

## **WELL-BEING TOURISM AS A HEALTH PROMOTION FOR EMPLOYEE IN THE IT SECTOR**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The scope of investigation was to research the interaction between Well-being tourism and social corporative responsibility of IT companies for improving the quality of life of IT-employees. Our changed world needs to live in harmony with the smart environment. An evaluation of IT-companies' health promotion programs /Well-being assistance programs/ and well-being tourist resources in Bulgaria were described. The main results are in line with social corporative policy of IT companies to provide safe and healthy work environments and to motivate IT employees for improving the quality of live. The Bulgarian Roadmap of well-being destinations present the health from nature and Safety Innovative Security Well-being Tourism for health promotion.*

**KEYWORDS:** Well-being tourism, IT employee, safety life, health promotion, CSR

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Our changed world after the COVID -19 pandemic imposed new rules for work and leisure management. The freedom of the hybrid model of work has given a strong impetus to the development of an independent lifestyle. Many young people found comfort of country houses with a yard, and IT specialists moved their offices to nature. The advantages of the IT sector in organizing outsourced offices definitely drew our attention to the development of a specialized tourism product to compensate for the lack of physical activity, high levels of stress and the inability to use the developed Wellness assistance programs of biggest IT companies.

The aim of study was to research possibility for implementation of Well-being tourism as a health prevention and improve the quality of life for employees in IT sector in Bulgaria.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology is aimed at two important stages of research - studying the state of Corporate Social Responsibility development in the IT sector, and another one -studying the attitude of employees to manage their free time. In first stage /primary data collection of sources and evaluation/ study is focused on finding a good business model for health prevention and

presented an overview of workplace health promotion. In second stage semi-quantitative method /online interview/ is used and presents the opinion of 76 respondents about their wellness/health prevention culture, their desire to improve quality of life based on the natural environment and outdoor physical activity.

## **2. FINDING**

### **RESULTS FROM THE FIRST STAGE OF STUDY**

During the first stage of the study, which included collecting data from existing documents and literature sources, the role of Workplace Health Promotion and Social Corporate Responsibility were clarified for quality of life of employees.

### **HISTORICAL PREVIEW OF WORKPLACE HEALTH PROMOTION /WHP/**

The profile of successful company depends on motivated and healthy employee. The challenges of our days are related to manage a healthier workplace, to reduce impact of stress factors on human psycho-emotional comfort and to obtain a new level of quality of life [1].

Referring the main strategies and regulations in this area - Council Directive 89/391/EC: Framework Directive on safety and health, Programme of Community action in the field of public health (2003- 2008), we can find the influence of globalization in every level of our life, development of quality management system and the role of healthy work environment for economic success. The responsibility of European Commission is demonstrated by an initiative to develop an European Network for Workplace Health Promotion /WHP/, based on historical Luxembourg Declaration since 1997 which was adopted by all members of the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion in Luxembourg on November 27-28, 1997. Later it was updated in 2005, 2007 and 2018. According to the Declaration: “Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work. This can be achieved through a combination of: - improving the work organization and the working environment; - promoting active participation; - encouraging personal development.”[12].

### **IDENTIFICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF GOOD PRACTICE MODELS FOR CSR**

When tried to identify and disseminate some good practice’s models in the area of health prevention, we have to adopt the innovative management strategy Corporate social responsibility (CSR). The philosophy of this strategy works for better and healthier workplace environment for different kind of professionals in corporate structure. The relationship between WHP and CSR is complementary. Obviously the WHP is a corporate strategy which is oriented to obtain the delicate balance between company profit and well-being of employees. But actually, managers are investing in main capital - human resources, improving staff’s quality of life in different approaches. One of the more valuable ones is corresponding to mental and physical health of employees. Their motivation and workability affect the company estimated as an important prerequisites for successful business model. For example Bloomberg presents an overview of company’s sustainable business activity in 2020 [fig. 1]. Company provided a “comprehensive suite of programs designed to improve the financial, physical and mental health and well-being of employees and their dependents, reduce health risks and manage work

and family demands. ... When the COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges for families, we enhanced our work-family benefits”[2].

