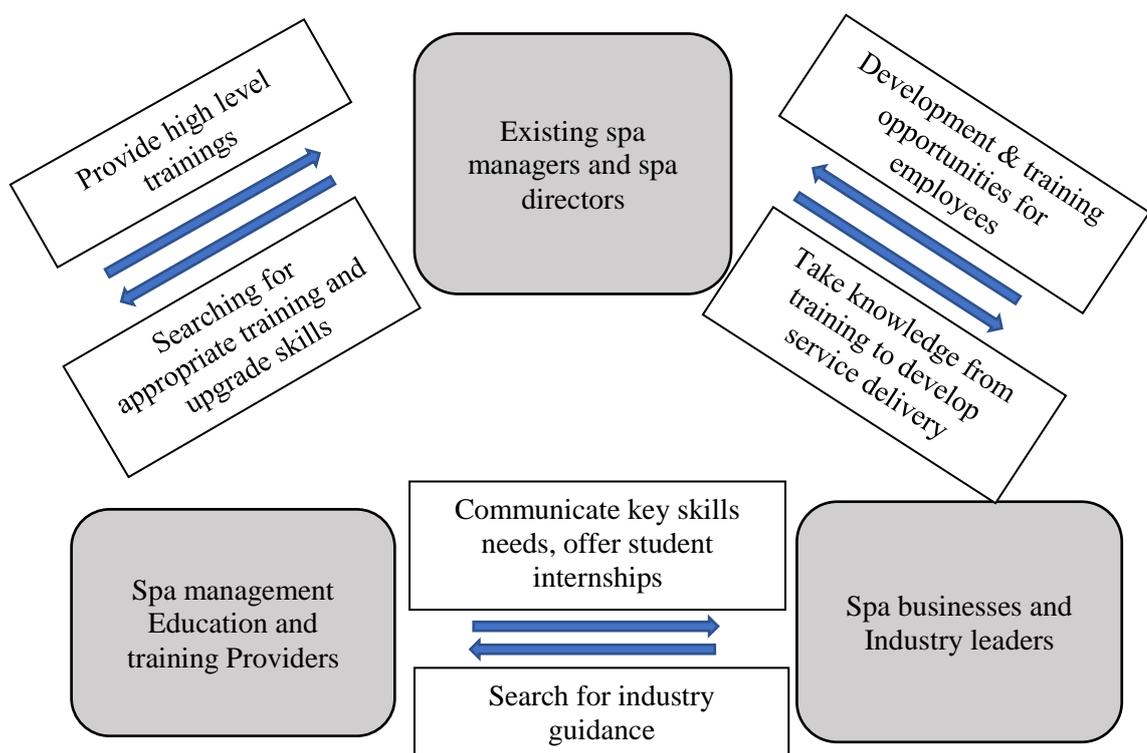
Such kind of programs tend to be essential in the development of human resources in the field. There are educational institutions focused particularly on spa and wellness management, but the increasing number of spa and wellness enterprises cause the increase

of demand on qualified spa workers simultaneously. In 2017, Global Wellness Institute issued the briefing paper about the global mentorship program where the main challenge is increasing number of persons needed in spa. According to them 70,000 more spa managers and 400,000 more spa therapists will be necessary for wellness and spa business to operate by 2020 (Global Wellness Institute, 2017a). Therefore, their goal is to prepare industry leaders who encourage staff and give motivation not to leave the profession and develop themselves in this field.

However, together with the existing and positive example of solution, it is crucial to mention the project created as a result of cooperation between the five partners ILIS – Innovation and Learning in Spa management (Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency [EACEA], 2010). The field specialists from five different countries – United Kingdom, Poland, Spain, Austria and Finland, gathered to eliminate the issues related to education at spa management level. The project lifetime was two years, starting from 2008 and issuing summary paper in 2010. The ILIS aimed to increase of spa culture understanding within society, to find out how the demand for qualified workforce is met by different regions, and to establish the vocational educational course, as well as online training modules. As a result, the module programs were created in four different directions, such as spa operations, marketing for spa services, informational technologies and finance, and strategic management. (EACEA, 2010, pp. 5–6). The life span of the project was said to be two more years after the issue of the paper. Unfortunately, the mentioned source is the only information about the project, as the webpage indicated in the paper does not exist anymore and it seems that it was finished without further development. No more contribution from the partner sides has been published anywhere. The case could be assigned as negative example in the field of spa and wellness studies as it was finished without having sufficient results. The reason can be the lack of recognition and awareness within the potential users. There is mentioned in the paper that all the objectives of the project were met (EACEA, 2010, p. 5), but it would be useful to expand the life span of it. It appears the content was not sufficient enough. Having such kind of example creates sense of dissatisfaction and one can think that the educational field of wellness and spa industry does not have the potential of future success. However, it is only one example and it can not decide the fate of the whole industry, especially when the spa and wellness industry is a subject of permanent increase and the need of qualified

staff increases directly proportional. The demand for the staff increases the need of supply and more and more companies offer educational courses in the field. The main point is the right negotiation within the decision-making stakeholders. One of the examples is given below.

The same Global Spa and Wellness Summit (2012) provides the model of negotiation between the three main stakeholders in wellness industry (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Relation of three stakeholders for management workforce system improvement (modified from GSWS, 2012, p. iv).

The Figure 1 shows the right way of relationship of three main actor of the industry and the model of the perfect cooperation. From author's point of view, for better results, the fourth player should be added to the Figure 1 – which is government. The tourism regulation organ of the country, with the name of entire government can become the best regulator by setting the obligations to each member, but not in a way it is shown in the Figure 1. It will have just the role of regulator. For instance, the business is strictly obliged to hire only the spa manager, who has specific background and proof of sufficient

knowledge from the educational institution, at the same time business is obliged to continue the relationship with education provider in terms of continue and enhance the development of current spa manager and other staff members, as well as give ability to students to have internships and hire the best students with a long-term agreement.

The concept and importance of spa manager was mentioned many times as one of the main figures in the wellness and spa industry thorough the text. Indeed, ruling and controlling of the enterprise or the department is crucial – it can cause positive effects such as satisfied and loyal customers, resulting in increased revenues and expanding, as well as the second extremity in the form of permanent complains from the side of clients, elimination of revenue, and in the worst situation – bankruptcy. The manager can cause or avoid all the kind of problems. Therefore, success as well as the failure is highly dependent on the manager or the management team. Provided that the literature part has already mentioned the hotel spas, it would be relevant to discuss what kind of spa manager is essential for the successful operation of the hotel spa. Cohen and Russel (2008) argue that the perfect manager is obliged to have the background in both – practical part of the therapies as well as the experience and knowledge of business related subjects. The Table 3 provides the characteristics for managers from both – therapists background as well as business management background and makes the differences.

**Table 3.** The characteristics of spa managers with different backgrounds

<b>Therapist’s background</b>	<b>Business management background</b>
Comprehend therapists view	Comprehend financial side
Uses terminology understandable for staff	Uses terminology understandable for management
Quality is the main driving factor	Numbers and performance indicators are main driving factors

Source: Modified from Cohen and Russel, 2008, p. 367

From the author’s point of view, it is more essential for the manager of spa center to have the background of business management. In the long-term perspective, where the spa has need to fulfill the budget determined by the top management, the skills of spa manager who knows finances in a high level becomes more significant than of former therapists who have not had touch with financial documents before. The spa manager with business management educational background can assimilate the main principles of the spa and wellness industry and become aware of principles and paradigms of different procedures

done in the spa center. The interpersonal skills and sense of responsibility towards the hired employees will help the spa manager to understand therapists and take into consideration their wants and needs on the workplace. The fact that therapist is the most essential part of the spa and needs to be treated carefully should be known for the spa manager from every background. Besides, therapist manager can be problematic in some case. The above-mentioned authors do not argue that the managers with therapist's background should perform the massages or different kind of procedures themselves. However, there is possibility that in high season when spa needs additional staff, the therapist manager performs massages for the guests. In this case, the therapist manager workload will be higher and the necessary things to be done in management will be abandoned and neglected. The result will not be desirable in this case.

As it comes out from the discussed literature, the gaps in the human resource management of spa and wellness industry are not few. The main gap is the lack of research in the field. Therefore, the research task of the topic is to carefully examine the situation currently happening on the real example. Hotel spas of particular country – Georgia was chosen as a case for the study. Before the research, it is essential to discuss the limitations existent in the field of human resources for wellness and spa industry.

It would be interesting to see the spa and wellness industry from different angle. For instance, to discuss the innovational aspects in the field and employees engagement in it. One of the previous subchapter about the importance of human resources management in tourism has included different factors and one of them was innovation. As there was mentioned, it was not totally relevant for the topic as most of the workers try not to be involved in innovations. The situation in spa sector is worth to discuss as well. For instance, Nagy in the paper from 2014 “The orientation towards innovation of spa hotel management: the case of Romanian spa industry” has done the survey to find out the degree of workers participation in creating innovative products. The survey aimed to find out whether the spa industry of the country goes to the innovative direction. The result was quite negative, as the managers of spa resorts themselves do not tend to work on innovations as such. The example is given to prove the author's idea expressed in previous subchapter about the innovation does not always depend on the characteristics of employees. If the management does not encourage the staff to be innovative, they are not

just motivated to create something new for the company. As it was mentioned above, the topic is actual in case the company has already found the spa staff and they work either full time or part time basis.

