

MEDICAL TOURISM:  
THE ANALYSIS OF POSITIVE ASPECTS OF ESTABLISHING MEDICAL TOURISM  
SECTOR IN LITHUANIA

By  
Gabija Baukute

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Supervisor: Professor Andrew Cartwright

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## Abstract

Even though Lithuania has strong assets and facilities to increase the medical tourism, the country is still not known as the medical tourism destination. This thesis is focusing on the medical tourism as the separate national sector. Since the medical tourism is quite a new phenomenon that attracted academic interest just in the 1990s thus there is not much research done on this topic and on the possible implications on the country that is known as the medical tourism destinations. This paper is aiming to analyse the impacts of having medical tourism as the strong and perspective sector in Lithuania. In order to draw conclusions, empirical data was gathered on the medical tourism as the separate part of the tourism and as the part of international business strategy. Following that, the case study of Lithuania and its current assets was used to analyse possibilities on how to promote and increase the interest of medical tourism. Given the findings and analysis, some recommendations of how to increase the interest in Lithuania as the medical tourism country is provided.

## Introduction

Medical costs are very high in developed and especially Western countries. Due to the high costs and high demand in their home countries, people choose to travel abroad in order to receive medical treatment, fostering medical tourism. Medical tourism as such is a quite new phenomenon and usually just developing countries in Asia and post communist countries are the destinations for people that are seeking for medical or wellness treatments. Usually the medical tourism destinations are the low income countries with developed medical technologies and treatments. Medical tourism is becoming more popular form of tourism.

The most common medical services offered to customers from developed countries usually consist of dental care, cosmetic surgeries and treatments of illness (Lee, Ch., Spisto, M, 2007). In one of the possible definitions, medical tourism is defined as “the organized travel outside one's natural healthcare jurisdiction for the enhancement or restoration of the individual's health through medical intervention” (Carrera, P. M; Bridges, J. FP, 2006). Medical and health tourism can be distinguished into separate categories (Lee et al, 2007). The first is the serious medical tourism that consists of treatments of illnesses, cosmetic surgeries, dental tourism, reproduction (fertility). The second category is considered to be less medical and more focused on wellness tourism. This includes spas, alternative therapies, fitness tourism etc.

At the moment, Hungary is the leader in medical tourism in Europe. Hungary is the top destination for the medical tourism with the special knowledge and worldwide recognition of the dental tourism. Even though dental tourism is very important in the country, Hungary is also very well known as a destination for medical spas. As much as 80% of the country is rich with medical and hot spring waters, meaning that those areas are suitable for the medical spa

treatments. There are around 400 establishments in Hungary that contains the thermal, spring water and spas. In 2007 seventeen baths were identified as the example of international success. Additionally, Hungary has 13 establishments that are qualified as 'health destinations.

Even though Lithuania has basis for medical tourism, the country is just starting to attract tourists for this purposes. Lithuania's geographic location allows attracting customers from Scandinavian countries, Western Europe and Russia. Despite that, very few foreigners are coming due to available medical treatment. Even though there are possibilities for medical tourism in the country, Lithuania is still not recognized as one of the destinations in world's medical tourism map, nor even in Europe's map. Lithuania is missing out on the potential area to boost economy that other countries like Hungary have already exploited. For example the turnover received from the spa and medical waters in Hungary was around 147 million Euros in 2009 (Puczko, 2011). While in Lithuania the estimated revenues gained from medical spas in 2010 were around 206 million Litas (around 59 million Euros) (Kazlauskiene, 2012).

At the moment Lithuania has only 22 establishments that are focusing on the medical spa treatments (Kazlauskiene, 2012). High quality medical service is present in the country but foreigners are not really using this ability. According to the 2012 statistics, of all the guests in the heath establishments just 24% were foreigners (Kazlauskiene, 2012). In order to change this situation, the government created a plan to establish and promote medical tourism in years 2011-2020 but nothing much has been done. Despite this promotion, the lack of research is not going to help to implement the government plan. Without the research, policy recommendations and implications, this plan is not going to work.

However, since medical tourism is very recent phenomena, not much research has been done on the whole topic. Most of the existing literature focuses on the tourism as a whole in the rural areas with little reference to separate classifications. Furthermore, most of the literature is based on the journals and publications on various internet sources. In addition, Lithuania is not very much explored country from the research point of view. Especially not much attention is given to the emerging medical tourism in this country. Most of the literature for this topic is based on separate internet sites but not academic literature.

Thus this thesis will fill in the gap and contribute for the future research. It will examine the question about the importance of newly emerging form of tourism – medical tourism with the specific attention to the promotion of it. The focus will particularly be on this type of tourism in rural and/or non urban areas in Lithuania. Why, despite the excellent facilities does Lithuania not realize its potential in medical and healthcare tourism? What policy strategies need to be implemented to make the change in this specific niche market?

The methodology part of this thesis will rely on secondary data and qualitative research methods. Medical destinations, medical tourism as the international business and challenges will be discussed. Following that, the case study of Lithuania will be used to see the differences and various aspects of medical tourism in different countries. The analysis of the current situation in Lithuania will provide the strong and weak assets in the country and will help to further analyze the possibilities on how to become the medical tourism destination.

Medical tourism is important in promoting country, attracting new investors and boosting countries tourism life. How medical tourism should be promoted in the light of experience in different countries? The main idea of this paper is to see how medical tourism would benefit

Lithuania, especially country's non urban area and why this type of tourism is still not widely recognized. Lithuania has a number of spas and natural resources that might be turned into medical tourism sector.

The structure of the study is as the following. The first chapter of the paper will be dedicated to the literature review on medical and health tourism. The following chapter will contain academic literature on this topic, separate case studies and will create the medical tourism image as such. After that, the case study of Lithuania will be examined with the existing assets and current situation in regards of medical tourism. After the review of medical tourism destinations, findings and analysis will be presented. The analysis part will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of Lithuania as the medical tourism destination. The analysis will help to draw the recommendation and finally, conclusions will be presented.

## Chapter 1 – Medical Tourism in the Broader Context

This chapter will present the literature gathered on the medical tourism topic. Medical tourism will be explained in details including the medical tourism destinations, medical tourism as the international business and the challenges that occur when the country wants to become the well known medical tourism destination and attract patients from around the world.

It is quite difficult to define medical tourism – there is no one definition that would be widely recognized and used. However, one of the available definitions state that “medical tourism’ is a term used to refer to a travel activity that involves a medical procedure or to activities that promote the wellbeing of the tourist” (Lee et al, 2007: 1). In other words, it is the travelling due to the medical reasons. Other authors such as Lunt and Carrera suggest different definitions – “organised travel outside one’s natural health care jurisdiction for the enhancement or restoration of the individual’s health through medical intervention” (Lunt et al, 2010: 28). This definition refers not just to the medical tourism as such but also at the medical tourists. In this case it defines that the tourists and the medical tourism industry is not static but rather linked to the mobility. As expressed by Horowitz (2007), medical tourism is very much driven by the forces such as economy, political and social life.