Figure 1. Bloomberg L.P.’s 2020 Impact Report

Issue	Environmental	Social	Governance	Cross-ESG
Tier 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy efficiency of offices/data centers</li> <li>• Utilization of renewable energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee diversity/equity/inclusion</li> <li>• Employee attraction/retention/engagement</li> <li>• Employee harassment/non-discrimination</li> <li>• Social/racial equality</li> <li>• Employee wellness, health and safety</li> <li>• Engagement in the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cyber security</li> <li>• Ethical conduct</li> <li>• Disaster response/business continuity</li> <li>• External ESG disclosure</li> <li>• Board diversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New/enhanced ESG products/services</li> <li>• BLP Media/News focus on ESG issues</li> <li>• Screening suppliers for environmental/social criteria</li> <li>• Integration of ESG into non-ESG focused products/services</li> <li>• BLP supply chain labor risks</li> </ul>
Tier 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BLP sustainable business travel practices</li> <li>• Waste reduction/diversion from landfill</li> <li>• Impact of BLP locations on local communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee grievance mechanisms</li> <li>• Poverty/wealth inequality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board oversight of ESG</li> <li>• Formal management accountability for ESG</li> <li>• Public policy engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BLP participation in advancing an inclusive economy</li> <li>• Carbon emissions from BLP upstream activities</li> </ul>
Tier 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water/wastewater management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of association/collective bargaining</li> </ul>		

Source: [https://assets.bbhub.io/company/sites/56/2021/04/Impact\\_Report\\_2020.pdf](https://assets.bbhub.io/company/sites/56/2021/04/Impact_Report_2020.pdf)

So CSR is a specific managing model directed towards to internal stakeholders-employees and company management unit. The fourth industrial revolution (4.0) comes with Internet of Things, Blockchain, Cloud Computing, Virtual reality, Artificial Intelligence, 5G, etc. According to some authors, “Industry 4.0 arrived with a lot of benefits to the industry business, but companies should not stop thinking about sustainable development [3]. In our view, CSR is facing to the employees as a part of society and trying to find the lost connection between pure Environment, quality of life and health prevention. One more, the main question is what kind of disease is a result of individuals’ lifestyle or managing of their free time. Obviously the employer has possibility to motivate and create a new healthy workplace and employee’s habits [3]. Especially, “IT enterprises are invited to conduct a CSR assessment, to develop a CSR strategy and to implement CSR commitments” [7].

## RESULTS FROM THE SECOND STAGE OF THE STUDY

### IT SECTOR PROFILE IN BULGARIA AFTER CORONA-19

According to the Bulgarian Software Association BASCOM, IT fulltime employees are above 38 000 in 2020. Graduates have very low unemployment, almost all of them work in their specialty with much higher than average insurance incomes. Nowadays, ecosystems of IT business are changed. The global economy is reducing the velocity of development, but in the same time, IT sector is increasing activity. The local independence of IT sector impacted on the World and the Hybrid work model is global trend of 2021. IT sector is simply the first to go hybrid works. “Home IT offices” including outside offices help other sectors to manage a new vision of their activity and change the reality. According to IDC, by 2023, 75% of companies will implement a hybrid approach to work by design and not by circumstances [14]. At the end of 2020 no more than 10-20% of IT staff in Bulgaria work from a physical office only. But in the same time well-equipped anti-stress zones in the companies cannot perform their function and employee cannot be health prevented. Their quality of life, based on Wellness culture indicator, is deteriorating and the risk of non-pandemic health problems is clearly increasing. The outlined trend for a dominant hybrid model of work directs our attention to presenting special care to IT staff, related to anti-stress programs and health prevention.

Main results from research stage 2 are showing that IT professionals have well developed Wellness and health prevention culture. More of them realized and appreciated workable companies Wellness programs /fig. 2/. But a new reality needs new approaches. Our respondents prefer open tourism product that combines with a clean rural environment and forest tourism (25% of respondents), 30.65% prefer ecotourism, 36.29% choose cultural tourism with its capabilities to offer a variety of individual programs for participants, healthy rural food and outdoor animation /fig.3/.

Figure 2. How often do you practice SPA or Wellness tourism?