#### **1.4. Limitations of the human resource management for wellness and spa industry**

Despite the theoretical part discussed above, the general principles of human resource management concept do not fully fit in spa and wellness industry. It is necessary to repeat that the main limitation in the sphere is existence of qualified talent gap. Moreover, different authors find some limitations preventing human resource managers in recruiting staff in a usual manner. The limitations can be as following – interrelation with various fields, wrong association of massage therapists with sex workers, unfair remuneration, the lack of proper education, etc.

Baum and Lockstone-Binney (2013) talk about wrong stereotypes within people, that wellness workers are somehow associated with sex tourism representatives because of very intimate nature of spa and wellness procedures. As therapists have to be in close touch with the clients, some of them think that they can have other kind of relationship rather than just massage or other procedures. Even experienced masseurs have trouble in this case. It is not surprising that many people who want to work in spa and wellness industry desist from starting the work because the massage therapists are often associated with sex workers. The theory lacks information how the management or staff itself puts a limit on and struggles with the wrong perception of people (Baum & Lockstone-Binney, 2013). Other limitations authors speak about are practice and ethical standards, sensitive and visual attitude to work, etc.

While talking about limitations, the certified staff problem is inevitable. Smith and Puczkó (2009) describe the certification problems as huge challenge for the field, as in most cases the qualification of spa therapist is not comprehended objectively by the customers which can lead to the negative and vital experience: “This is quite a dangerous pattern, as irreparable damage can be done to body, mind or spirit through neglectful or ununiformed practice” (p. 189).

Besides, authors talk about the multitasking of the therapists, as they can perform several different procedures by their own as it is financially beneficial for the spa center. The fact can be positive for the company but in fact, it is still difficult one person to be equally professional in several different procedures and give the equally high-class services in each of them. The concept can be seen from positive as well as from negative sides. The positive is for the company, but negative can be not enough effort from the side of therapist in each service he or she provides to the guests of the spa. Another negative aspect of multitasking is the ability of role ambiguity. Discussed by Hodari et al. (2014), role ambiguity takes place in case the employees are undefined in completing their tasks and do not realize the possible ways to fulfill objectives. Factually, when staff has to complete several tasks together, the same problem can be arisen. The role ambiguity is already internal problem, but still tightly connected with human resource management. In this case, the responsibility should be taken by the spa management to regulate situation and show the employees right way of cooperation.

All listed limitations create the additional challenge for human resource managers. Firstly, the incorrect association of wellness tourism with sex tourism create wrong opinion within population, so that potential employees of spa sector do not have desire to have bad reputation. That can be one of the reasons of talent gap. When this problem is overcome, another – connected to certification comes. Of course, it is more difficult to struggle with and requires proper educational institutions to improve situation. The multitasking and confusion at the workplace can be limitations as well, but they appear only after recruiting. The spa management should take care of these problem.

To sum up, there are some limitations preventing human resource managers to recruit the suitable staff, but in case of relevant management all of them can be eliminated.

## **2. HUMAN RESOURCE QUALITY IN THE SPA AND WELLNESS FIELD IN GEORGIA**

### **2.1. Georgia as a potential part of global wellness and spa tourism**

The global wellness and spa tourism is a subject of rapid development. The Global Wellness Institute (2017b) states that nowadays, wellness was \$3.7 trillion economy market in 2015, including the following spheres such as spa industry, fitness & mind and body, beauty and anti-aging, wellness tourism, thermal/mineral springs, workplace wellness, healthy eating, nutrition and weight-loss, preventive and personalized medicine and public health, complementary and alternative medicine. Wellness tourism was on the third place with the budget of \$563 billion after beauty & anti-aging and healthy eating dimensions. (Global Wellness Institute, 2017b, p. iii)

One of the given sub-chapters has shown the differentiation within the terms of health tourism, spa tourism and wellness tourism. It is time to discuss it in a detailed manner to see where the case country fits within these three dimensions. According to Stanciulescu et al. (2015), “Health and wellness tourism is now an established international trend of health-conscious consumers looking to increase their welfare through this kind of trips” (p. 158). The Table 1, p. 9, modified from the same authors show the clear differentiation. Georgia with its mineral waters, natural muds and current development level seems to fit in health/spa tourism direction, but with high potential of wellness tourism. The arguments for this idea are given below.

Georgia, the country on the border of Europe and Asia is in the process of further development. Nowadays, the main goal of the country is to satisfy the requirements of European Union and become its member. The first and most important step to this long

and complex way was visa free regime with Schengen Zone, declared on 28<sup>th</sup> of March, 2017 (Vardishvili & Panchulidze, 2017).

The building of resort infrastructure in Georgia started in XIX–XX centuries. After the becoming the member of Soviet Union, in 1926, Georgia became the main destination of health and wellbeing with 102 resorts all over the country, six of them had an entire union importance (Liparteliani & Ninikashvili, 2014, p. 4). The majority of Soviet Union citizens used to get tour packages of Georgian medical resorts. Lots of tourists were coming for leisure and relaxation, as well as for medical purposes. The gastronomy and wine were very popular aspects for the foreigner tourists as well.

According to Kohl and Partner (2014), the country suffered from huge economic, demographic and general development problems in 1990s, but with the beginning of 21st century, huge and fast improvements has started. Last few years the country experienced radical changes in terms of politics as well as economics which led it to be assessed by famous international companies as one of the countries with ease of making business. (Kohl & Partner, 2014).

Lately, Georgia has gained popularity among international tourists as the new tourism destination and hosts increasing number of international visitors annually (Sidamonidze & Girod, 2016). According to Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNNTA) statistical portal (<http://stats.gnta.ge/Default.aspx>), in 2017, the total number of international arrivals was 7,556,273 among this, 3,479,507 stayed more than 24 hours, which showed 27.9% grow compared to the data from 2016.

Georgia is the land of more than 2,000 mineral waters, 1,700 of which comes out from the ground naturally, the rest of them comes by the help of bore-hole. Nowadays, 103 resorts and 67 resort places are registered on the territory of Georgia. Besides, the healing muds are in an active and effective usage (Saakashvili, Tarkhan-Mouravi, Tabidze, & Kutateladze 2011). According to Sidamonidze and Girod (2016), the spa potential of the country is not limited with the curative character of water and mud used in medical service, but there are also spa centers included in the rapidly developing chain and luxurious hotels in Georgia. Functioning of spa resorts is the most important and unchangeable factor for the country to transform as a wellness tourism destination due to

the natural resources which are reserved in Georgia. To have the better comprehension, the SWOT analysis is presented in the Table 4.

**Table 4.** SWOT analysis of spa and wellness resources of Georgia

<b>Strength</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural resources – mineral waters, resorts</li> <li>• The ability to have low prices on products</li> <li>• Huge potential of development for spa and wellness</li> <li>• Perfect geographical location (between Europe and Asia, three international airports, one of them main hub)</li> <li>• Seaside – additional potential of spa and wellness</li> <li>• The fame in post-soviet countries (many people from those countries know about Georgia)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undeveloped infrastructure (former resorts need to be renovated in a modern way)</li> <li>• Lack of qualified and educated staff</li> <li>• Lack of information (promotion) to local and foreign people about Georgia as a spa and wellness destination</li> <li>• The attitude of people towards spa – they only visit them for curative activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming the member of European Union</li> <li>• Increasing awareness for European countries – more and more tourists come to Georgia from EU and Central Asia, as well as from USA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competitor neighbor in terms of tourism – Turkey</li> <li>• Russia – still continues the occupation of the country (20% of Georgia is occupied by Russia, that prevents tourism development in occupied regions)</li> </ul>

Source: compiled by author

Notwithstanding the fact, that natural resources give the maximum ability to transform as a country of spa resorts, the sphere is still under the development. So, it was better to research the existing situation in hotel spas of the country. The research was done in hotel spas of Georgia. According to ASEAN (2016), “Hotel / Resort Spa: is the spa in a hotel or resort with the major services of massage, exercise, steaming and sauna, mostly for hotel guests” (p. 3).

Taking into consideration information given in this subchapter, it is clear that Georgia is not typical wellness and spa country on this stage of development. After passing such a diverse history and different types of government systems, one cannot truly say that at this point the country is ready to host wellness tourist in an infrastructural glance. That’s why it is so interesting to discuss the case of such kind of destination, with huge development potential. At this stage, the financial situation in population is not reasonable. Spa and wellness services are not affordable for the majority of population.