Western Europeans started to get involved in medical tourism in the 1980s (Connell, 2011). And just decade later, medical tourism is still the growing phenomenon that attracted the academic interest from the tourism field just in the 1990s (Page, 2009: 149). Medical tourism became demanded when medical costs and unapproachable busyness of queues became too much of a problem in home countries in Western world. Due to the long queues and high prices medical tourism is becoming an international business thus it needs clear policies how to

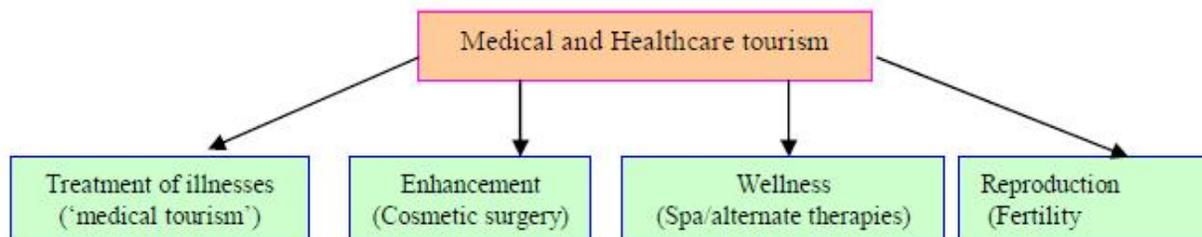
maintain the demand. By the year 2012 around 50 countries indicated that the medical tourism is one of the most important sectors in their industries (Todd, 2012: 4).

People that are going to foreign countries are put into two different categories according to the length of their visit. People who are staying in the foreign country for more than 24 hours are called tourists and those who stay less than 24 hours are called visitors. In this case, the thesis will rely on tourists who spend more than 24 hours and that are using accommodation and other available facilities. As stated by MacReady in the 2007 World Report, medical tourists are usually classified as 50 years or older people that are seeking medical treatment and procedure. Most of these tourists are coming from wealthier countries and regions such as Western Europe, North America and wealthier Middle East countries (Connell, 2006: 1096).

According to the Lunt and Carrera (2010) medical tourism has different categories according to the region. In Europe there are two categories of medical tourists. The first category is composed from the European citizens that are using their rights to have free medical treatments in other European Union country. The cost of the medical treatments such as surgeries is reimbursed. The European citizen has a right to receive medical treatment for free in other European country. This specific right was implemented by the European Court of Justice after the successful private cases related to the healthcare and consumption of it. European medical tourists belonging to the second classification are paying for medical services themselves. This category is using the light form of medical tourism such as dental, spas, cosmetic surgeries etc.

Just as the travelers, medical tourism can be distinguished and divided into different categories and subcategories. The figure below shows how medical and healthcare tourism can be divided according to the Lee and other authors (2007).

Figure 1: Components and Healthcare Tourism



Source: Lee et al, 2007: 1

Medical and Healthcare tourism is divided according to the interest of tourism, participation, the length and seriousness of the medical treatment. From the table above it can be seen four categories of the medical and healthcare tourism – treatment of illness, enhancement that contains cosmetic surgery and dental treatment, wellness tourism that is further divided into spas and the last category is the reproduction tourism.

As defined by Lee (2007: 2) “the ‘wellness’ segment of medical and healthcare tourism promotes healthier lifestyles”. This category is considered to be not that serious and does not involve serious medical treatment. It is more like relaxation and wellness. This subcategory can be further divided into products as the treatment in spas, thermal and water treatments, acupuncture, aromatherapy, beauty care, facials, exercise and diet, herbal healing, homeopathy, massage and yoga.

Medical tourism is one of the tourism forms that involves foreigners staying in the destination, using provided accommodation and using other touristic facilities. Thus medical tourists are fostering the medical tourism destination country to improve accommodation, hotels and health establishments. On the other hand, tourists prefer to come to the destination where the infrastructure is already in the place. It becomes like a vicious circle. Even though most of the

time “medical tourism relies upon a developed infrastructure” (Lee et al, 2007: 4). Furthermore, most of the medical tourists stay much longer in the country than ordinary tourists. It means that this kind of travelers will demand better accommodation and better service and at the same time will most likely spend more money. Additionally, since it is medical tourism, most of the tourists come with the company for the time of medical treatment.

The decision to use medical treatment abroad thus become a medical tourism proponent depends on pull and push factors. Push factors are those that are making patients to go abroad in order to seek certain medical treatments. The first push factor is the too long waiting queues in order to receive the treatment. High price is the other well known push factor. High prices at the home country increase the need to search for medical treatments elsewhere. Authors such as Crooks and Kingsbury (2010) named the lack of insurance as the third major push factor. People look for the medical treatment abroad if they do not have insurance at all or if insurance does not cover specific treatment in the home country that the patient is seeking for.

Pull factors are considered to be those that attract patients to go to medical tourism destination. These are the competitive advantages that medical tourism countries have over the home countries. Quality of the services abroad is the best known pull factor. It is not just the most known factor but also the most important one. Good quality ensures constant tourist flows to the medical tourism countries. According to authors Crooks and Kingsbury (2010) language is another very important pull factor. Language is the way of communication and for customers it is important that they will be understood by the staff in foreign health establishments. The stability of the destination is another pull factor. In this case the stability is understood in regards of political life, culture and traditions. The last important pull factor indicated by same authors is the vacation aspect. The destination country should be interesting to see from the touristic not

just medical point of view. Once people go to the country, they would like to explore it as well. So if the country has something tourism interesting to offer, people are more willing to choose such country over another.

The difference in prices and shorter queues abroad are not the only driving forces to search for different destinations that offer medical services. Some patients are looking towards other countries because those countries have alternatives that home countries cannot offer. Some medical interventions are banned in the origin country while the foreign countries can suggest the same treatment. For example the United Kingdom is not allowing doing the stomach stapling for the patients younger than 18 years old. In most of the Asian medical tourism destinations this operation would not be a problem and younger patients are welcomed. Same is with the abortions. While abortions are banned in some countries it is allowed to do them in other destinations. Another extreme example of such travelling due to the restrictions and availabilities is the provision of euthanasia. According to Connell (2006) there is an increase in the number of patients going to Switzerland that are seeking for this specific procedure.

## 2.1. Medical Tourism Destinations

Main destination for medical tourism is based in the Asia region. Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore are the leading countries in the region and in the whole world. India also falls under the category of most visited destinations. From the South America Brazil and Costa Rica and from the Central America Cuba and Mexico are the destinations to seek medical treatment (Lunt et al, 2010). Dubai is the most popular destination in the Middle East. Europe is famous for medical tourism in Scandinavia, Southern and Central Europe. Even though there is a wide variety of the medical tourism destinations, according to the Connell (2006) tourists from Europe prefer to use medical services that are based in India, Thailand and Malaysia. More and more people go to other countries to receive medical treatment. For example in data provided by Connell (2006), around 50 thousand UK citizens went abroad to the medical tourism destinations in 2003.

Thailand has been known as the medical tourism destination since the 1970s and now it is famous by specialization in the cosmetic surgery. This country is mainly focusing on the tourists from other Asian countries such as Taiwan, China and Japan. Most of the patients are coming from Japan due to the available Japanese staff in medical establishments (Connell, 2006: 1096). Even though the same author expressed the doubts about the reliability of the data in the Asian countries, Thailand presented itself as the top medical tourism destination that receives the most of the medical tourists flows.

Malaysia joined Thailand just in the 1998 and this was related to the economic crisis in the Asia. Singapore entered the medical tourism market and started to promote available services because it wanted to compete with Malaysia and Thailand. Differently than Thailand, Malaysia is

focusing on the tourists from the Middle East. This focus is due to the Islamic heritage (Connell, 2996: 1096)

Singapore was very competitive in this market by setting up the prices much lower than in other Asian destinations but with the same quality. This allowed Singapore to boost the number of medical tourists rather quickly. The country was also very good in the marketing medical tourism. Medical tourism was highly promoted in the destinations where international tourists are seen like airports. Hungary is the other country that took an advantage of promoting medical tourism, specifically dental care, in the airports. The stands with perfect smiles are greeting to come to Hungary for the dental treatment and visit the country at the same time. In 2003 Singapore received the 800 thousand medical tourists with the majority coming from Japan (Connell, 2996: 1096). Despite Singapore presented this data, the situation with its reliability is the same as with the data about Thailand patients.