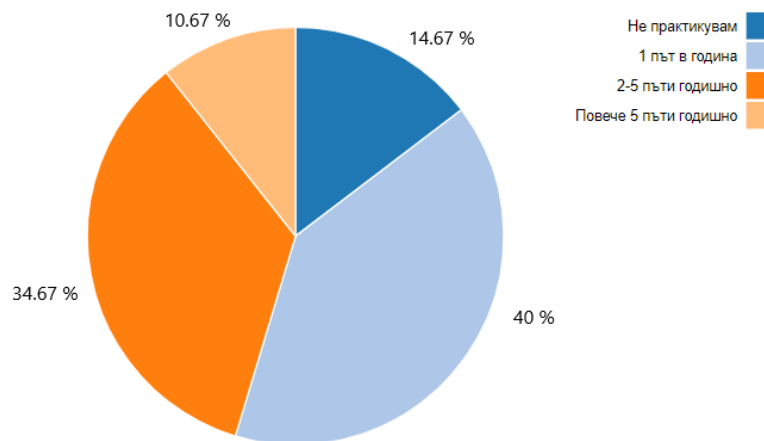
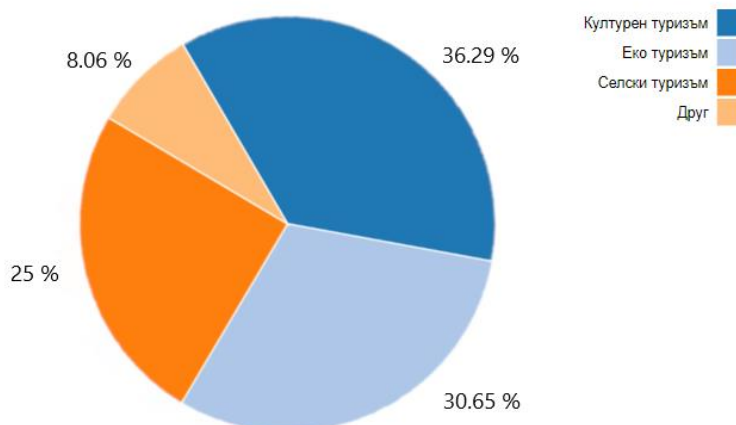


Figure 3. With which tourism would you combine Well-being?



A very important element is that participants seek psychoemotional comfort for their families in a natural environment./ Fig. 3/. Today the called “Digital Well-being” is not efficient for IT employees.

## WHERE DOES WELL-BEING TOURISM MEET IT EMPLOYEES? DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS

The proposed concept is a reflection of the results of the study. Our conceptual framework describes several levels of participants in the process of improving the quality of life: Digital Well-being of employees and stakeholders, Well-being risk assessment of employees, Design

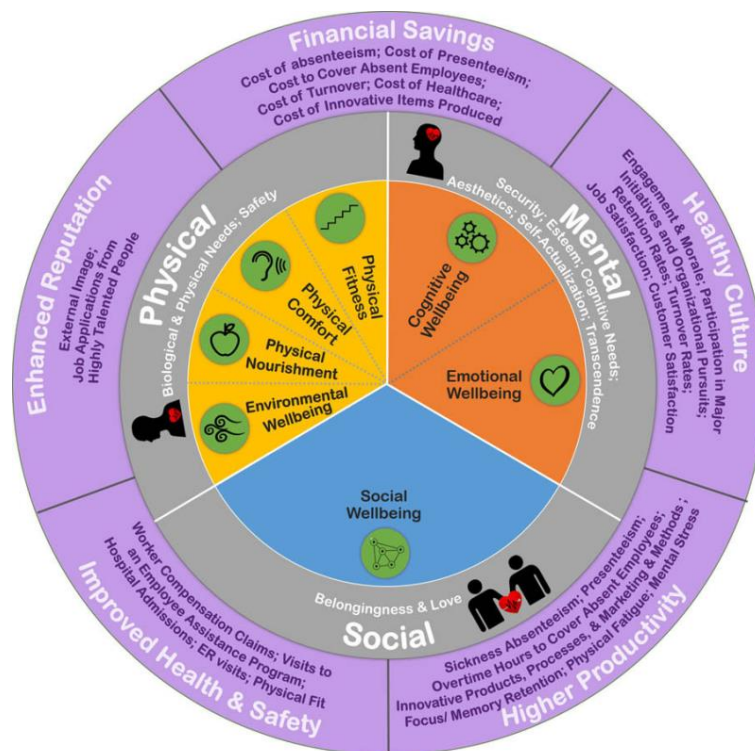
of Well-being assistance programs, Social Corporate Responsibility with Health prevention of IT employees. Bulgarian Association of Geomedicine and Geotherapy created an anti-stress program “Health from the Nature” since 2006 in Bulgaria for different target groups [4, 5]. Promoting Wellness and Well-being culture, we obtain new level of Maslow’s pyramid- Self-actualization needs, connecting people towards to their health prevention, based on outdoor activity.