Only some percentage of people can visit spa centers and pamper themselves. It can be assumed that even the comprehension of the word “wellness” is very scarce. Due to the soviet past, the population is used to think about sanatoria while speaking about health and wellbeing. As mentioned, the former sanatoria are not developed enough, so the only target which can be discussed in terms of human resources is hotel spa, which are developed in terms of spa and wellness. Besides, former sanatoria provide more medical assistance than wellness treatments. The spa and wellness staff consist of practitioners, dermatologists, and other doctors: professionals of musculoskeletal systems as well as indigestive system, medical masseurs, etc. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to make research in sanatoria. Notwithstanding the fact, after rebranding their names include the term “spa resort” they still do not follow the typical understanding of spa. It is logical because the target of clients they have, need exactly such kind of curative services as they provide. There are six day spas as well, with sufficient facilities, but number of them are not enough to make research about it. Besides, the natural sulfur bathes in capital city, Tbilisi are said to be spas, but they do not provide the wide range or treatments. It is just the naturally hot water pools with healing characteristics. Nevertheless, the potential that Georgia will become spa and wellness destination in following decades is huge due to natural resources.

## **2.2. Research methods**

According to the literature review, it became clear that main problem which human resource managers have is the lack of educated and experienced staff. For this reason, it would be relevant to find out what are the causing factors of such kind of problem. The research report of Global Spa & Wellness Summit (2012) describes all the issues found in spa workforce and gives the recommendations, but still, there can be found some gaps in the research. For instance, as the research is conducted only in specific areas of the world, it covers only the part of global spa industry trends and circumstances, which cannot be applicable for the entire spa and wellness industry. It is very complex as it includes the results from the surveys not only of the field experts, but also of educational institutions, etc. Moreover, the research was done via online surveys, which can somehow give not full and real picture of situation. It would be difficult but face to face interviews

would be better to fulfil the aim of the research. Herewith, the authors state that the results are not for scientific usage, it had only explanatory face.

Research, as an essential part of the studies, should be done in a very careful way. As the topic is in a tight connection with tourism industry, it would be relevant to discuss the situation of tourism research. The research in tourism field is a matter of many discussions between scholars. Many researchers describe tourism as a subject of interdisciplinary research. Darbellay and Stock (2012) explain interdisciplinary approach “process of mobilising different institutionalized disciplines through dynamic interaction in order to describe, analyse, and understand tourism’s complexity” (p. 453). Interdisciplinarity attributes research the such kind of advantages as reliability, efficiency and intensity, though it demands the professionals of various fields to be involved in order to enrich the research problem with different visions (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2013; Oviedo-García, 2016).

Between the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research methods, qualitative approach was chosen for the research, as there was need to find out the current situation in the field, taking into consideration the ideas of people involved in the process directly. As the goal of the topic is about understanding the opinions of specific persons, it would be relevant to design research in terms of quality more than quantity. The statistical information would not be helpful to find out the current needs of the market and give recommendations for future development.

Castleberry and Nolen (2018) talk about the advantage of qualitative research: “The descriptive nature of qualitative approaches allows the researcher to build a complex, holistic picture in a natural setting” (p. 2). According to Veal (2011), qualitative research gives ability to collect a deep information about specific subject the researcher is interested in. Qualitative information can be collected in different methods, such as observation, text analysis, in-depth or informal interviewing, etc. (Veal, 2011). Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin (2007, p. 738) underline the emotional aspects qualitative method is concerned with, such as feelings, private experiences and relationships.

In case of Georgian hotel spas, the best way of collecting the data for the research is face-to-face interviews with spa managers or human resources managers, depending on the

site, the person or the group of persons who have responsibility on talent searching, recruiting, staff trainings, employee care, etc. The desired minimum number of sample was ten persons from different spa resorts or hotel spas. Therefore, this was the way to collect the primary data, which was used only for this specific research. The main advantage of face-to-face interviews is that most likely the information gathered with this method will be true and reliable. The chance to find out more information by asking in-depth questions to the respondents if anything is unclear, or there is need for detailed information is bigger during such kind of interviews.

The interview questions were prepared depended on the sources used in the literature review chapter of the paper, however, one of them was compiled by the author, as they were tightly connected to research question, and would give interesting information for the data analysis (Table 5).

The 14 semi-structured questions were carefully selected. The author has thought about the content of the questions in terms of possible issues connected with confidentiality. Obviously, none of managers would like to share inner information to the stranger, therefore, the questions just ask for the very general and basic information from the spa and/or human resource managers. The Table 5 gives better linkage of questions with theory and is used in discussion and recommendations part very efficiently.

It is important to identify the method of interview analyzing before transferring to the next sub-chapter. According to Willis (2015, p. 60), there are five different ways to analyze the cognitive interviews, such as text summary, cognitive coding, question feature coding, theme coding and pattern coding. The mix of text summary and theme coding are used in this particular situation. "Text Summary involves the description of dominant themes, conclusions, and problems that are evidenced within a set of aggregated interviewer notes" (Willis, 2015, p. 60). As for the theme coding, it involves giving concrete tag to the answers and can be represented as pie charts or as different figures to express the answers of interviews.

**Table 5.** Interview questions with sources

Question	Source
1. The qualification and education of the interviewee, the general and day-to-day responsibilities of him/her	GSWS, 2014; Hodari et al., 2014
2. How important and profitable is spa and wellness center of the hotel?	Hodari et al.,2014; Rančić et al., 2013
3. What are the spa positions in your organization? (spa manager, spa therapist, etc)	Singapore Workforce Development Agency, 2014
4. In which situations do you decide that there is need of new employee (maybe nobody has gone from work)?	GSWS, 2012
5. Who is responsible on hiring new staff – spa manager or HR manager	GSWS, 2012
6. The ways of searching new employees – social network, acquaintances, vacancy webpages, how effective are they	GSWS, 2012
7. The main obstacles while searching for new employees?	GSWS, 2012
8. Who creates general requirements for employees?	ASEAN, 2016
9. What kind of employee is more difficult to find – spa receptionist – administrative staff or spa therapists and beauticians?	Smith & Puczkó, 2009
10. Do you require special certificate from massage therapists before accepting?	Georgescu & Necsoi, 2013 Smith & Puczkó, 2009
11. Do you have onsite trainings and how do you take care of professional development of staff?	Georgescu & Necsoi, 2013
12. Have you heard about specific educational or training course for spa staff?	GSWS, 2012; Georgescu & Necsoi, 2013
13. From scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is minimum and 10 is maximum) how would you rate the overall situation in HR of spa and wellness field in Georgia? Do you see any development potential?	
14. What are your recommendations to improve the current situation and get more qualified and professional staff in the field?	GSWS, 2014; Hodari et al.,2014

Source: compiled by author

The answers to these questions are analyzed in a detailed manner according to above-mentioned strategies in data analysis section.

### 2.3. Data collection

As it was mentioned above, provoked by the lack of developed spa and wellness enterprises in the sample country – Georgia, the most essential target to be chosen for the interviews were hotel spas, which are more or less well developed as they are under the guidance and governance of hotels itself. Most of the hotel spas have spa managers who are the right persons to talk with about the human resource issues and challenges. There are some hotels, where spas are managed by the front office team, such kind of places

were not ranked as the potential interviewees for the research. Face-to-face interview was chosen as a research tool to reach the goal of the Master thesis. As the aim of the topic is about finding out what spa managers or human resource managers think about the staff in the field, there was need to research the ideas of people from these particular positions. Due to the fact the existent literature does not contain the concrete questionnaires for spa managers to take the model and optimize for the particular situation, almost every question was inspired by different source from the literature review. The questionnaire was compiled by fourteen questions, thirteen of them were strictly open-ended questions, while one of them was about scale from one to ten asked to estimate the overall situation in terms of human resources in spa and wellness field followed by open-ended question about development potential of the field. The questions were written in English language at first, but as all the interviewees were Georgian speaking, there became need the questions to be translated in Georgian language. The translation was completed by the author. Moreover, some interviewees asked to get the questionnaire by e-mail to get to know to the content of interview before the meeting. Besides, some of them agreed to answer the questions and send the answers by e-mail due to their busy schedule. The questions for interviewees were sent in Georgian language as they demanded so. It was expected due to the ease of communication on national language.

Before starting the contact by e-mail, the author had attended the Tourism Career Day on 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 2018 held by Georgian National Tourism Administration. Different enterprises in tourism were participating in the event, so it was a good chance to meet the representatives of the hotels personally. Most of the presenters were from human resource departments as it was the career day aimed to find the new employees. The event was quite helpful for the topic, as some companies gave the direct contacts to spa managers and made the situation easier. Besides, the companies whom author met on career day, already remembered about the conversation and easily answered to the questions given to them.

The next action made by an author was sending e-mails to the hotels who have the sufficient spa and wellness facilities (including the contacts gained from the above-mentioned event), which represented the following information: the identity and occupation of the author, current working topic with its aim, which expressed what kind

of employee could be relevant interviewee and answer the questions in a best manner. Besides, it was mentioned that in order to fulfill the aim of the topic, there was need to meet and take interview from either spa manager or human resources manager who was in charge of hiring and development of the staff in spa and wellness field particularly. In the end, author wrote that she was very flexible in time and could visit the hotel anytime appointed by spa and/or human resource manager (depending on the hotel). The last step was kind of strategic action: it was not easy task to persuade the managers to give the interview to the student due to their busy working schedules but giving them the ability to choose the desirable time by their own was a big step forward. However, this tactic did not work in every case, in some situations author had to say that she was visiting them on a particular day, which was kind of forcing them to meet the author, but still, they told their preferable part of the day. There was one case, when the employees advised interviewer to visit the place personally and try to catch the busiest manager on place for several minutes, but it was not guaranteed that manager would be on place by all means.