The other destination known for medical tourism in Asia is India. India is still seen as the underdeveloped country compared to the others in the same region but medical tourism is advanced in this country. Differently from the countries mentioned above, India has a wider range of medical and healthcare services. “India is usually regarded as the contemporary global centre for medical tourism”, (Connell, 2996: 1095). Interestingly and differently from other countries, India is not focusing on tourists coming from particular countries or regions. Most of the medical tourists coming to India are the Indian Diaspora. The majority of them are coming from the United Kingdom and the United States. The medical tourism sector in India is growing by 25% each year (Connell, 2996: 1095). This is partly due to the good marketing campaign – the annual Medical Tourism Exposition.

## 2.2. International Business Industry

According to the data presented in 2007, medical tourism then was an international business industry worth 60 billion US dollars and it was growing by 20% every year (MacReady World Report, 2007: 1849). Furthermore, by the year of 2006, this sector was sustained by 617 million people (Bridges et al, 2006). Since medical tourism has been becoming more popular recent years, it is becoming a part not just of a tourism industry but of the whole business market. Moreover, this business is international one since it involves people traveling from one country to another. In order for this business to be successful and for a country to be known as medical tourism destination marketing plays very important role. “Marketing naturally stresses the pleasures of the destinations” (Connell, 2006: 1098) which is very important for any tourism destination but extremely important for medical tourism. This is because usually medical tourists are seeking tranquility and pleasure after certain procedures and also because this type of tourist mostly are coming with other people that are not patients. So in this case the destination has to have additional tourism facilities.

Internet was very important in the growth of international medical tourism. Also, “the emergence of new companies that are not health specialists, but brokers between international patients and hospital networks” (Connell, 2006: 1094) played very important role in promoting medical tourism and attracting patients from wealthier countries. The improvement of the governmental work in improving health care system is very important as well. The implementation of good health care system boosts the trust of foreigners thus they are more likely to come and use available medical treatment. Furthermore, the adoption of the new technologies is important as well.

Due to the existing gaps in medical public medical services, a lot of private medical and health establishments have been opened. Most of the medical tourism is linked to the later establishments – private sector. The emergence of private sector in medical tourism can be evaluated from the positive perspective. As noted by Connell (2006) the emergence of private sector increased the possibilities for the employment thus raising the economic benefit. Furthermore, this can help to decrease the brain drain and prevent qualified medicals to leave. This is very important in developing countries where qualified medics migrate to other countries in order to find an employment. So the expansion of medical tourism services and sectors are leading to the opposite action of brain drain and are attracting doctors to come from other countries and to stay the existing ones.

The other economic effectiveness is related to the price. It is not the surprise that most of the time medical tourism is driven by the price and its difference between home country and medical tourism destination. Usually the difference between prices is the double or even more. The following comparison in prices was presented by Connell in 2006. So for example the heart surgery might cost 70 thousand US dollar in the United Kingdom and 150 thousand US dollar in the United States while the same surgery would cost between 3000 and 10,000 US dollar in India. The difference in prices is significant (Connell, 2006: 1096).

The emergency and the waiting time play another important role next to the price indicator. For example in the United Kingdom the waiting for a non major surgery can last up to one year or even more while in India the surgery can be done within one week. (Connell, 2006: 1096).

### 2.3. Challenges in Promoting Medical Tourism

Since medical tourism destinations are the less developed countries or still developing ones, it might be difficult to attract foreigners. Especially those that are used to the wealth and do not trust in medical services provided by other countries. Most of the times it is hard to convince potential medical tourists that the quality of the services provided in the less developed countries are at the same level as in the home country or even higher level. It is important to ensure the level of quality of the medical service whether that is a knee surgery, plastic surgery or just a massage. Also the staff should be qualified as doctors and nurses. It is important to ensure the safety and reliability of the service.

All developing countries are facing more or less the same challenges. The number of countries already managed to prove their reliability and got into the map of medical tourism destinations while other countries are still struggling to achieve this goal. India was one of the countries that struggled to prove that the health care system is good enough to receive foreigners for the medical treatments. In other countries India has been viewed as inappropriate and not developed (Connell, 2996: 1094). Now India has the name of the medical tourism destinations.

Countries that are seeking to be known as the medical tourism destination are facing the number of challenges and difficulties that need to be overcome. There should be the connection and communication with the healthcare and tourism sectors. Those sectors should work together in order to create a quality environment for fostering medical tourism. Basic infrastructure should be in place like road connections, hotels, catering and of course healthcare facilities. Medical tourism cannot exist without qualified doctors, nurses and other staff that is related to medicine, healthcare, wellness and tourism. The destination must have this manpower. The other

problem that medical tourists face is the lack of doctors involvement and care after the procedure is made. Since the patients do not spend much time in the health establishments after procedures in case of complications or other issues patients cannot go back and the home medicals are then responsible. This issue is also related to the lack of laws that would secure the rights of patients in case of complications or side effects. Finally, as pointed out by Acharyulu (2011) country that is seeking to become a medical tourism destination start to focus just on tourists forgetting the local needs for medical treatment.

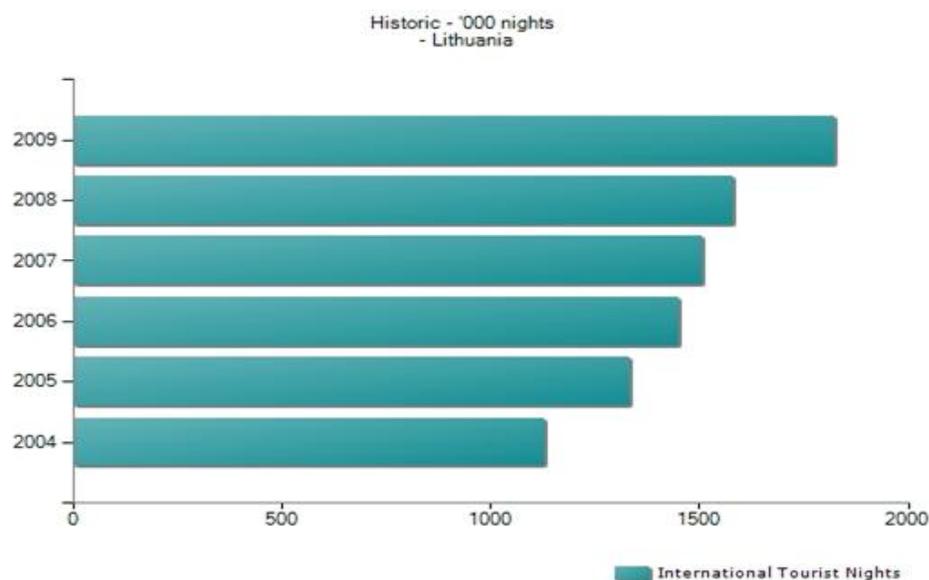
## Chapter 2 – Case Study of Lithuania

Lithuania regained its independence from the Soviet Union in the 1990s. It was a long road and the country struggled throughout the wish to be free. Lithuanian, together with the Estonia and Latvia that had similar fate was not known for the simple people in foreign countries nor these countries had received enough attention from the academic perspective (Alanen, 2004: 1). Lithuania gained such wanted worldwide attention in 2004 when the country joined the European Union and was accepted to NATO. Even though the country received the attention and the interest grew within the academic background, as mentioned by Alanen (2004) “even in post socialist research there is still a tendency to slot them (*Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia*) somewhere in the ‘grey zone’, in between Central Europe and NIC countries, and indeed lump them (*Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia*) together under one heading” (Alanen, 2004: 1).

