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**CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF MEDICAL TOURISM
IN THE WORLD AND THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

The subject of this paper is an analysis of medical tourism, in order to draw attention to contemporary trends and the factors that influence its development. We have tried to define the concept of medical tourism, the directions of movement of patients – tourists and look at the factors that influence decision-making in the choice of a particular destination. The results of this research show that the number of medical tourists is increasing. The analysis of the potential that Serbia has in the field of medical tourism, we have concluded that large cities have the largest

private hospital complex. Even though the interest of patients from abroad are great, so far reference hospitals do not participate in organized medical tourism. Organized and synchronized performance of travel agencies and medical institutions, as well as adequate measures of the Government of Serbia would help Serbia to become a centre of medical tourism in Southeast Europe.

Key words: medical tourism, patient, competitiveness

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Introduction

Provision of medical services is now increasingly influenced by global trends in order to create a global patient, staff and services. Health care at the national level in recent years has become a serious problem. The high price level, the long wait for the execution of specific interventions made the patient in this area acts as a finicky market-oriented consumer. In order to solve their health problems, patients become creators of an entirely new markets and new services. Consumption in the sphere of health care creates an unexpected connection, the idea that consumers are quickly recognized and accepted. Developing countries realizing the importance of a new, creative thinking and are the leading centres of medical tourism. Medical tourism is developing rapidly in recent years, and its development influences the development of the national health system.

Defining the concept of medical tourism

Medical tourism is a collection of different services that can be linked to the provision of treatment services to foreign tourists or patients sent by local health agencies through intergovernmental agreements on the exchange of patients, but they can not be considered as medical tourism. Medical tourism, highlight by Carrera and Bridges (2006, p. 447) includes tourists who voluntarily choose to pay for certain health services in countries outside the EU, although EU has secured health care. Contribution in defining the concept is given by Crozier and Baylis (2010) so medical tourism is perceived as an international medical travel, where patients cross national borders in order to purchase medical goods and services. Doctors in their home countries, as

the author's state, have the opportunity to inform patients about the potential for their recovery in accordance with ethical and moral principles. Jones and Keith (2006) introduce a concept of "medical outsourcing". They indicate the legal and political constraints faced by medical patients, the need to adapt treatment protocol in an efficient and ethical system. Doctors, lawyers and politicians are trying to shape the field of medical tourism in line with trends in modern medicine.

Status and trends of medical tourism in the world

Medical tourism market in the world is recognized as a highly lucrative and growing form of tourism that entails a number of paradigms. According to the study of health care consumers the United States (Deloitte, 2009), which referred to specific questions about medical tourism, 40% of respondents showed interest in treatment abroad if their doctor recommends it or if the cost of treatment is lower by 50%. Studies show that more and more Europeans are travelling for surgery intervention, and in the last five years travelling for surgery intervention is on the rise by 24%. And when you take into account the information that in Europe about 80 million people with disabilities or special needs together with followers is around 133 million people, then we see a huge potential of affordable medical tourism. Based on the research of literature and practice we have been observed following trends and characteristics.

Estimated market growth of these services from 20 to 25% per year due to the aging of the world population, the value of medical tourism market 2011 totalled over \$ 120 billion, a 5% of all

ISSN 2222-9345**Founder**

FSBEI HPE
«Stavropol
State
Agrarian University»

№ 1(13)
Supplement,
2014

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economy – as a take-off element for the „Northern Coast of the Danube Bend”. Concurring with the opinion of the local actors, to revitalize the local economy successful and sustainable operation, the development of production and marketing of the local products, the development of local enterprises, and the reshaping of the population’s and entrepreneurs’ approaches is needed.

Conclusion

Through the results of analyses, calculations and surveys, I established that in the micro-region of the „Northern Coast of the Danube Bend” a significant part of the goals and tools of local economic development (e.g.: tourism) have potential chance

for materialisation, and its sustainable operation considering the economic, social and environmental endowments of the area. Therefore, a successful local economic development program can be carried out by the optimal utilization of tourism potential.