Sampling – the author contacted to the 19 hotels with spa facilities all over the Georgia – in every direction. It is obvious, that majority of them was in the capital city of the country – Tbilisi. Out of 19 potential respondents, one of the most famous spa resorts was very special case: the author has met the human resource department personally on above-mentioned tourism career day held on 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 2018, but they said that spa is totally separated organization and only spa manager was responsible on such kind of topics. Besides, they could not give the contact information of spa center as they were not in touch at all, author was said to find the contact of this particular spa in the internet. Somehow, the connection between the author and spa manager was held and everything from interviewer side was explained in details, but taking interview was not possible due to managers refusal – the reason was that any kind of information about spa was strictly confidential.

Other reasons why it was not managed to get more answers are following: one potential respondent refused due to managerial changes in the company, another one apologized due to busy time schedule, two of them promised to send the answers by e-mail but then didn't answer even the phone calls. And at last, one hotel spa which did not answered participated in another tourism exhibition on 12–14<sup>th</sup> April, 2018. Author met manager

on the event and asked if the e-mail was delivered to them. It appeared that the letter was delivered, they just did not know who could answer on the questions and therefore did not answer at all. In the end, the author managed to get seven face-to-face and two e-mail interviews.

The problems during data collection were as follows. The biggest problem was the difficulty to get the answer by e-mail. Even the negative answer like – “We cannot help you” would be more acceptable than waiting for a long time without any answer. Consequently, it became necessary to start calling to the places. There was hidden another problem. In some cases, the hotel receptionists who answered the call could not give contact or connect the author with the right persons because in most cases they did not know who could answer on authors questions. Another trouble was that even if the author has spoken with the right person they refuse to give the interview, it is acceptable because they do not want to share their inner information – no matter that the questions do not demand any personal or confidential information to be given by the managers. In general, it took time the managers to answer, or to get the contact of the right person. Even when the necessary contact was found, it was not easy to get the answer certainly. As it was predictable, five-star hotel spas answered fastest among the addressee and notwithstanding their busy working schedule, it was the easiest to set the acceptable time for meeting.

The period of interviews started on 24<sup>th</sup> of March, last interview answer was gained on 12<sup>th</sup> of April. Before starting the interview, the managers were asked for permission to record the talk and they were given the guarantee of confidentiality, as the answers will not be given to the third party and will only be used for the Master thesis. All of them accepted this and did not demand from the author to send them either recording or the document which includes their answers.

To sum up, the answers to these questions could give the clear picture to reach the thesis aim and give the right recommendation for the further and right development of spa and wellness field in Georgia. It is true, that the research is done on the base of hotel spas and not the overall picture cannot be seen, but on the other hand, these institutions are more experienced and developed than day spas or former sanatoria which still continue to heal customers with the same medical treatments and are far away from spa and wellness

concept. The hotel names and interviewees are absolutely confidential and their identities will not be mentioned in the thesis. They will be coded in the following manner – S1 to S9. The persons are coded accordingly – from P1 to P9 (Table 6).

**Table 6.** Coding of hotels and persons’ names

SPA	Location	Interviewee	Position of interviewee	Date of interview	Duration (minutes)
S1	Tbilisi	P1	Spa manager	24.03.2018	14
S2	Tbilisi	P2	Recreational center manager	25.03.2018	15
S3	Tbilisi	P3	Spa manager	25.03.2018	18
S4	Tbilisi	P4	Spa cluster manager (at two chain hotels)	26.03.2018	19
S5	Telavi	P5	Spa manager	28.03.2018	18
S6	Batumi	P6	Spa sales manager	28.03.2018	By e-mail
S7	Borjomi	P7	Spa manager	05.04.2018	12
S8	Tbilisi	P8	Human resources manager	06.04.2018	17
S9	Batumi	P9	Spa manager	11.04.2018	By e-mail

Source: compiled by author according to interviews

The Table 6 is actively used in the data analysis as the identification of interviewees and hotel spas are represented there.

## 2.4. Data analysis

Analysing the data gained from the face-to-face interviews is the most important part of the topic as it has to present the results given by the research – primary data.

The first question aimed to find out the qualification and day to day tasks of the interviewees. Out of nine persons, three of them – P3, P4 and P5 have degree in foreign languages, another three – P1, P6 and P8 have background in economics and business administration, spa manager P7 is a doctor specialized in gastroenterology, P9 has degree in tourism, while only one of them – P2 is from the most related sphere – fitness expert. All of them have taken the course in terms of either tourism or spa and wellness, given by the beauty product providers at different working places. Everyone has long previous experience, the special cases are P2 with 17 years of experience as a fitness coach and rehabilitation center employee, and P7 with 25 years of experience as a doctor in different health resorts in Georgia. It must be noted that P5 and P8 are perfect examples of promotion inside the company, as each of them started with different low positions: P5

was promoted from sommelier to wine spa manager. At first, P8 represented low position as well but after working in the company for seven years and taking the training course of human resource management, she became human resource manager of the company.

The day to day tasks of the managers does not vary much: the typical activities what can be found in the job description of spa manager or human resource manager. Very important ones are listed below:

- Attending management meetings and share news to the employees
- Take care of quality standards to be achieved on a daily basis
- Follow the protocol and demand from the employees to do so
- List the beauty products
- Making pricing of the treatments and beauty products
- Making the annual and monthly budgeting, control the income statement, bonus system and other activities connected to financial management in spa
- Train the new staff members and give an example of standard
- Creating Standard operational procedures
- Creating everyday action plans, give target task to each employee and review their fulfillment
- Creating the promotions for spa and wellness center
- Making working schedule for employees
- Taking care of existing staff and their development by offering different kind of trainings, both – on-site and outside
- Meeting the guests personally to manage better (P1)
- Making guests and company happy (P1)

Obviously, the human resource manager tasks vary from the spa managers’:

- Making agreements and statements to employees in the beginning of each year
- Budgeting (salaries, benefits including insurance, petroleum and phone expenses, bonus system)
- Stipulating the annual training schedule in the beginning of each year
- Conducting training to new employees
- Organizing supportive events for the staff

- Taking care of the staff, motivating and solving their problems connected to workplace

Every manager assents, that general importance of the spa center functioning for the hotel is very big and quite profitable providing that spa and wellness is not a well-known and high-developed field in the country. It is noteworthy, that hotel spas are visited not only by people who stay on the same please, but also by outside visitors. That is the main reason why hotel spa sector is quite active during low touristic season. Outside visitors are mostly local Georgian population with medium and high income, who tend to buy the monthly ticket for the swimming pool and other water activities and not only, book different massages as well. P1 mentioned that when the guest makes the reservation if the hotel, he or she always prefers the accommodation with the spa center. It is quite popular place for the guests. Currently, the most active cluster of tourists who use spa services are from Middle East – both, hotel guests and outside visitors. It is not surprising because their ability to spend money in pampering services is higher than other tourists. According to P3, functioning of every additional department for the hotel is profitable and especially spa center, because business travelers tend to use spa mostly. As the awareness about spa and wellness increase, “The usage of spa center increases year by year” (P9). In opinion of P5, having the spa center makes the corporate image of the hotel higher. P4, as the manager of the pioneer spa in the country states that many hotels do not have spa center, at first it was very difficult to create the niche on the market – spa as such, but time by time it became quite popular and profitable (P4). Besides, the interior of the spa matters a lot. P7 mentions that spa is quite profitable in case it is well managed. The location is essential in some cases as well. The repeating guests are guarantee of the quality and successful operation.

The Table 7 shows the essential part of the study – number of employees and their positions in different spa centers.