### 2.1. The Overview of Tourism in Lithuania

Lithuanian tourism industry has expanded rapidly, especially since the country became a member of European Union in 2004. Since the accession to the EU, the country was brought into a worldwide view and received wide attention. Tourism industry was significantly growing from 2000 till now even despite the global economic crisis that recently occurred. Vilnius faced additional tourist flow in 2009 because it was the year when Vilnius became the European Capital of Culture. This growth is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 2: International Tourist Nights Spent in Lithuania during 2004-2009



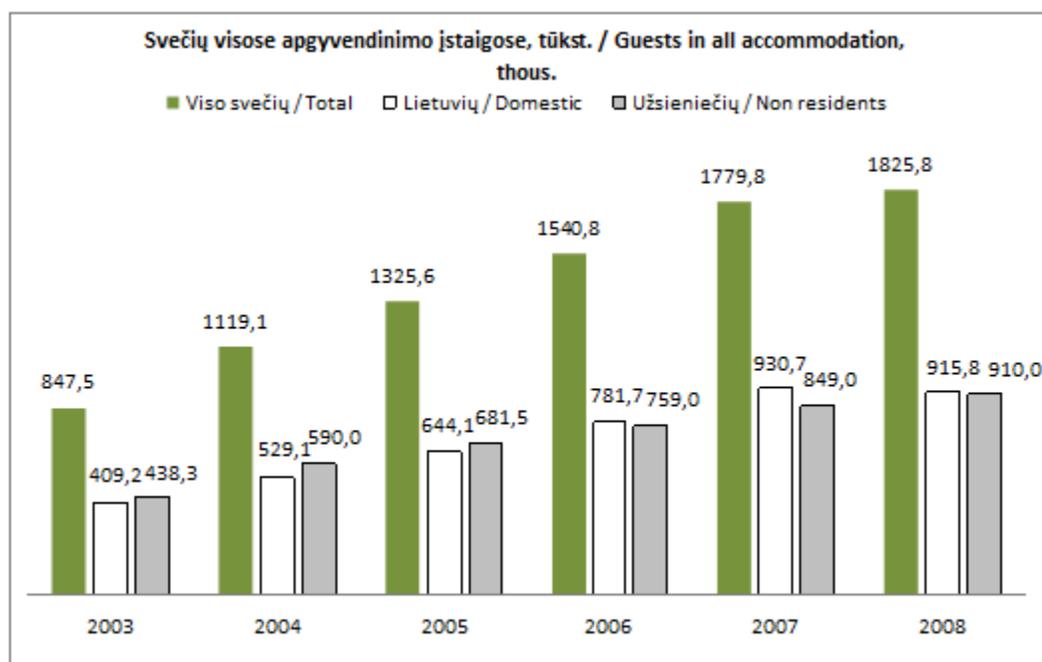
Source: [www.euromonitor.com](http://www.euromonitor.com)

According to Vilnius City Municipal Government Tourism and Promotion Division (2009) during the first half year of 2009, the biggest flow of tourists to Vilnius accommodation was in June. Out of all guests 86.3% were foreigners.

Most of the guests are coming from neighboring countries. Poland, Germany, Russia, Latvia, Belarus, Estonia and Finland are the top countries according to the number of guests coming to visit Lithuania. In 2008 Polish tourists constituted 17,2% of the whole foreign market share following by 14,3% of Germans (State Department of Tourism, 2009).

Figure 2 shows the changes of the number of guests in all accommodations between the years 2004 and 2008. This table presents total numbers and also divides domestic and foreign guests.

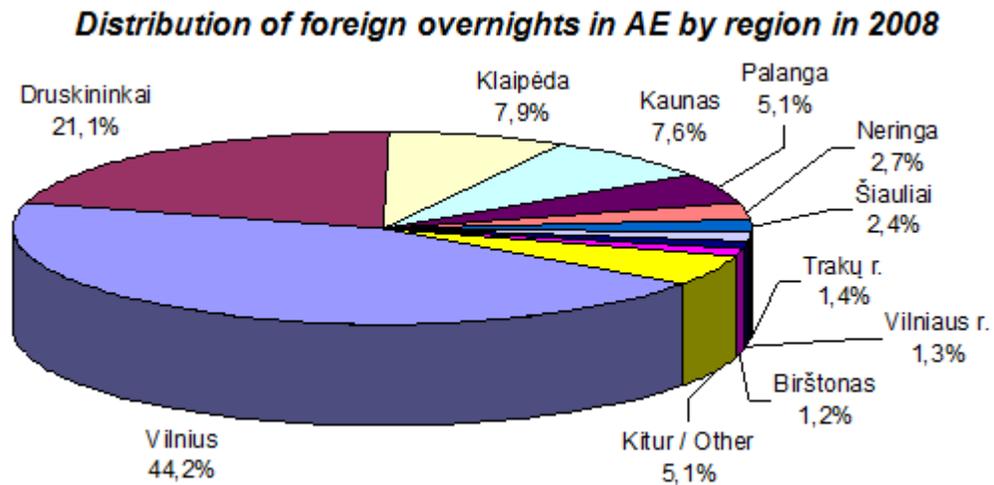
Figure 3: Number of guests in accommodation establishments, thousands in 2004-2008.



Source: State Department of Tourism, 2009

This table shows that the guest number was constantly growing every year since 2004. Interestingly, the growth of foreigners was higher than domestic guests till 2006. The number between domestic and foreign tourists was nearly equal in 2008. Looking at this table the overall positive growth of tourists can be seen.

Figure 4: Distribution of Domestic Overnights in 2008



Source: State Department of Tourism, 2009

The pie chart above represents the distribution of foreign tourists nights that are spent according to the regions and different cities. As it can be seen the capital Vilnius remains the most popular place of visiting. Following this city, the second most visited place is Druskininkai which is the non urban area in the south of Lithuania and that is well known for the number of cultural attractions as well as the place for medical tourism, more specifically spa treatments. This destinations constitutes 21,1% of the distribution. Interestingly, another region known for spa's – Birstonas – is not famous among foreigners at all. According to this pie chart Birstonas is the last of the most visited places and contributes just 1.2%.

## 2.2. Medical Tourism in Lithuania

Lithuania is focusing more on light form of medical tourism – medical spas, rehabilitations, mud and mineral water treatments. During the time when the country was under the Soviet Union oppression, most of the tourists were coming from other republics in the Union.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lithuania's tourism sector suffered dramatically. There was no exception to the health resorts. All resorts could no longer call themselves as the resorts – they lost the status (Baranauskas et al, 2011). It was very difficult time for the non urban cities that was living just out of the medical tourists. After the decade of the independence better time came to the Lithuanian resorts. In 2001 the Parliament approved the requests of rebuilding the resorts and four towns regained the name of the resort. Also the reform of the healthcare was taking place at the same time and this reform had effect on rebuilding resorts. At the same time towns with the statuses of the resorts were ready to improve the medical facilities and create additional tourist attractions.

It is important to understand what is meant by the 'resort' in Lithuania. According to the Lithuanian Law, resort is "the status granted by law to the residential area which can be distinguished by natural healing factors that have been scientifically studied and acknowledged to have a healing effect (mineral water, healing mud, healthy micro-climate, recreational planting, bodies of water) and which has developed a special infrastructure to use these factors for healing, wellness, tourism, and recreational purposes" (Baranauskas et al, 2011: 126).

### 2.1.1. Current Assets

Currently Lithuania has two main medical tourism destinations – Druskininkai and Birštonas. Both of these locations are more famous for the light medical tourism. They specialize in healthcare tourism like spas, treatment with mineral and spring water, mud etc. Both Druskininkai and Birštonas are situated further from the capital city in non urban areas and both are small cities. From the map below it can be seen that Druskininkai and Birštonas are situated in the south of Lithuania, by the country's biggest river Nemunas.