Digital technology manages our smart homes. The new kind of attractive tourism with VR and AR tools helps us to visit museums, gallery and concerts, to share historical ancient time, but after COVID-19, we realized the power of green environment and breathing fresh mountain air. We evaluated the positive effect of outdoor physical activity and touch with Nature not only for physical health. Especially mental well-being of IT staff is the focus of many well-developed companies. IBM is one of the first IT companies which developed a Well- Being Management System in 1999. The core of Well-being program is proactive planning and improving of health and well-being of IT employee [9]. Actually the company is managing employee’s choice for health prevention, offerings Well-being activity which impact on physical, mental, financial and social status of staff family.

Hewlett Packard Entreprise realized the role of wellness culture and promoted „The Global Wellness Challenge” which is a marque programme for maintenance of fit and healthy life style of IT employees’ [11].

PROWELL presented a comprehensive workplace model /fig. 4/ which corresponds to Well-being tourism essence. Both are aimed at maintaining the well-being of employee. Self-actualization needs- realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences. A desire “to become everything one is capable of becoming”.

Figure 4. Comprehensive Workplace Model: PROWELL©



Source: <https://www.innovativeworkplaceinstitute.org/workplace-wellbeing-prowell.php>

Referring to Northern Well-being Tourism, which is a trademark of the Scandinavian countries for a combined tourism product with four main areas: rural tourism, ecotourism, mountain tourism and horseback riding, the versatility of the product could be outlined. The tourism product itself was created within the "ProWell" project, jointly by professionals from Latvia, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Lithuania. The focus of the offered product is the well-being, which is achieved among beautiful and clean nature, mild climate with four separate seasons, which allow various outdoor activities. The Baltic States offer saunas and SPA treatments using natural materials. By adding healthy, seasonal and high quality food, psycho-emotional comfort for the client is achieved. Special emphasis is on medical herbal teas, outdoor therapy, herbal massages, face and body masks made of natural materials, etc. [13].

The core of Bulgarian's Well-being tourism product is to improve quality of life and to assist for public health prevention. Well-being tourism can change the IT employee's health culture and develop a very new environment sensitivity. The created well-being trials or destinations offer clients a suitable place for their mental and psycho-emotional comfort. Well-being products are very attractive and special approach for achieving a balance between company goals and employee. We can create a human-centered work place incl. Hybrid workplace. Today the hybrid model of work covers 97 percent of those employed in HCL Technologies, Indian IT services multinational. [6]. The monotonous way of life and work puts IT employees in limited spaces without physical activity. But the IT companies adapted to dynamic reality very fast and correct and offer adequate health care and prevention of staff and their family. Trying to present a comprehensive analysis about connection between Well-being tourism and Well-being workplace dimensions, we found three different levels of relations - physical, mental and social, based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs: Biological & Physiological Needs; Safety Needs; Belongingness & Love Needs; Esteem Needs; Cognitive Needs; Aesthetic Needs; Self-Actualization; and Self-Transcendence [2].

Well-being tourism has the ability to assist in healthcare cost control efforts. It promotes the development of a Wellness and health culture and motivates the personal responsibility of the employee. This specialized tourism has a particularly important role in creating a family Wellness culture and an adequate attitude to quality of life. It provides a dynamic connection between employer and employee, as well as a bridge between generations of users of smart technologies. One more specific contribution is in a moment of social isolation, the nature of the offered tourist services allow for active relaxation in a natural environment without health risk for the participants and coaches. Well-being tourism has an important social role today. It is determined by participants' motivation, choice, expectations and satisfaction of their experience.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

The Corporate social responsibility and Workplace Health Promotion is a self-regulating business model that helps a company to be socially significant. The famous IT companies invest in innovative Wellness programs and motivate IT employees to maintain good health

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technologies. One more specific contribution is in a moment of social isolation, the nature of the offered tourist services allow for active relaxation in a natural environment without health risk for the participants and life-coaches. Comparing the natural touristic resources in Bulgaria with the resources for recreation of Alpine Wellness and Nordic Well-being, we can promote the use of Well-being tourism for health prevention especially for employee of IT sector [15]. Obviously, “Employee happiness is crucial for retaining good talent as well as having a motivated workforce that delivers great results and continuously innovates”[13] .

Well-being tourism does not have to be costly. It is very simple to offer clever recreation in fresh nature and healthy home-made food. [4, 5]. Well-being tourism implies taken into account environmental, social and economic impacts on human health

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