

Proposing a Master of Science Program in Spa Management based on findings in the Greek Tourism Sector

¹Ioanna Leontaridou, ²Costas Assimakopoulos, ³Lydia Moutsiou, ⁴Spyros
Avdimiotis

^{1,3} *Department of Nutritional Sciences and Dietetics, International Hellenic University (IHU)*

^{2,4} *Department of Organizations Management, Marketing and Tourism, International Hellenic University (IHU)*

ABSTRACT : International Hellenic University offered a Post Graduate Program in Spa Management. After the re-formations of the Higher Education in Greece the program needed re-formation also. Thus, a new effort began so that a new Spa Management Post Graduate program will be offered by the University. The University assigned a project to investigate the contemporary needs in the spa sector so that the profile of such an employee is determined and subsequently, the curriculum of the post graduate program is adapted to the needs of this profile. The Authors made an extensive qualitative and quantitative research as well as study of the literature and deduced to a brand new curriculum fully adjusted to the findings of the research. As a result of the Qualitative and the Quantitative field research the competences of a spa manager have a multidisciplinary character. The cognitive area is not limited to the classical managerial character although up to now spa managers need to be people that have no other qualifications than the administrative ones. Nevertheless, the contemporary manager should be reinforced with marketing skills and modern managerial skills. Moreover, information and communication technologies should be part of the spa managers' profile as well as soft skills like cosmetology knowledge and new trends in therapeutics. Based on the above outcomes the proposed new Master of Science program has special courses in four axes: management, marketing, soft skills for a spa therapist and new ICT technologies.

KEYWORDS - Spa manager profile, Spa Management, Education Program.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2015 the Department of Aesthetics and Cosmetology of the Alexander Technological Educational Institute in Thessaloniki, Greece, run a Master of Science Program for graduate students of the department. The title of the MSc program was "Quality and Human Resources Management of Wellness and SPA Units" and it was a complete success. The years passed and new perspectives arose. The University after the economic crisis was looking for re-formations over its Graduate programs so that they could be robust and competitive under the opening of the Greek economy after many years of recession and recently covid-19 pandemic. Hence, the author's under the contract of the project with code number 21045 of the research committee of the University had undertaken the obligation to investigate the needs of the society and particularly the needs of the sector of luxurious hotels and resorts that facilitates customers with spa and wellness centers, so that a new re-formatted MSc program will be offered providing to its students knowledge, skills and competencies at the state of the art in the area of SPA management. This is not the first time in literature that spa management has been investigated and particularly the profile of a spa manager tried to be determined [1].