#### **Druskininkai**

Druskininkai is situated in the South of Lithuania, close to the border with Belarus by the biggest river in country. By 2011 around 20 000 people were living in Druskininkai. The city is the oldest known resorts destination in the country. It got the name of the health resort in 1794 (Baranauskas et al, 2011: 128).

During the Soviet times Druskininkai was well known as the health and wellness resort. During this period the city had good infrastructure not just in the medical services but also accommodation and transportation and it was modern for that time. This was due to the Soviet requirements to build infrastructure in all the Soviet Union.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Lithuania became an independent country and the popularity of Druskininkai as the health resort dropped tragically. No one was coming for the medical procedures since the majority of the clients were coming from the neighboring Soviet countries and now Lithuanians could not afford medical and health treatments. Moreover, since there were no additional revenues and no incoming tourists, no one maintained the existing infrastructure and it got old and unattractive. Also, there were no other non medical related

activities, no new needed equipments. Furthermore, Druskininkai lost the official name of the resort. This was the serious downfall for the city.

Over the years Lithuania was developing as an independent state with its own needs. People got on their feet, started to care about their health and could afford medical treatments and travelling around. The new demand for tourism was created. Druskininkai municipality decided that it is the time to make some changes and create the supply for the tourists. In 2000 the city started to rebuild and change infrastructure that was left from the Soviet times. Also new health establishments were built, accommodation, and other objects that would be attractive for visitors. After taking the important steps to create new medical centre, it was important to create the official ownership rights of medical and health establishments. Now all medical establishments belong either to the Druskininkai city municipality or are privately owned (Baranauskas et al, 2011).

After Lithuania joined the European Union in 2004 it opened up the international European borders and allowed Lithuania to receive tourists from abroad. Also the country joined the European health care system which gave the advantage and ability to receive and treat foreign patients. It also opened up an ability to receive European funds for the health sector if that is needed.

In 2011 Druskininkai had 20 spa centers that were either newly built or renovated (Baranauskas et al, 2011). The city is well known for natural mineral waters, spas, mud therapy. It is surrounded by lakes and beautiful nature.

Tourists from abroad are usually coming from the countries like Germany and Poland. It is very profitable to have tourists from abroad and also they usually set the high standards of the service but unfortunately the city is suffering from the seasonality. Most of the tourists are

coming during the warmer period of time – between middle of summer and October (Baranauskas et al, 2011: 132). Additionally, people that are visiting Druskininkai are usually middle aged people that are interested only in the medical services. Furthermore, such clients do not spend a lot of money and usually their treatments are reimbursed by health insurance. Alongside that, the city is known as a quite resort with natural landscape and not a lot of additional touristic assets.

## **Birštonas**

Birštonas is situated nearly in the middle of Lithuania, 60 km away from Kaunas, the second biggest cities in Lithuania. According to the data presented in the beginning of the year 2012 there were around 5 thousand inhabitants (Statistics Lithuania).

The first time Birštonas received the status of the resort in the middle of the 19th century. First sanatorias were build during the Soviet times. After regaining the independence the town faced same problems as Druskininkai. It lost the statue of the resort and the health establishments were nearly abandoned. After 2001 the interest in the medical sector increased and old health establishments were renovated. At the moment the town has 2 health establishments that are focusing on spas, treatments with natural mineral waters and mud.

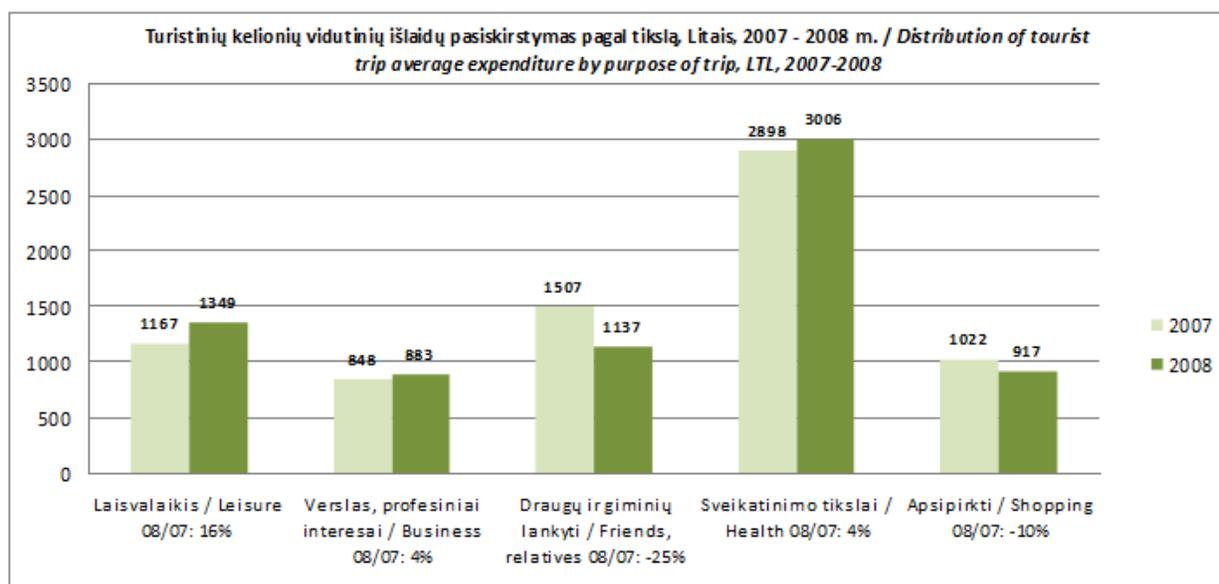
### **2.1.2. Current Situation**

According to the State Department of Tourism (2009), the number of health establishments in Lithuania declined. There were 29 such establishments in 2004 and 25 in 2009. Even though there are less health establishments, the number of guests has been increasing since

2004. For example there were 112,1 thousand guests in 2004 and 132,7 thousand guests in 2008 in sanatoria. The share of foreigners in sanatoria establishments were accordingly 17,4 % in 2004 and 19,8% in 2008. So it can be seen that not just the total number is increasing but more foreign people are coming.

Usually health and medical tourism is not distinguished as separate type of tourism but rather combined with other purposes of visiting the country like shopping and others.

Figure 5: Distribution of Tourist Trip Overnight Expenditure by Purpose of Trip 2007-2008



Source: State Department of Tourism, 2009

This table shows the distribution of the trips that foreign tourists are visiting Lithuania for. The distribution is arranged according to the type of trip or activities/main purpose of the trip. As it can be seen, visiting due to the health reasons is far more popular in comparison with leisure, business, shopping and visiting friends and relatives. The health visit grew by 4% in one year (from 2007 to 2008). Even though it is not the biggest growth in comparison with leisure tourists, the health tourism still remains of the high importance.

The State Department of Tourism (2010) also collected and indicated the data of the information sources of particular tourism attractions or purposes in the years of 2007-2009. Most of the cases medical tourists found out the information about available medical treatment from the friends and relatives, previous visits and internet.

According to the Lithuanian Tourism Statistics (2008), in 2007 there were 5,1% more visitors in health establishments than a year ago in 2006. Out of 131, 1 thousand guests the foreigners constituted 19,5 %. The number of foreign visitors grew by 8.3%. Most of the medical tourists in Lithuania are coming from the Eastern countries. According to the statistics presented by the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Lithuania, the biggest share of medical tourists is arriving from Russia. These tourists constitute 54 per cent. After Russians, Germans follow with 15%, Polish with 14% and Latvians with 13% of the tourist flow. Most of the tourists are coming to Lithuanian resort because of the available spa treatments and rehabilitations. In other words, medical tourists are more interested in low scale services that medical tourism provide.