**Table 7.** The number of employees in each hotel spa and their positions

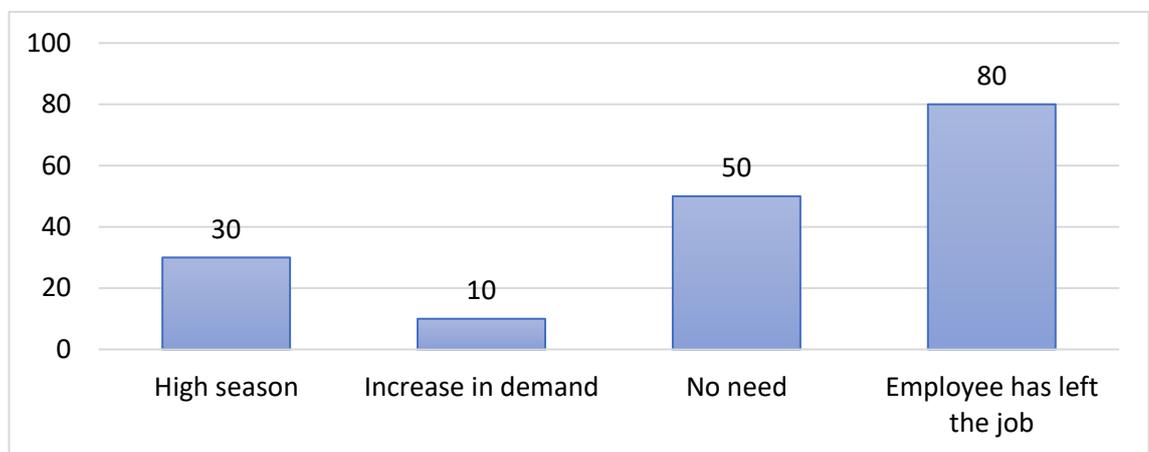
SPA	Number of Employees	Positions in spa center
S1	10	Spa manager, supervisor, receptionists, spa therapists, pool attendant (on high season)
S2	18	Spa manager, supervisor, receptionists, housekeepers, fitness instructor, swimming instructor (same as life guard), spa therapists
S3	6	Spa manager, Spa receptionists, Spa therapists
S4	15	Spa manager, Spa receptionists, Spa therapists, manicure specialist, yoga specialist and swimming instructor (when needed)
S5	5	Spa managers – perform the functions of spa receptionists, spa therapists
S6	12	Spa manager, receptionists, massage therapist, stylist, beautician, make-up artist, thalassotherapy specialist, physiotherapist
S7	18	Spa manager, spa supervisor, spa receptionists, massage therapists, stylist, manicure specialist, med-sister, yoga specialist
S8	25	Receptionists, wellness therapists, medical coordinator, head physician, physical rehabilitation specialist
S9	10	Spa manager, spa supervisor, spa receptionists, spa therapists

Source: compiled by author according to interviews

Notwithstanding the fact that the respondents are drastically different from each other, they have in common one very important thing – selecting and hiring the new staff member is always decided by spa manager and human resource manager together. There is just little difference how it is done, for example in some cases (S1, S5) the spa managers search for the new employee themselves and then discuss it with human resource manager, in case of S1 even general manager of the hotel is involved in recruiting process. The potential employee is interviewed by spa manager, followed by human resource manager and if he or she passes these levels, then general manager meets the person and he obtains the right of final decision. As for the others, the spa management informs human resource department about necessity of particular person, the vacancy is announced and after the sorting the number of CVs, only short-listed candidates are interviewed by human resource and spa managers together. The case of S8 is totally different as it is medical wellness resort and requires the staff with medical background.

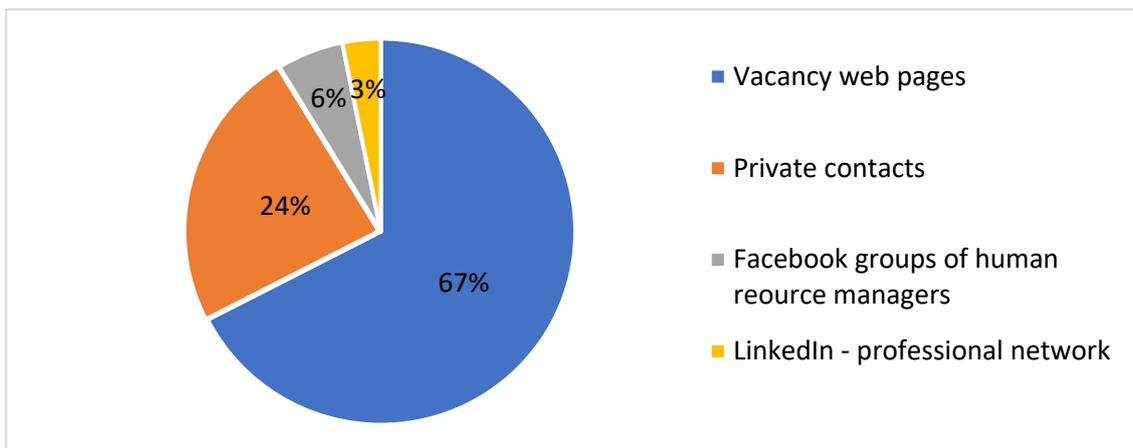
Hence, the selection process goes together with head physician, director of the resort and other competent members of the company together with human resource manager. In order to become employed in S8 as a wellness therapist, it is important to have the diploma from medical educational institution. It is noteworthy, the position of wellness therapist is created by S8 due to the specification of medical wellness resort.

The recruiting new member of the staff is only done when someone has left the job, otherwise, the existing number of employees are enough even in case of full occupancy of the hotel. The only exception is summer season, when there is need of additional staff like freelancer massage therapists (case of S2) and pool attendants (S1). However, P4 talks about the unusual situation happened not so long ago, when there was need to add full time spa therapists, as the demand for them was increased in the morning hours, when spa therapists were not used to work. The Figure 2 shows the clear picture of the situation, horizontal axis offers the cases when company has to hire new employee, while vertical axis measures how frequently each section happens, expressed in percentage. To be concise, the percentage of cases when it is most likely to hire new employee.



**Figure 2.** The necessity to hire new employee in percentage (compiled by author)

The searching for the new staff is another common tool within the different spa centers. Every possible way can be used there – social networks and private contacts, as well as the vacancy web pages (<https://hr.ge/>, <http://jobs.ge/>) which are the most relevant and useful way. After the job offer is located on the web page and potential employees start sending their resumes, all the relevant spa therapists or people applying for another job are asked to come for interview after the sorting out the CVs, and all of them are tested by the spa manager personally. It is very difficult to find the relevant staff, especially with the certification. The Figure 3 shows the popular ways of searching for and finding new employees.



**Figure 3:** The ways of finding new employees (compiled by an author)

Blue color represents Vacancy web pages (<https://hr.ge/>, <http://jobs.ge/>), the orange one – private contacts, grey expresses Facebook groups of human resource managers, while the yellow one is LinkedIn professional network. The all four different versions given on the Figure 3 was accounted by the spa managers and human resource managers as they use them. It is clear from the Figure 3, that job and recruitment webpages are the most popular way. Indeed, the job offer aligned on such kind of webpage has the highest number of views caused by people desperately searching for the jobs. Obviously, searching the employee via private contacts are comfortable and reliable way. The candidate recommended by the person who is expert in the field, or the manager knows him or her very well, of course, has some level of reliability which is trusted by concrete number of managers. The thing is that, one concrete source is never used while searching, the managers try each of them. It is not a must all of them to have a sufficient result. The Figure 3 represents the tools with the best results in a searching process.

The above-mentioned process is compounded with very significant thing – limitation while searching. The issues before finding the right staff are caused by different factors. The main obstacle is a language barrier. The national language of the country is Georgian, besides English language is taught at schools intensively. After the war of Russia and Georgia in 2008, the learning of Russian is not desired by young generation. It is very rare to find the staff who knows English and Russian languages which are essential for the hotel employees. Even though the generation who is assumed as a workforce of the country was taught Russian language at school, but still there exist the problem of languages. P1 states:

I think that we should not pamper Russian speaking guests by speaking in their language, we should start speaking with them in English directly, as it is international language. Although as the spa belongs to the hotel, we still demand the knowledge of Russian language.

The problem of qualification stands as one of the main barriers between employers and potential employees. P8 states:

As a human resource manager, my experience showed me that I should not judge the person by the cv, because I get the perfect cv-s, but during the interview, it appears that more than half of it was invented by the candidate.

The problems are mentioned by each interviewee during their speech. The above was mentioned two main problem actual for every manager. Besides, they name the problems like: too much ambition, incompatibility with working schedules such as “I cannot wake up so early to come to the work”, incorrect attitude towards work and general things like “I will not wear this uniform”, etc. Considering the real-life situation, P4 mentioned “there are two kinds of problems in Georgia – the first is unemployment, the second – no desire to work”. It comes out from the managers point of view, that the main problem in the workforce is lack of language proficiency, together with no qualification and high level of ambition.

The general requirements are list of the rules according to which one is expected to act in the workplace. It is kind of protocol which should be followed by all members of the staff. Every manager speaks about it, in a different manner as expected. The thing is that the protocol is the general rules created by the management of the company. In the chain hotels, spa workers are obliged to follow the rules common for every staff member. Besides, some spa managers state that spa has special rules to be followed by the workers additionally. These are very important as every guest awaits to get the high quality service when he or she has paid some amount of money in it.

The next topic to be analyzed is the range of difficulty in finding the spa therapist and other workers such as spa therapist, spa supervisor, and others. Majority of spa managers are on the same idea that spa therapist finding is not an easy task. First of all, the certificate obtained should be checked by the management. Then the date of examination should be

passed by the potential employee and only after this she or he will be accepted on job. The opinion of P4 is very interesting as she compares the position of spa therapist with the chef of the restaurant:

As the chef is everything for the restaurant, the same can be said about the spa therapist. You can always teach the spa receptionist the necessary skills, like a waiter can study how to distribute the food to the guests, but it is impossible to teach massage if she is not professional already

Totally different idea is sounded by P8. Her idea is the following:

I cannot say that it is difficult to find any type of employee. It is true that they do not satisfy the necessary needs, but the main is what they will become after trainings. the universal employee does not exist and everybody can study everything

The certification is the main priority for every manager while recruiting. The concept is especially actual in case of spa therapists. It is impossible the therapist not to have the prove of educational background that she or he will be accepted in any of the spas. One of them, S8 demands even the medical diploma, as the establishment offers more than spa services. Therefore, it is important to present suitable document proving the educational and practical background of the applicant. S8 is different in terms of innovations as they plan to create two years Master program of wellness therapist in the base of Tbilisi State Medical University – one of the successful and leading universities of Georgia in terms of medicine. It is caused by the increasing needs of wellness therapists for their resort and the lack of the staff. Therefore, the management has decided to rise up their future employees themselves. Besides, as the medical wellness has huge potential in the country, this educational program will be suitable for other spa resorts as well.