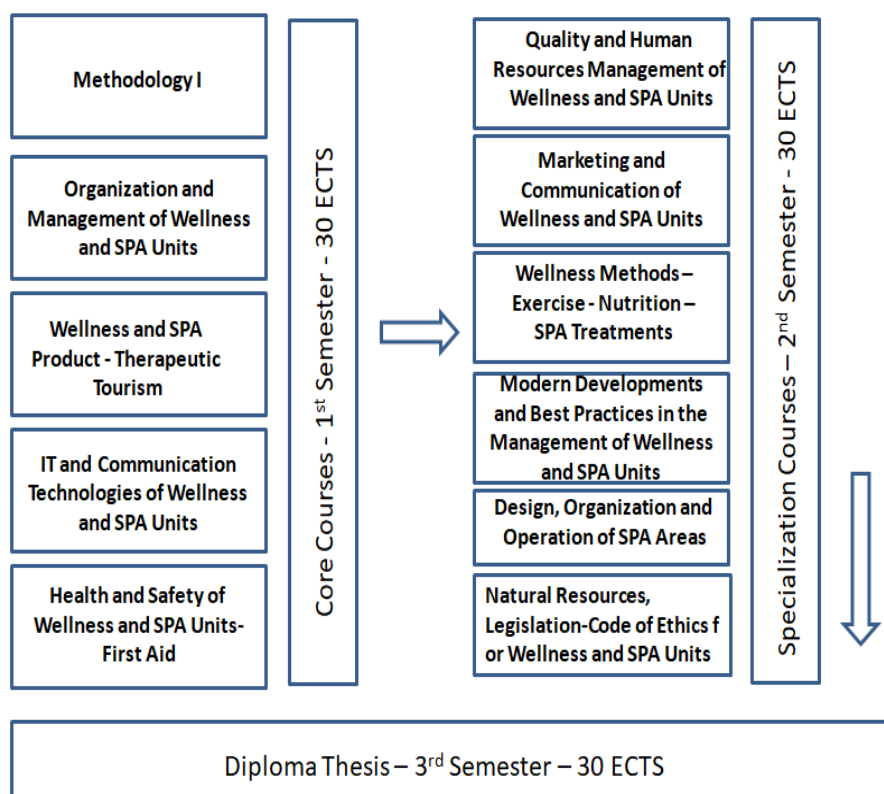
II. BACKGROUND

The initial MSc Program was developed in 2015 and it facilitated its students with the post graduate title "Quality and Human Resources Management of Wellness and SPA Units". It included 2 semesters of courses plus one semester where the students had to pursue their diploma theses. The total ECTS offered by the program was 90 ECTS whereas the work load was equal to 2700h. The program was unique (no other competitors) in Greece and constituted the physical continuation of the undergraduate studies of the Aesthetics and Cosmetology Department. The interest of the professionals in this area was great and 50 candidates for 25 student slots had applied. The program started in 2015 and lasted for 3 successive years. The candidates were professionals (freelancers) who were looking for enhancing their position in the market, as market limits was blurred, especially after plastic surgeons tried systematically to take advantage of the legislation liberation and re-position themselves in the area of skin care. The professionals of skin care felt the pressure in the market and hence, they were obliged to look for new knowledge, skills and capabilities so that they can effectively

counterpart the share loss of the market. This need was partially covered at that era by the MSc program in SPA management.

The graduate of that program had a competitive advantage, or an alternative to work as a manager in a spa/wellness resort, in the case when he/she couldn't stand the competition to the plastic surgeons. However, nothing stands stable and new needs arose. It was the rapidly increase of the tourism industry of a country exiting 10 years of recession and the new economic environment deployed. On the other hand everything suddenly closed again due to the covid-19 pandemic. Thus, now, after the pandemic crisis passed, new challenges impose new capabilities for workers in the area of hotels, resorts and SPA centers. This new situation has been studied within this project. The results are depicted later in section results. In the literature [2] it has been proven that adaptation of a teaching program to the needs of society is a legitimate way of teaching designing. The program consisted of background courses for establishing the corpus of the post graduate and courses for specialization in the area of spa manager. The background courses are: Methodology I, Organization and Management of Wellness and SPA Units, Wellness and SPA Product - Therapeutic Tourism, IT and Communication Technologies of Wellness and SPA Units, Health and Safety of Wellness and SPA Unit - First Aid, whereas the specialization courses are: Quality and Human Resources Management of Wellness and SPA Units, Marketing and Communication of Wellness and SPA Units, Wellness Methods - Exercise - Nutrition - SPA Treatments, Modern Developments and Best Practices in the Management of Wellness and SPA Units, Design, Organization and Operation of SPA Areas, Natural Resources, Legislation-Code of Ethics for Wellness and SPA Units.

Table 1: MSc Program that needs improvement



The program needs to be reformatted in the context of the syllabus of the units of it. Particularly, the topics for every course of the program should be enhanced according to the outcome of the qualitative and the quantitative outcomes of our survey.

III. METHODOLOGY

The survey that was conducted by the authors was divided into two major parts. After the literature review the authors prepared for a qualitative survey using a semi structured questionnaire. The qualitative research targeted to experienced distinguished administration members of wellness and spa centers with clear view of the subject. The outcome of the qualitative survey was then used for quantitative survey. Based on the results of the first

campaign of interviews, a structured questionnaire was prepared for quantitative measurements so that robust results are obtained with deductive analysis.

The qualitative research took place in 2020, which was the first year of the project.

Qualitative Research : Qualitative research entailed 12 interviews with spa managers having more than 20 years of experience and faced a lot of experiences [3]. The purpose was that they would guide the successive quantitative research by giving characteristics of the profile of a manager or by excluding characteristics of the profile of the manager. After the interviews had finished, the recorded voice material was passed through N-vivo software to distinguish nodes and grouping terms. The nodes and the terms helped construct the instrument for the second part the quantitative campaign.