## Chapter 3 – Findings and Analysis

Previous parts of this thesis were based on the academic literature containing information about the medical tourism as such and about medical tourism in Lithuania. This chapter will provide the analysis of medical tourism opportunities in Lithuania based on the information in the previous chapters. This chapter will help to understand possible opportunities for Lithuania if the country decided to invest and promote medical tourism as one of the most important assets in tourism industry. In that matter the SWOT analysis will be provided that will lead to the following chapter of recommendations.

### 3.1. SWOT Analysis for Medical Tourism sector in Lithuania

Figure 6: SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- number of beds</li> <li>- rich of mineral waters</li> <li>- infrastructure(highways, airports, hotels, medical centers)</li> <li>- no language barriers (communications)</li> <li>- lower prices</li> <li>- good quality of the services</li> <li>- qualified staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not a popular destination</li> <li>- limited number medical staff (emigration)</li> <li>- not much research made</li> <li>- competition with other forms of tourism</li> <li>- no cooperation with neighboring country</li> <li>- geographic location (for Western countries)</li> <li>- lack of low cost flights to other destinations other than UK</li> <li>- lack of marketing strategy (national wide)</li> <li>- lack of the image of the good quality services</li> <li>- lack of public private partnership</li> <li>- lack of information and data</li> <li>- seasonality</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- employment for tourism and medical industry</li> <li>- conference tourism for medical service</li> <li>- exploitation of geographical location</li> <li>- good image of the country</li> <li>- financial revenues</li> <li>- tourism benefits</li> <li>- cooperation with other countries</li> <li>-provision of the network of services</li> <li>-modernization of health facilities</li> <li>- attract medical workers from abroad and sustain local ones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- big and strong competition</li> <li>- lack of private participation</li> <li>-cutting budget for tourism (e.g. tourism offices)</li> <li>- possible bad image of the country</li> <li>- traveling risks</li> <li>- ethical and moral issues</li> <li>- legal issues</li> <li>- safety and risks</li> <li>- brain drain</li> <li>- worse medical service for local people</li> </ul>

## Strengths

As presented by the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Lithuania, the country has the advantage over the other countries by having the bigger number of beds at hospital. For 10 thousand inhabitants Lithuania's health establishments provide the average of 50,3 beds while in the European Union the average number is 39,5. In this case Lithuania is able to accept more medical tourists than other European countries that are competing in the size of the tourist flows.

Lithuania is rich of natural mineral waters. There are more than 15 different kinds of natural mineral water sources in the country (Lithuanian Natural Mineral Water Manufacturer's Association). There are 4 mineral waters that are produced as drinking water and other sources are used for medical treatments. Mineral water is used for treatments like the stabilization of digestion, cure for stomach illnesses, and improve the liver and bile activities. Also mineral water baths are used for the skin treatments. According to authors like Sekliuckiene and Langviniene (2009) countries that have natural mineral water have the competitive advantage because they can create the separate niche in the medical tourism sector that would specify on the spas.

Besides the natural mineral water, Lithuania has the mud sources that have the power of treatment. The mud baths are used as the treatment for the skin. Also Lithuania is known as one of the greenest countries in Europe. The weather is not that polluted like in other countries thus it is very good for breathing and lungs treatments.

Lithuania has three international airports. One is in the capital Vilnius, the other one is in the middle of Lithuania, in the second biggest city and the third one is in the west of the country, next to the seaside. The geographical location of all 3 airports is very good so the customer can

choose the more suitable one according to the location of the health establishment and the availability of the flights.

The infrastructure of the resorts and Lithuania is very modern and well organized. It is easy to access resorts by car or public transportation since there are a lot of highways and they are in the good condition. Also there is no problem of finding modern accommodation and catering places in the towns with medical establishments. At the same time, medical establishments are well equipped with the model technologies. The infrastructure is one of the key aspects of the success on attracting foreign tourists. It is extremely important for the medical tourists. Also, the existence of the good infrastructure allows exploring the country – culture, traditions, other cities and town and natural landscape.

Lithuania is a multilingual country so there are no language barriers while communicating with foreigners. Besides the native language most of Lithuanians are fluent in English and Russian. Also a lot of people are able to speak in Polish, French, German and Spanish. Recently it became popular to study Scandinavian languages, so there are citizens that are available to speak in these languages as well. The ability to provide the service in different language is very valuable asset since, as mentioned by Crooks and Kingsbury (2010) the knowledge in languages is one of the pull factors for patients to go the foreign country.

Lithuania is the country that can offer better service than some Asian countries and even European ones. Lithuania is still not well known as the medical tourism destination so it can compete with offering services for lower prices for the same quality. For example hip replacement in Lithuania costs 3252 UK pounds while in the United Kingdom patients would have to pay 8000, in Spain around 7000 and it would cost 5000 UK pounds in Thailand (Lunt et

al, 2010). Tummy tuck operation in Lithuania is cheaper as well. It costs around 1300 UK pounds and in other medical tourism destinations the prices start no lower than 1700 UK pounds. The table below shows the comparison between the medical treatment prices Germany, Czech Republic, Poland, Turkey, Israel and Lithuania. The comparison reveals that in the majority of the cases Lithuania provides the service for the best customer friendly price. It is very important and gives the competitive advantage over other medical tourism destinations.

*Figure 7: Price comparisons*

Service/Country	Germany	Czech Republic	Poland	Turkey	Israel	Lithuania
Breast augmentation	7500 \$	4312 \$	3712 \$	3586 \$	4037 \$	3224 \$
Liposuction	4499\$	3054 \$	2800 \$	2207 \$	2500 \$	1400 \$
Cataract surgery	1973 \$	921 \$	1741 \$	1673 \$	3500 \$	1232 \$
Knee arthroplasty	11375 \$	-	8348 \$	7175 \$	-	5691 \$
Knee arthroscopy	2625 \$	-	912 \$	-	3200 \$	1200 \$
Hemorrhoid Surgery	3400 \$	2888 \$	1026 \$	1925 \$	2325 \$	1200 \$
Varicose Vein Surgery	3150 \$	3588 \$	751 \$	2100 \$	-	720 \$
Dental Implantation	3000 \$	1950 \$	973 \$	970 \$	2000 \$	1202 \$

Source: <http://moc.lt/>

## **Weaknesses**

Despite the fact that Lithuania has a qualified medical staff and well equipped medical centers it is still not a popular destination for medical treatments. Especially the country does not

look very appealing to the customers from the western world. Furthermore, medical and health establishments do not have international recognition. It also leads to the lack of communication with other countries and international organizations.

The other very serious problem that is related not just to the medical tourism is the massive emigration. People are leaving the country to find better education, job, career possibilities and better life. This present migration is not giving a good image of the country and is placing Lithuania into the serious position of the brain drain. The migration had an impact on the medical and health sectors as well as in the tourism industry. Young and perspective specialists are leaving the country as well as older experienced and well qualified ones. Furthermore, instead of staying and getting education in these two fields, students are choosing to study medicine and tourism abroad with little perspective on coming back to Lithuania after the studies are over.

Medical tourism is quite a new phenomenon in the whole world and did not attract academic interested till recently. Having that in mind, research about medical tourism in Lithuania is very limited. Not much has been done in this regard.

Alongside the minimal research, there is a lack of available data about medical sector. It is difficult to find the data about medical tourism in the country. By not having such kind of data at all or not making it available to the public does not create a trustworthy picture. Before coming to the country, clients want to know as much as possible about the medical treatments, conditions of the treatments, availability of them, previous experience, the comments and reviews from previous clients, quality of the doctors etc.