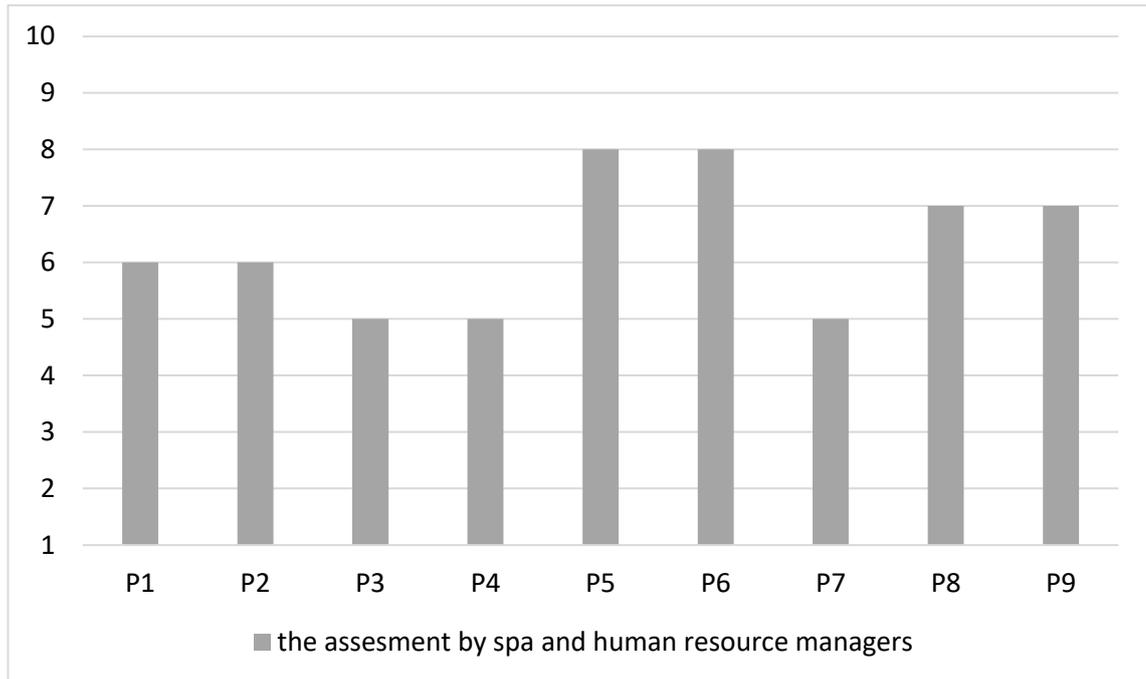
As for the on-site trainings, it is very popular among spa enterprises. P7 explains that the staff has experienced any kind of training which would contribute in learning of the staff, both on site and visiting other cities for the better education. Besides they tend to invite international experts of the field who give lectures to the staff and is done for the further development. Another spa managers mention that they provide the trainings to the staff members while recruiting. It includes the first aid, safety issues and other such kind of trainings, together with professional ones. It is noteworthy, that the beauty products used

and sold in different spa centers conduct the trainings for the spa therapist to better understand and use the product in the therapies. Most of the spas use the product only from one company.

On the question about existence any educational course specially for spa staff, the answer is negative. Nowadays, most of the spa therapist who work in hotel spas of Georgia, have taken the study course on the basis of balneological resort located in Tbilisi. The thing is that potential therapists are taught medical massage, which is used for the cure of different diseases, such as osteo articular problems, etc. Physiotherapy and different kind of manual massages are taught in the institution. The author tried to meet the representatives of the study programs, but it was impossible to make appointment with them, as they are working with a very busy schedule. Neither e-mail interview was done.

According to spa managers, Georgian market of wellness and spa is not so developed to have many educational and training programs in the sphere particularly, there are some vocational schools who offer the courses for massage, but the base of them is not neither enough, nor well developed. P4 mentioned that interviewer is the first person she has ever met with the relevant background in spa and wellness. As for abroad, the managers have very general information about training courses in the field. It is clear from the interviews that they have not had practice to send the employees abroad. Although, the spa therapists from almost every spa center researched, have foreign background which is expressed either in the international diplomas (mostly medical diplomas from Russia) or practical experience abroad, both – in European and Asian countries.

The most important answers tightly connected with the research question are given below. The extent by which spa managers and human resource managers should have assessed the overall situation in terms of human resource quality in spa and wellness field was the scale from one to 10, where one is minimum, 10 is maximum. It is important to define what overall situation includes: it is the mix of current state of workers, their educational and practical background. Besides, the matter of development potential was additional sub question in this part. The Figure 4 given below, clearly expresses the situation. The ideas of spa managers and human resource managers were essential in this question.



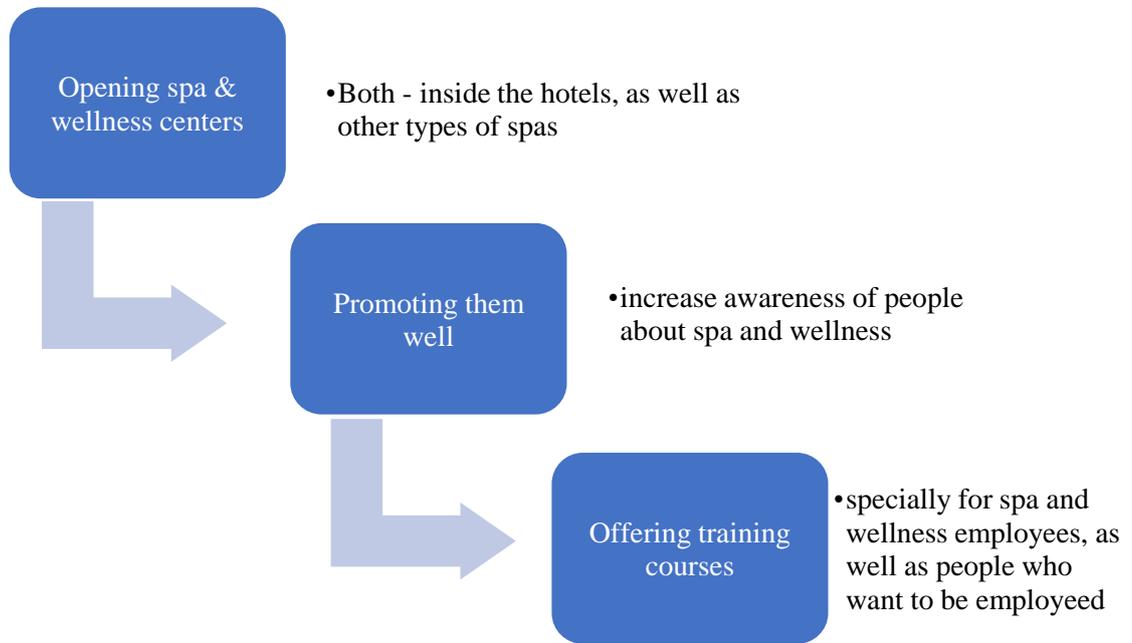
**Figure 4.** The evaluation of human resources quality in spa and wellness field by spa managers and human resource managers.

As it is clear from the Figure 4 the highest mark given to the overall situation is eight, while lowest is five. It is noteworthy that mostly the managers tend to name the same problems but somehow, assessment is quite individual and everyone has their opinion depending on the private experience. If one sums the results and divides by the number of interviews, the average point will be calculated, which in this case equals to 6.5.

The last question about the recommendations does not have very controversial answers from the side of interviewees. The Figure 5 shows the three different group of managers.

The answers can be divided in several groups, one of them believes that creating the training courses can survive and improve the current situation. Another group is the managers who think that image of the spa and wellness field should be better positioned and promoted within target audiences. The problem is that local population comprehend the spa services in a same manner as they were used to get in former Soviet Union sanatoria – with curative water treatments and mud applications. That is caused by the lack of promotion of the field and right explanation to population what is spa and how beneficial it is for the overall wellbeing of the person. The third group thinks that the lack

of the spa facilities is the main cause of different problems and recommend to open more and more spa centers. According to P3, when the demand for the workers increase, the supply of training courses will be increased simultaneously.



**Figure 5.** The recommendations from the spa managers and human resource managers (compiled by the author)

To sum up, the answers mentioned above can be classified and grouped in the manner as it is presented in Figure 5. It includes every group of answers. It is noteworthy that every group is interdependent on each other. The relationship between the “opening spa and wellness centers” and “promoting them well” may seem little bit different at first sight, but during further discussion, the promotion of something that does not exist would not be logical case. The actions can start with offering training courses as well. While giving more information to the existing and potential spa employees will cause the motivation within stakeholders to open more spa facilities as the trained staff can manage it in a profitable manner.