Quantitative Research : The quantitative campaign entailed a sample of 72 people either having managerial positions or being staff of spa centers in luxurious resorts in Greece. The team approached by in-vivo interviews throughout high season periods 102 members of the population of interest. There were specific meeting where the response rate finally reach 70%. For that purpose team members travelled in a wide geographical spread the country meeting important resorts in Chania, Heraklion, Rethymnon (Crete island), Rhodes, Peloponnese, Athens, Komotini, Chalkidiki, covering almost 70% of the most important touristic regions of Greece. This campaign was undertaken just during two covid-19 summers (2020-2021) when the protocols for face to face meetings were severe. However, the data set was adequate.

Questionnaire : The questionnaire has turned the profile characteristics of the spa managers identified through literature study [4] and qualitative research into questions regarding potential competencies, skills and/or knowledge that the latter should have for confronting everyday issues as well as designing strategies in a demanding spa center. The questionnaire covered topics like marketing knowledge, skills and competencies, personal sales, customer satisfaction issues, hygiene and safety issues, contemporary IT and communication issues, therapist skills, human resource management skills, soft and technical skills, total quality management issues and finally management style. The findings were not prominent. They revealed necessities and in all the above topics they provided details so that the proposed MSc program syllabus could be elaborated.

Data analysis : For the data analysis the counterpart of spss software was used. Data was organized into groups and the latter helped the authors to elaborate the topics of the syllabus. Descriptive statistics was the main tool. However, cronbach's alpha coefficient was used in some cases so inherent consistency of the answers was checked. The results were sufficient, as alpha coefficient in most of the cases was found to be greater than 0,7..

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data processing resulted in a brand new curriculum for the MSc program in spa management. Methodology was inspired by [5] and [6]. The main syllabus retained the structure of two semesters plus a third for diploma theses. However, now there are proposed 4 axes: Marketing, Management, Therapist technical soft skills, Information communication and technology. Each axis has three specialization courses that elaborate the special chapters of the axis. The specialization courses of an axis were discovered after exploring the needs of a spa manager as recorded by the field survey campaigns. The specialized chapters are as follows:

Spa Marketing issues: The field research revealed that data regarding customers should be systematically gathered by spa administrative members and therapists and using modern technology it should be stored and processed. The need that has to be covered is the customer profile building which in turn will help for market segmentation and adapt offers of spa centers accordingly. Moreover, a remarkable finding is that when applying a therapy the customer is sometimes in dialogue with the therapist who can suggest a range of alternative products to the customer and give him/her the opportunity to choose new therapies additionally to the therapies applied. This gives the chance for the therapist to make product/services sales simultaneously with the application of therapies, and increase the revenue for the wellness /spa centre. Hence, personal sales techniques should be one hot topic that spa management MSc program should offer to its students. In a competitive environment defensive marketing is quite a priority to be applied against offensive marketing. Preserving customers is much easier and money saving strategy rather than gaining new customers which in many cases can cost 5-10 times more money. The spa manager/staff has to focus on most valuable customers (distinguish them, give them customized services and offers) so that to retain them. This is the subject of the Customer relationships

management (CRM) as a philosophy, system applied in a company. The spa workers should be trained for CRM philosophy.

Spa management issues: The qualitative and the quantitative research revealed how important is the human relationship management in modern companies and in spa centers even more important. Employees working in such a place are spending many hours a day in a technically created warm and moisture environment continuously over several months (touristic seasons) when breaks and leisure time for the workers are limited. Conflicts and inter-personal problems arise, and thus, the manager usually comes to solve or counterbalance those disputes. HR management is a key course in a Spa manager MSc program. Competition and the need for differentiation imposes to offer flawless services of high quality. Do the correct things from the beginning, follow protocols and paths of services offering, continuous self-improvement, design of the services so the problems prevented, etc. All these notions are primary principals of total quality management. Hence, such a course should exist in a MSc program. Nevertheless, the variety of personalities of customers/staff, the variety of services and environments /needs that a spa/wellness center comes to cover imposes that the manager has the knowledge and skills to adapt himself to dynamic administrative conditions. In other words spa manager should be aware of different management styles existing in the literature and this should be a training subject.