Lithuania is more known as the country for weekend tourism. Most of the foreigners are coming just for few days and usually spend all their time in the capital Vilnius or visit just the seaside. Lithuania is a pass way tourism destination. Tourists usually visit three Baltic countries at once, spending just few days in each of the country.

Lithuania's geographic location is one of the weaknesses as well. The country is situated in the Eastern part of the Europe thus it is quite far from the South or Western Europe. Thus tourists from those regions usually choose different destinations to visit.

Even though there are 3 international airports in the country, there is a lack of low cost flights to other destinations other than the United Kingdom. At the same time there are not so many flights that would go directly to Lithuania. Furthermore, the national airline FlyLal went bankrupt in 2009 leaving Lithuania without its own airlines. Since there is no national airline and just few foreign based airlines provide direct flights to Lithuania, the ticket prices are usually high. The bankruptcy had a very negative effect on Lithuania and its tourism industry. If people cannot easily access the country, they are not looking for alternative versions. They just simply go to other destinations that can be easily reached without any obstacles.

There is a lack of national wide marketing strategy. As the Ministry of Economy put it down, there is „the lack of coordination and unification of medical tourism promotion as well as shortage of resources for active marketing”. The marketing strategy heavily depends on the image of the country as the whole, on the image of specific area, in this case medical tourism sector, the internet and the feedback of previous medical tourists. Unfortunately, Lithuania does not provide any of these marketing strategies at the best. Also these days discounts play very

important role in the marketing strategies in order to attract customers. However, the country that is just starting in the medical tourism business cannot offer many discounts.

There is a lack of public private partnership in the medical tourism service. Usually private and public organizations do not communicate with each other and see each other as the potential threat. This leads to the stagnations of both parts and it does not lead to further improvements.

The climate in the country is not very favorable for the tourism industry. Since Lithuania is located more to the North, seasonality is the key factor for tourists to come during just the warm season which is the summer time. In order to change the existing flow of the tourists and to attract them during other seasons, Lithuania's medical resorts need to establish all year round activities. These activities can be related both to the medical treatments and tourism attractions.

## **Opportunities**

Being the well known medical tourism destination will create new opportunities for the employment in both tourism and medical industries. It will prevent qualified specialists in both fields from leaving the country. At the same time it will boost tourism and medicine specializations in universities. Alongside that Lithuania could attract qualified employers from other countries and encourage emigrated specialists to come back. This will create the opposite effect of the brain drain – the brain gain.

Medical tourism can also boost other forms of tourism. It can create the niche for the conference tourism especially for the medicine industry. Towns with medical tourism facilities could organize conferences, lectures, seminars, meetings on this topic. Lithuania then will be a possibility to connect with other countries that have similar organizations that specializes in medical tourism. At the same time, clients that are coming for the medical treatment are usually

not coming alone. So while the patient is getting medical treatment, those visitors want to tour around and explore other touristic attractions. So it encourages the town of medical destination to create other attractions like cultural, active or relaxing activities. All tourism industry is benefiting from having a well organized medical tourism sector.

Good medical tourism service will ensure the loyalty of tourists. They will be coming back for more medical treatments and spread the word around which is one of the best marketing options. Also the same tourists next time might be interested to explore the country itself thus boosting all tourism industry.

With the quality of the medical tourism services comes the good image of the country. This is very important in attracting same tourists to come back and attracting new segments of tourism to visit the country for the first time. The good quality medical services will put the country on the list of the best medical tourism destination and promote it for future tourists. The matter of fact, the quality is one of the most important pull factors.

Medical tourism brings various revenues to the country. Starting from the financial and finishing with the social benefits. From the financial point of view, it brings revenues from the patients and tourists coming from abroad. It benefits towns that are medical tourism destinations and the country itself as well. In 2010 the estimated revenues gained from medical spas were around 206 million Litas (around 59 million Euros) (Kazlauskiene, 2012). As, for example, the turnover received from the spa and medical waters in Hungary was around 147 million Euros in 2009 (Puczko, 2011). Lithuania has a room to increase the revenues.

This sector can also provide new network of services. By having established networking services, it is easier to connect with other countries that are medical tourism destinations.

Countries can create the service of networking in order to learn from each other and increase the quality of the treatments provided to the patients from all over the world. For example Croatia created an association for development of medical tourism.

Being the medical tourism destination requires to have modern health facilities and good health sector. It means that the country's health sector should be modern and without any gaps in the system. This is the modernization of the health sector. It benefits not only the tourists but it is also very important for the locals. Most of the medical establishments are either owned by the government of the town with this kind of establishment or are privately owned. The private ownership increases competition which increases the quality of the services and treatments. Also it benefits entrepreneurs and the government at the same time.

There is an opportunity that medical tourism will benefit the health care system and locals. As indicated before, in order to attract tourists, there has to be modern facilities and good health care system. In this case, these facilities help to attract tourism and at the same time local people are benefiting from being able to use modern establishments. The money gained from the medical patients is helping to further improve health sector.

## **Threats**

One of the threats is the wide scale and strong competition. The competition exists within the country and the other countries that are specializing in the medical tourism. The competition within in Lithuania itself is between medical tourism and other tourism forms. The competition with other countries is extremely competitive and since Lithuania is the new country within medical tourism destinations there is a big threat to be outshined. If Lithuania will not step up

within this industry, it will not manage to place itself on the list of the top medical tourism destinations within Europe and the rest of the world.

Recently the Government of Lithuania decided to rethink and evaluate country's budget and made some major changes and budget cuts. The tourism sector was one of those that suffered these changes the most. The Government decided to cut the budget for the tourism sector. It was much unexpected decision. Due to the budget cut, tourism sector had to close down tourism offices abroad that were representing Lithuania in foreign countries. These tourism offices were responsible for promoting Lithuania as the tourism friendly country with a lot of activities, culture and traditions. These offices were representing the country in international fairs and exhibitions so the close down of them was a really big inconvenience for the tourism sector in the country.

In case of unsuccessful treatment or complications after the surgery, country can possibly get the bad image within medical tourism destinations. This can spread across the world, creating serious obstacles for further improvements in the sector. It would also prevent patients to choose Lithuania as the medical tourism country and also it would decrease the overall number of incoming tourists. For example Australia held a survey with the patients that had plastic surgeries abroad. It was noted that the high percentage of the surgeries were made poorly and even some complications followed. Those surgeries were made either in Thailand or Malaysia (Connell, 2011). These findings were published and it had negative impact on the image of these two countries and the tourist flow from Australia decreased.

Before going to the other country, travelers are counting on every possible traveling risk and then making the decision if the travelling risks and obstacles are too big in order to travel to

the specific country. Legal barriers are also taken into the consideration before making the decision whether to visit the country or not. In Lithuanian case there are few travelling risks, depending on how the tourist is planning to enter the country, and some legal barriers as well. It is not that easy to get visa and it is complicated to get financial support in order to receive treatments in private health establishments. Also some provision in the health care institutions might be restricted.

Ethical and moral issues exist in every country that has the medical tourism services. These issues might be the threat to the whole medical tourism industry. The issues can be identified as following – cosmetic surgeries, fertility, treatments that are available in the destination but are restricted in the country that tourist is coming from and many more.

Medical tourism can create the brain drain within Lithuania. The successful medical tourism industry can attract doctors and nurses to trade jobs in public organization and join the private institutions instead. This can create the lack of medical specialists working in the public health and medical establishments.