### **3. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The literature review was discussed in a careful manner in three levels, the first in a global picture, the second – in a tourism field as a typical industry for the spa and wellness, and the third and most important was the discussion about human resources in spa and wellness industry particularly. The last-mentioned subchapter had big limitations. The main and most problematic thing was the non-existence of relevant literature in the field. It appeared that the subject is not a matter of an in-depth research and it is quite difficult to find any useful information about it. Another limitation was the main industry paper (GSWS, 2012) used in the thesis many times. It includes plethora of information and in fact, is the main and only research done in the field. The only limitation is that six years has passed after the issuing of the paper, information is not up-to-date, as lots of things should be changed in the field. On the other hand, research showed that nothing has changed and problems discussed in the manual is actual and will be for some period of time before something is changed in the field.

The synthesis of the literature review with the results gained after the analysis of the primary data is an essential part of the thesis as it must be compared what the author has got by the research and if it repeats the theoretical parts issues. The starting point will be the education and qualification of spa managers. The theoretical part expressed the idea that it is very difficult to find the qualified and certified spa manager, especially with the background of therapists, as well as business subjects (Cohen and Russel, 2008; GSWS, 2012). It should be said, that the research has shown the same. From nine managers only two of them were in a connection of the field – one of them as fitness expert, and second of them as doctor. In this part, it can be said that results from the theory are practice are quite similar.

Another point to be compared is the importance and profitability of spa center for the hotel. The mentioned literature shows that functioning spa centers in the hotels is very important as the demand from the customers increase time by time and their preferences

to spa treatments change as well (Rančić et al., 2013.) The primary data analysis gave quite the same result. The most important term from the data analysis is the idea that having spa center higher the reputation of the hotel.

The theoretical overview showed the division of spa employees in three levels – managerial, supervisory and operational (Singapore Workforce Development Agency, 2014). The findings from the research is not strictly divided in these levels as it depends on the size of the company. The spas where only five persons work, have only managerial and operational levels, as for the hotels with more than 10 employees have supervisor as well. According to the respondents, the supervisor is said to be the assistant of spa manager in day to day operations.

The decision about hiring the new staff member and the ways of searching for the new employee are not the subject of any difference from the general practice. It happens in a usual manner and nothing innovative or creative is there. The briefing paper from 2012 of GSWS showed that human resource managers are persons who deal with the recruiting the new staff for the spa and they have trouble with it. The research done by the author gives slightly different results as in case of Georgian hotel spas, spa managers are the persons who decide and say final word in terms of hiring new employee. Of course, there are some exceptions where human resource manager or general manager is the main decision maker but in most cases spa manager says the final word after working together with human resource managers. It is logical as spa manager knows what the spa needs exactly.

The obstacles while hiring the new staff can be associated with Smith & Puczkó's (2009) idea about the special importance and specification of wellness staff, lack of qualification, as well as Baum and Lockstone-Binney's (2013) paper where wellness work is a subject of confusion within sex tourism. Besides the language barrier and lack of qualification and experience were mentioned by other authors. In the research case, one can see that the results are quite the same as from the literature review (Baum & Lockstone-Binney, 2013; D'Angelo, 2006; GSWS, 2012; Smith & Puczkó, 2009). The fact is compounded by the lack of awareness within people about the positive sides of working in spa and wellness sphere.

The difficulties in finding either spa therapist or spa administrative spa, as well as the certification in terms of therapists is solely dependent on Smith & Puczkó's (2009) idea. The authors state that the certificates got by the therapists are not trustworthy in many cases and can cause serious damage of client. Besides, the ease of the finding new employee is mentioned as spa centers tend to make their employees multitask as it is economic and one therapist can perform several treatments. The same picture is seen from the interviews, especially from P7 as the employees are specialists of different procedures. The same respondent state that it is not difficult to find employees, as the main is how he or she will study on the workplace. However, there are very different occasions, where finding the therapist is the most difficult as they do not obtain relevant qualifications.

Onsite trainings are another subject of matching literature review with the results obtained by the research (ASEAN, 2016; D'Angelo, 2006; Rawlinson, 2017). But, the difference is the primary data, which shows that the trainings for the staff are mostly provided by the beauty product providers as they tend to teach the therapists how to use their production in the procedures. Therefore, it can be the exceptional factor that varies from the theoretical part.

The most important part of empirical study was the human resource quality assessment by the managers by the 10 points scale. The result showed the average point 6.5 which is slightly more than half of the maximum point. It can be assumed that the situation towards quality is not relevant. The result is not surprising as author was waiting for the worse results in this case. It seems every manager assesses the staff quality with different components and their answers of course are quite diverse from each other.

The existence of educational institutions globally is discussed in details in the theory as it includes the systems implemented by the decision-making organizations in the global spa and wellness industry, such as GSWS, EACEA and others (EACEA, 2010; GSWS, 2012). The literature obtains the information about the lack of educational places in spa and wellness field in general but gives recommendations and offers the own training system (Global Wellness Institute, 2017a; GSWS, 2012). The reality of Georgian spa resorts shows drastically different picture. Only medical massage courses can be assigned as spa and wellness education providers in the field, as well as the training base of one of

balneological resorts which does not really differ from the medical massage teaching centers. So, there is a huge gap in this direction. Besides, managers have not concrete information about training courses abroad. This part is the most problematic and root cause of every problem.

The main recommendation from the literature review (GSWS, 2012; Smith & Puczkó, 2009) is to train more and more people in terms of spa and wellness in order to answer the increasing demand of the field. The respondents of interview give quite the similar answers about the need of training opportunities. Besides, they recommend to open more spa centers and promote them well, so that local population will have better comprehension of the sphere as well. The idea seems very good but it should be mentioned that the prices of spa services are not affordable for the majority of Georgian population. If more spa centers will be opened, then they should regulate the prices as well in order the local people to have ability to use the services. Otherwise, it will be counted only for the high-income population and foreign tourists. From the authors point of view, that is one of the ways how the spa and wellness field should be developed – to offer more affordable services for the local population, so that they will start to use the spa centers and popularity, as well as profitability of the field will increase as well.

The main finding of the research connected with the literature review is that Georgia, as a case country really suffers from unqualified and non-professional staff in the wellness and spa field. As mentioned above, the survey can not give the whole picture as it describes only hotel spas, but the lack of the spa centers in Georgia gives ability to use hotel spas as a case study example. Besides, they are well developed.

The case can not be used as an example of the whole sphere of spa and wellness as the health resorts are not included there. But the thing that the hotel spas are the most developed institutions in this field, it is obvious and can be used as a recommendation as well. Giving the right direction to the hotel spas, the health resort sector can be developed with the same manner. Of course, there is need of staff with totally different background like medical education, but still if the training center will prepare the staff for the hotel spas, the same staff can be suitable for health resorts at some point (spa manager, spa supervisor and other administrative staff can be examples).

The need of training is strictly highlighted in both – literature review (Baum & Lockstone-Binney, 2013; GSWS, 2012; Smith & Puczkó, 2009) and research as well. But due to the lack of spa staff the demand is not as high as it should be. The existence staff of the hotel spas are trained on site by the spa managers. At the same time, the companies providing the beauty products to spa centers are helping the sphere to develop better and be proficient at procedures done by their production.

The further recommendations from the side of the author will be the following: the main solution to the above-mentioned problem is the opening of private training center, which will be in a close connection with Georgian governmental sector to have its support and will hold the training courses for the spa and wellness staff, or the people interested in working in the field. It does not mean that government has to pay for the courses. The contribution from them will be to support the existence of the training center and encourage further investments in the educational field of spa and wellness. The country has the project named “Invest in Georgia” which involves motivating foreign business people to invest in the different spheres of the country (<https://www.investingeorgia.org/en/>). The project will be very suitable for the spa and wellness development as the training center can be opened by the foreign institutions who will see the huge development potential of the field and profitability as well. Besides, spa and wellness is part of tourism which is highly encouraged by the government in terms of tax rates, infrastructural projects, etc.

If the training center will be opened by the local business people, it must have the connection with such kind of giant and leading organizations of spa and wellness world, such as International Spa Association, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Global Spa and Wellness Institute, as well as educational institutions toward the spa and wellness education. By cooperation with this organizations, there is possibility to make the field very modern and equipped with the sufficient knowledge, both in a managerial as well as operational level. As it appeared from the study, even managers do not have relevant education in terms of spa and wellness, therefore the training center will be the right educational institution to support the field and provide it with qualified and certified personnel. To sum up, the synthesis of literature review and data analysis led to the recommendation mentioned above.

## **CONCLUSION**

The paper describes the situation in one of the rapidly developed parts of the tourism industry – as spa and wellness field. The main aim was to find out the managerial point of view towards crucial thing in a spa and wellness center functioning, such as employee qualification and education. The research questions were taken from the aim and was assigned to find out the overall situation in spa and wellness field of Georgia, as well as finding out the weakest part of the industry and needs of further support from managerial, as well as industrial side.

Provided that the case country is on the development way in terms of spa and wellness and has image of country of curative muds and waters, it was not easy task to find the cluster of managers who could answer on the questions asked by the author. Gaining interviews took a long time as it needed to persuade the managers to assign an interview. In the end, author managed to take nine interviews, seven of them was face-to-face, while two of them were answered by e-mail.