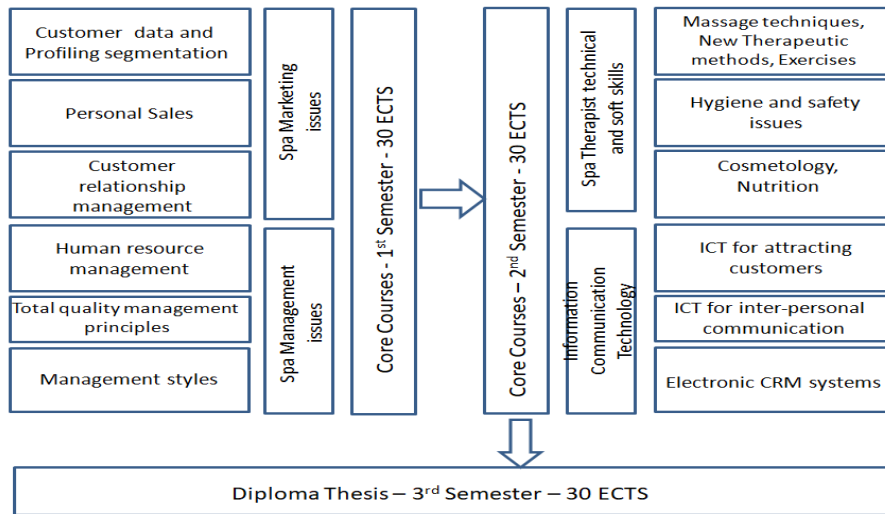
Technical and soft skills: In the name of continuous improvement, spa therapist and spa managers should never be isolated or estranged from the actual duties and professional skills. New therapies, massage techniques and exercises should be top priority. Even, techniques that are applied being old fashion should be taught in depth so that their working mechanism would be really and in depth known. These should be part of a course of the proposed MSc program. Wellness and spa centers are warm environments with high levels of moisture. The environment is friendly to germs and microbes (funguses). Measures of hygiene and safety should be applied. The dangers regarding germs must be explicit to the workers and administration should elaborate to the measures taken to prevent contaminations and their application must be strict. Hygiene and safety issues should be subject of such an MSc program. Moreover, therapeutic techniques should be accompanied by appropriate cosmetology products and nutrition. Skin and body must be treated with all products that are important for its health. Thus, therapists and managers in wellness centers should have specialized training regarding cosmetology and nutrition. In this direction qualitative research depicted that cosmetology and nutrition should be part of a training spa manager program.

Information and communication technology : All MSc modules should be supported by ICT new evolutions and tools. Hence, data gathering and custom profiling as well as customer relationship management philosophy must be sustained by an e-CRM software and well-trained employees for data entering and analyzing. Data gathering requires ICT for customers' wills and passions capturing. Social media and social networking is a modern tool for supplying data to the spa /wellness centre servers for CRM and profile segmentation. Moreover, the latter can assist sales and promote offers and get feedback from potential customers. Finally, ICT can play an important role for intra-company communication and extra-company communication. Spa manager and staff should be trained to that also. The proposed M.Sc. program with its 4 axes and the modules per axis is shown in table 2. Twelve modules are offered in two semesters having 5 credits per module, 30 credits per semester plus a third semester with the diploma thesis. Diploma thesis can be a thorough study of a management case regarding spa/wellness centers.

V. CONCLUSION

After a long investigation that took place from March 2020 until October 2022 the authors succeeded in investigating by both qualitatively and quantitatively means the special knowledge, skills and competencies that a spa manager should have in contemporary competitive environment in the tourism sector where spa/wellness centers are embedded into luxurious resorts and differentiation along with high quality services are an imperative need. In this framework the qualitative research provided the seeds for quantitative research and a complete package of twelve modules has been designed. The modules are attend on four basic axes that are also presented. The new proposed MSc program aspires to be successful again and attract the interest of professionals in the spa /wellness area.

Table 2: MSc Proposed Program



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