

**Medical tourism as a mechanism to activate sustainable development**

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**Abstract:**

Tourism is a dynamic activity with mutual and effective influence, which includes all activities in the country inside and outside. It has importance that is reflected on all levels, including the economic, social, cultural and political levels of society, where tourism represents a major leader of development, including local, national and foreign, despite the divergence of economic opinions. However, the scientific evidence and the experiences of countries indicate a significant increase in the role of tourism, especially in development issues in its broad sense. So, medical tourism has become a significant aspect of tourism in various ways, enriching the experiences of both individuals and groups. Their abilities and their energies are renewed, as the latter has a mixture between entertainment and health treatment, specialized centers provide, through hospital centers such as treatment centers for febrile treatment, and usually the adjective combines both.

**keywords:** medical tourism, local development, health tourism, tourism security.

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**Introduction:**

There is no doubt that tourism represents a fundamental phenomenon that shows a human activity which holds between its characteristics and contents that does not take any particular form or pattern due to their many existing different types, interfering, and its impact upon environmental, economic, cultural, technological sectors. Tourism has a special importance to the world especially with the development of its shapes, types, and the ongoing stages of it. Following the changes and transformations witnessed by the global and local societies. To that, tourism represents an important engine to growth. The tourism activity presents also a principal side of the economic gateways for global countries and governments. Also, by its diversities, it contributes in rising openings and creating work chances and flourishes the sector to accomplish the economic and social progress.

Tourism has become one of the most significant axis of life. That is why its forms and patterns differentiated especially after transforming the material appearance to one of the human phenomenon. That carries out motives to replace human from pursuing his desires and daily life affairs to a social, cultural phenomenon with the goal of relaxation, culture, and leisure. Also to preserve health in both prevention or treatment stages. This means that tourism took a dimension that combines between entertainment and treatment. Health treatment is considered one of the categories that holds a material, human, logistic recruitment.

Through this socio-health theoretical perspective came this intervention to shed light upon the intellectual combination between tourism and treatment. Through out the role played by the tourism agencies.

**The Problematic of theoretical study:**

Development is considered as one of the most fundamental pillars of progress in different fields of the individual's life. Perhaps local development is considered necessary in all programs of governmental entities and tourism, represents one of these interceptions between programs, curricula and medical tourism. One of the most important categories of the sustainable development either inclusive or local, which the supervisory authorities works on developing from all sides and different ways, being necessary and fundamental that goes with changes and transformations that the world lives today. On this basis and standpoint came this theoretical study in the medical sociology field that links in many indicators that has a relation with tourism as a an essential element in culture and health and as an essential element as well in treatment. From this comes the answer of the following question:

How does the medical tourism contribute in pushing and developing local growth wheel?

### **The adopted approach:**

The descriptive-analytical approach is what was used in purpose of studying the subject and addressing the most important concepts that works on the topic of medical tourism and local development.

### **Goals:**

This theoretical study in the field of sociology of health aims to shed light on the medical tourism topic and its types, also how to line up governmental programs who's goal-oriented to local development through working on the uplifting with this type of medical practices, with the aim of its development and working towards enriching the tourism sector as an alternative to the advancement and local sustainable development.

### **Basic Concepts:**

1.1. The concept of local sustainable development: the concept of local growth knew an great deal of interest from the researchers in the economic and developing matter. Regarding the changes that specialized the modern societies, and the necessity to focus on the important of enhancing the local social development espacially after growing its role of reaction and going from this principle, the local development know that rising the cost living to local societies through involving them in the developing process and improving local industries. It is a process that makes the collaboration between public administration and government conduce to raising the level of such local communities and social units as villager factories, economically, socially, politically and culturally. This is a Means of increasing the quality of life within locally governed clusters at all levels in some broader and more integrated method." <sup>1</sup>

According to a 1591 definition by the United Nations, local development is “a set of approaches and technical methods that rely on locally organized communities to stimulate initiative and leadership within the local community, considering it the main tool for instigating change.” In another definition, local development is “the place where the efforts of local community members combine with governmental authorities’ efforts to improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions – and the quality of life – for communities.” This integration enriches both the community’s life and the life of the nation to which it belongs, enabling productive and effective contributions that achieve national progress and development.