As a result, it appeared that the topic chosen was very actual for the field. Globally, there is the problem of educated and experienced staff in the spa and wellness industry, Georgia is not exception as well. The authors personal contribution to the thesis was the qualitative research done with face to face interviews, as it is the best way to find out as much as possible about desired topic. During the synthesis of literature review with the empirical part of the study, it appeared that the case country shares most of the values described by famous authors but there are some visible differences. The similarities of the theory and practice are the following: the existence of spa managers with irrelevant qualification, the importance of spa center for the hotel, the ways of searching new employees, the main obstacles while searching new employees, the lack of certified personnel and having other barriers. The differences which the synthesis shown are as follows: spa positions (more or less different) in the spa centers, the situations when there is need of new worker, the

responsible person for hiring new employee, providing onsite trainings for the existing staff members, the information about specific educational and training center in the field.

There are number of limitations appeared during the study process. For example, the current development level of the country in terms of spa and wellness is not so strong and country can be assigned rather the health tourism destination than spa and wellness one. The awareness of the field within the population is not wide. The natural resources give all the possibilities to health tourism and it is quite popular among local population, as well as foreign visitors. In terms of right management, there is huge potential to develop country as spa and wellness tourism destination and promote it internationally.

After making the discussion about the similarities and differences between theory and practice, the author gives the idea how the spa and wellness field in Georgia can be developed in terms of human resources in the recommendation section. Creating the training center with foreign or local investment will lead to the desired result to have qualified and educated staff. The government support and involvement in this is of paramount importance: encourage and motivate investment in spa and wellness as a part of tourism development will be the push factor for different companies to take care of the field and make it as profitable as the rest of tourism directions, such as accommodation sector, tourism attractions, etc.

To sum up, the paper offers the detailed investigation of hotel spa management which is one of the main point for the wellness and spa service development in the case country – Georgia.

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## **Appendix 1. Questionnaire for interviews**

1. The qualification and education of the interviewee, the general and day-to-day responsibilities of him/her
2. How important and profitable is spa and wellness center of the hotel?
3. What are the spa positions in your organization? (spa manager, spa therapist, etc)
4. In which situations do you decide that there is need of new employee (maybe nobody has gone from work)
5. Who is responsible on hiring new staff – spa manager or HR manager
6. The ways of searching new employees – social network, acquaintances, vacancy webpages, how effective are they?
7. The main obstacles while searching for new employees?
8. Who creates general requirements for employees?
9. What kind of employee is more difficult to find – spa receptionist – administrative staff or spa therapists and beauticians?
10. Do you require special certificate from massage therapists before accepting?
11. Do you have onsite trainings and how do you take care of professional development of staff?
12. Have you heard about specific educational or training course for spa staff?
13. From scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is minimum and 10 is maximum) how would you rate the overall situation in HR of spa and wellness field in Georgia? Do you see any development potential?
14. What are your recommendations to improve the current situation and get more qualified and professional staff in the field?

## Appendix 2. List of hotels obtaining spa centers in Georgia

#	Name of the hotel obtaining spa	Location
1	Radisson Blu Iveria - Anne Semonin Spa	Tbilisi
2	Biltmore Hotel	Tbilisi
3	Hotels and Preference Hualing Tbilisi – Be pure	Tbilisi
4	Laerton Boutique hotel	Tbilisi
5	Bioli Medical Wellness Resort	Tbilisi
6	Gino wellness Mtskheta	Mtskheta (Eastern Georgia)
7	Gino Wellness Rabath	Akhaltsikhe (Southern Georgia)
8	Crowne Plaza Borjomi	Borjomi (Southern Georgia)
9	Hotel Borjomi Likani	Borjomi (Southern Georgia)
10	Borjomi Palace	Borjomi (Southern Georgia)
11	Tskaltubo Spa Resort	Tskaltubo (Western Georgia)
12	Tskaltubo Plaza	Tskaltubo (Western Georgia)
13	Sairme Resort	Sairme (Western Georgia)
14	Nunisi Hotel forest & SPA	Nunisi (Western Georgia)
15	Lopota Lake Resort and Spa	Telavi (Eastern Georgia)
16	Schuchmann Wine Chateau and Spa	Telavi (Eastern Georgia)
17	Kvareli Lake resort	Kvareli (Eastern Georgia)
18	Kvareli Eden	Kvareli (Eastern Georgia)
19	Ambassadori Kachreti golf resort	Kachreti (Eastern Georgia)
20	Rooms hotel	Kazbegi (Eastern Georgia)
21	Castello Mare hotel and wellness resort	Tsikhisdziri (Western Georgia)
22	Radisson Blu Hotel Batumi – Anne Semonin Spa	Batumi (Western Georgia)
23	Sheraton Batumi Hotel	Batumi (Western Georgia)
24	Euphoria Hotel – Shangila Luxury spa and fitness	Batumi (Western Georgia)
25	Intourist Hotel – Shangila Luxury spa and fitness	Batumi (Western Georgia)
26	Sky Tower Hotel - Shangila Luxury spa and fitness	Batumi (Western Georgia)
27	Colosseum Marina Hotel	Batumi (Western Georgia)
28	Hilton Batumi – Eforea Spa	Batumi (Western Georgia)
29	Paragraph hotel	Shekvetili (Western Georgia)
30	Best Western Bakuriani	Bakuriani (Southern Georgia)
31	Snow Plaza Hotel	Bakuriani (Southern Georgia)
32	Marco Polo Hotel	Gudauri (Eastern Georgia)

Source: Compiled by author

Note: the list represents only the hotels which has spa and health center as a department (with own reception and management)

## RESÜMEE

### TÖÖJÕU KVALIFIKATSIOONIPROBLEEMID HEAOLU JA SPAA TÖÖSTUSES GRUUSIA SPAA-HOTELLIDE JUHTUMIUURINGU NÄITEL

Tsitsino Jangidze

Käesolevas töös on käsitletud heaolu ja spaa tööstuses levinud kvalifikatsiooni- ja sertifitseerimisprobleeme. Juhtumiuuring viidi läbi nõukogude minevikuga Gruusias, mis asub strateegiliselt Euroopa ja Aasia piiril. Pärast hoolikat kirjanduse uurimist tõstatati uurimistöö probleem – kogemustega ja kvalifitseeritud töötajate puudumine spaa ja heaolu tööstuses. Magistritöö eesmärk tuleneb uurimistöö probleemist ja kõlab järgnevalt: analüüsida spaade juhtide ja/või personalijuhtide nägemust, mis puudutab heaolu ja spaa tööstuse töötajate kvaliteeti ning anda soovitusi praeguse olukorra parandamiseks.

Uurimistöö küsimused tulenesid töö eesmärgist ja need jagunevad kaheks:

1. Inimressursi kvaliteedi analüüs Gruusia heaolu ja spaa tööstuse valdkonnas
2. Soovituste andmine spaa ja heaolu valdkonna töötajate toetamise parendamiseks ja tõhustamiseks

Kirjandusallikate läbivaatamine on uurimistöö probleemi kinnitanud ja andnud parema ülevaate valdkonnas valitseva talenditühimiku kohta. Erinevate autorite poolt esiletõstetud peamised probleemid olid järgmised: raskused universaalse juhi leidmisel, haridusasutuste puudumine spaa ja heaolu valdkonnas, ettevõtete poolse soovi puudumine investeerida töötajate arendamisse. Käesoleva töö autori poolne isiklik panus oli uurimistöö läbiviimine näidisriigis Gruusias. Uurimistöö sihtrühmaks olid spaa-hotellide juhid, kuna see valdkond on võrreldes muude tervisekuurortidega rohkem arenenud. Uurimistöö raames intervjueriti üheksat spaa juhti ja personalijuhti, seitset neist näost näkku ja kahte e-posti teel.

Intervjuude põhjal saadud tulemus näitas, et näidisriik on arenguteel, et saada spaa ja heaoluteenuste turismisihtkohaks, kuid sellel teel on ka mõned takistused. Kvalifitseeritud ja kogemustega tööjõu puudumine on üks peamisi probleeme koos inimeste väheste teadmistega heaolu valdkonnas. Selgus, et näidisriigi spaa-hotellid kannatavad kvalifitseeritud spaa juhtide puudumise all, kuna ükski neist pole selle valdkonna professionaal. Lisaks esineb hulk takistusi uute töötajate otsimisel, üks neist on antud valdkonna haridusasutuste puudumine. Keskmise hinnang, mille juhid andsid 10-palli süsteemis inimressursi kvaliteedile oli 6,5, mis pole edasiseks arenguks piisav tulemus.

Autoripoolne soovitus on luua koolituskeskus, mis on suunatud üksnes spaa ja heaolu valdkonna professionaalide ettevalmistamisele, mitte üksnes tavatöötajate, vaid ka järelevalvepersonali ja juhtkonna ettevalmistamiseks. Selline tegevus oleks suur samm Gruusia edasiseks arenemiseks spaa ja heaoluteenuste turismisihtkohaks.

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