Being medical tourism destination puts the pressure on the country and both on the tourism and medical industries. The big attention is given to the tourists. It is important what they want, the prices are important and the service that is provided. In a lot of the cases foreigners become the center of attention while forgetting the needs of the local people. These issues were pointed out by Helble (2011). The author agreed that due to the high flow of tourists, the prices of medical treatments might heavily increase thus creating dissatisfaction within locals and inability to pay high fees for those services.

## Chapter 4 – Recommendations

Previous chapters provided both empirical evidence and analytical framework about medical tourism industry in the world and Lithuania. Based on the previous chapter and SWOT analysis, recommendation must be drawn in order to promote and encourage the growth of medical tourism in Lithuania.

Lithuanian government should start cooperation with abroad countries for attracting tourists to come to Lithuania for medical treatments. In this case the involvement of insurance companies in the promotion of Lithuania as the medical tourism destination would be extremely helpful. These insurance companies would be responsible for creating insurance schemes suitable to cover the medical treatment abroad. This kind of collaboration was done between the United States of America, more precisely the state of California, and Mexico (Helble, 2011). The schemes offer lower treatment price in Mexico than domestic schemes in California. But this offer exists just for the clients that are using the particular insurance company.

The other change can be done by removing some obstacles that are related to the traveling. The government should change the existing regulations for obtaining the visa. The requirement should be simplified for the medical tourists and some restrictions should be removed as well.

The easier access to Lithuania is urgently needed. This involves transportation by railroads and air. At the moment it is quite difficult to reach the country and it is extremely inconvenient for the medical tourists since usually they are not in the best shape and condition for uncomfortable traveling. Lithuania should urgently come with the plan on how to establish the national airlines. Having the national airlines gives the advantage of implementing the cheaper flight costs and also the direct flight which is even more important than the cost. Also

Lithuania does not have very well established railway system. At the moment just Russians, Belarusian and Polish patients can reach the country by rails. In order to attract tourists from wider range of countries, the railway system must be expanded to other neighboring countries and beyond that.

Lithuanian medical tourism sector should create the very well managed cluster of one or more particular medical tourism treatments. In that case the country could focus on the improving the quality of one particular treatment and use it as the niche and as the competitive advantage over the other countries that are known as the medical tourism destinations. The cluster of the procedures and the treatments should be made so it is easier to promote medical tourism abroad. The existence of such cluster will help to promote Lithuania as the medical tourism destination with the qualified staff and services thus it will increase the good image of the country.

When the cluster or package is made of the particular high quality treatment, Lithuania then should focus on the marketing and promotion strategies. In order to do that, medical tourism establishments have to create websites in various languages and make all the information accessible to the public. Potential medical tourists want to know everything starting from the description of the procedures, how long they last, what is the effect of the procedure what might be the negative side effect, the probability of complications. Also it is important to share all the information about the doctors and nurses and about previous procedures, the comments of patients and of course the data and statistics. All this information is extremely important. It helps to decide if the person will come for medical procedures to the particular country and the health establishment. Wide promotion strategy is very important and can bring additional tourists. Hungary is a good example in being active in promotion campaign. Hungary is promoting dentist

tourism in the international airports so a lot of various people can see advertisements while waiting for the flights. Besides that, Hungary promoted itself by establishing the Year of Health Tourism in 2003. It was estimated that Hungary received around 25 thousand medical tourists from the United Kingdom in the year of 2007 (Connell, 2011: 51).

Lithuania should make contacts and communications with other countries and other organizations that specialize in the medical tourism. These organizations can be insurance companies, private and public health and medical institutions and organizations, tourism agencies, sales people, airlines, governments and various ministries. For example one of the Germany's medical health establishments entered into the agreement with the airline company Lufthansa (Medical+Wealness Tourism, 2010). This cooperation allowed to suggest better services for the patients and increased the number of the tourists. Communication channels are always important in spreading the word about countries and available services.

Additionally, next to the collaboration with other countries, there has to be the cooperation within Lithuania between medical and tourism services. These industries should not see themselves as competition but rather as partners that help each other to boost both tourism and medical industries. During this cooperation, there will be already tourism package made for the medical tourists. That could include the accommodation at the best hotels, catering, medical treatments, and tourism related activities like cultural and traditional experiences, various travelling routes. In this case the tourist would not have to worry about additional things besides just getting to the destination. Everything is done for the convenience of the client. Both client and the medical tourism sector are benefiting.

## Conclusions

This paper is looking at the medical tourism and the positive aspects that this sector can provide for the country that decide to promote medical tourism as the national industry and export. The special attention was given to Lithuania and opportunities of medical tourism in this country. Following by the literature review and analytical framework, some recommendations were drawn on how Lithuania should promote itself as the medical tourism destination.

Medical tourism is quite a new phenomena but the interest in it is growing rapidly. Western Europeans started to get involved in medical tourism in the 1980s (Connell, 2011). And just decade later, medical tourism is still the growing phenomenon that attracted the academic interest from the tourism field just in the 1990s (Page, 2009: 149). At the beginning medical tourism more related either to the medical or tourism sector. Nevertheless, recently the medical tourism has become the international business industry. According to the data presented in 2007, medical tourism then was an international business industry worth 60 billion US dollars and it was growing by 20% every year (MacReady World Report, 2007: 1849).

As expressed in this thesis, medical tourism involves traveling of wealthier patients from the Western developed world to the less developed countries in order to receive medical treatments for various different reasons. Medical tourism is a very broad sector. It can be divided into separate categories – serious medical treatments like heart surgeries, hip replacement etc and light medical tourism. The later one is further categorized to the spas, treatments with natural mineral water and mud, massages, beauty treatments etc.

High cost and long waiting queues to receive medical treatments were the incentives to start looking for the same treatments in some foreign countries. Besides that there are more than

just costs and long waiting list. There are both push and pull factors that are playing the biggest role in the whole medical tourism development. Besides already mentioned costs and queues other important push factor is the insurance. Non existence of the insurance will lead people to leave abroad in order to receive the treatment. Another push factor is the restriction of certain medical treatments in the home destination. Pull factors have a high importance in deciding whether to leave the country for medical purposes as well. Quality of the services abroad is the best known pull factor. Good quality ensures constant tourist flows to the medical tourism countries. Language is another very important pull factor. Language is the way of communication and for customers it is important that they will be understood by the staff in foreign health establishments. The stability of the destination's political life, culture and traditions is another pull factor. The last important pull factor indicated by some authors is the vacation aspect. It is interesting to see the country not just from the medical point of view but also from the tourism aspects.

Main destination for medical tourism is based in the Asia region. Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore are the leading countries in the region and in the whole world. India also falls under the category of most visited destinations. Europe is famous for medical tourism in Scandinavia, Southern and Central Europe. In the Central Europe Hungary is the leader, especially with the specialization in the dentistry tourism.

Lithuania has some good assets in regards of medical tourism but not enough is done to make the country known as the worldwide medical tourism destination. Currently Lithuania has just few towns that are known for their medical treatments. There are also other strengths like the existence of natural mineral waters, there are no language barriers when it comes to the communications, Lithuania can offer treatments for the lower price but at the good quality. Also

the staff of medical establishments is qualified. Furthermore, the infrastructure is well organized. There are 3 international airports, good roads and highways, internal transportation, medical establishments, hotels and catering services.

Despite all good existing facilities, Lithuania still has to improve and change a lot in order to become one of the top countries in the medical tourism world. There are various aspects that have to be considered when making important changes. Based on the analysis of the current assets and current situation in Lithuania this thesis provided some recommendations on how to improve the situation and promote medical tourism. It is believed that with the successful implementation of these recommendations the medical tourism sector can bring positive social and economic revenues as well as put Lithuania on the list of the best medical tourism destinations in the world.

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