The new methodology, applied in the selected micro-region, is considered to be effective judging by my knowledge of the place and the researches carried out throughout the years. The devised indices can clearly show the role of space and the subjective structure of the local economy, furthermore, its application is advised despite territorial differences.

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- Subjective index of local products (HTI)
- Subjective index of the local economy (HGI) (Table 1)



Source: based on own research result, 2013.

Figure 1 – The summarized system of created indices

Results

It became clear from the tourism infrastructure potential analysis that the attraction scope of Pest County is very wide in the country. To investigate this we chose a smaller area, a micro-region, which lies between the agglomeration ring and a highly underdeveloped region. During our investigation aimed to analyse the economic potential of the area, the indices clearly showed the economic structure, success and development level of the Northern Coast of the Danube Bend.

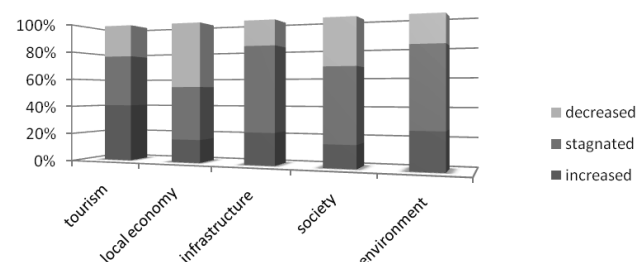
The results:

- according to the opinions of the local actors, the development process is halted currently (HFSI=49%)
- local economic development tools supported by the locals could be rather successful (HGSI=64%)
- implementations aiming to revitalize the economy of the micro-region would be needed and would be successful (HGCI=78%)
- currently, the selling and buying frequency of local products and services is not developed well (HTGI értéke 39%)
- the quality of local products is above average (HTMI=72%)
- factors influencing the consumption of local products and services affect the consumer habits in the micro-region greatly (HBTI=65%)
- in the investigated area the support of marketing activity is above average (MTSI=71%)
- in the micro-region of the „Northern Coast of the Danube Bend”, according to the opinion of the local actors, the economic development activity of the settlements can bring success (HGFI=68%)
- on the „Northern Coast of the Danube Bend” the consumption potential of local services and goods is above average (HTI=62,3%)

- the potential level of the local economy of the „Northern Coast of the Danube Bend” is currently above average (HGI=65,4%).

It can be established by the statistical and subjective parts of the research that – because of the missing natural resources from the „Northern Coast of the Danube Bend” – the basic resources and also the main factors to form its image are the Danube, the landscape and the tourism. According to the opinion of the local actors, the basic determinant of the area is the Danube, which is a resource, a basis and opportunity for tourism, common image and supports the sense of belonging. Also, they consider the Brzs ny, the arable lands and the forests as local resources as well. That is why the protection of the environment is important in the area, because the sustainable utilization of resources and the improvement of quality can only be carried out this way.

Development does not only have a quantitative side, but also a qualitative one, which cannot be established only from the statistical data. Thus in the questionnaire the representatives of all the spheres were asked to give grades to the five investigated dimensions (classes: decreased, stagnated, increased, Figure 2.). Tourism was highlighted from the economy, because it is the most characteristic economic branch of the area, furthermore, because it provides the largest market for local products through the tourists, beside the local inhabitants. It can be clearly observed on Figure 2. that according to the respondents, in the micro-region of the „Northern Coast of the Danube Bend”, the development of infrastructure, the society and the environment stagnated. Local economy received the worst grade, which shows obvious decrease. This is understandable, because such jobs have decreased which produced local products, and people responded that they do not know much about local economy and local products. This is because the marketing of these products is not efficient. The best grade was given to the tourism. 39% of the respondents said that its importance had increased.



Source: own edition based on own research, 2013.

Figure 2 – The improvement of quality of the investigated five dimensions

The distribution of the respondents showed that, despite the local actors see that the local economy decreases, a significant part of them sees the tourism – which is a part of the local

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