1.2. Definition of Tourism: A considerable amount of time and effort on the part of researchers and professionals has been dedicated to the evolution of the concept of tourism and related concepts. According to Mohsen Milad Al-Tarhouni, modern concepts of this industry began to take shape only in the early twentieth century. Thus, it can safely be said that the ideas defining tourism and defining its framework began at that time.

Tourism is movement from one's place of origin to another place apart from work or migration for different purposes; that is, leisure, study, treatment or culture, meaning an endeavour in an area for which the visitor will not derive financial income from the move. Definitions provided by N. GOLDEN stated, "Tourism is any movement where tourist would not conduct" Beside the views mentioned above, it is considered that "it is a special type of movement not on its behalf, travel is inherent to people who at first moved in order to find food and later began to enjoy life. With the evolution of the world, the attitude towards various pleasures has changed. And here is how tourism can be defined from the concept of a phenomenon involving many other impressions and connections emerging from temporary movement or stay of a person in different objects and faced factors of this purpose, not in terms of permanent place of residence and not depending on paid labor" .<sup>2</sup> .

The meaning and definitions from the social sciences dictionary meant that tourism is the movement of any person from his/her permanent residence to another place for a relatively short period, spending the cost of a person's existence there, housing, and food for his/her personal savings and not for a job in the place of travel. Thus, a tourist is a consumer, not a producer<sup>3</sup>

Based on the above definitions and observations, tourism is agreed to be a relatively short period of movement of a person from his permanent place of residence to another place for relaxation, treatment, or leisure but not for work and settlement, provided that there is personal money assistant.

### **1.3 The concept of Health;**

According to the World Health Organizations definition health is described as "a state of physical, mental and social well being rather, than just the absence of illness or weakness"<sup>4</sup> . Health is viewed as a notion that emphasizes the asset. The individual. And how they shape their character as well as their physical, mental and social capacities. Health is seen as the catalyst, for community advancement and progress. It aids individuals in carrying out their responsibilities and duties by giving them a framework and tools to lead a life in all its aspects.

1.4 The concept of tourist demand pertains to the range of goods and services that travelers are willing to purchase at prices during their visit. These demands can encompass both intangible preferences. It also encompasses the number of individuals who journey or aspire to journey to utilize tourist amenities and services in locations, from their home<sup>5</sup>.

### **1.5 Characteristics of Tourist Demand;**

Given that the quality of tourist demand characteristics plays a role in development at local, national or global levels it is vital to outline these features in a manner that underscores their connection, with local sustainable development specifically. These characteristics comprise;

**1.5.1. Elasticity:** is the measure of how responsive demand for a good is to changes in price conditions or economic, political and social situation that are taking place<sup>6</sup>. Price elasticity of demand for tourists has remained high which implies that when prices fall in a given country people tend to increase their visits while an increase in prices will discourage tourists from visiting the country. In addition it relates with incomes; hence the higher the income of an individual, the more likely he/she will be inclined towards holidaying by making plans to go on tourist trips. Tourist destination varies between middle-income earners and high-income earners.

**2.5.1. Sensitivity:** Tourism demand is very responsive to changes in social, political and security situations in the area of reception of tourists; this makes it necessary for peace and security to be provided through all possible ways. The countries having troubled political stability and security are seen as pivotal in stabilizing and developing their tourism<sup>7</sup>.

**3.5.1 Non-repetitiveness:** Tourism demand is usually anathema to repetition; thus, ensuring customers' satisfaction with what they encountered during their vacation does not mean that they will visit the same destination again next time around as different places are chosen for every visitation<sup>8</sup>.

**4.5.1 Seasonality:** Normally, the demand for tourists is affected by seasonality whereby tourist activity is high during some seasons of the year and low in others. Different factors can explain this including climate and weather, national holidays, events among others<sup>9</sup>.

## **2. Importancy of Tourism:**

Today tourism has become an immediate social-economic need that states prioritize to meet individuals' needs of comfort and rest. In addition to other things, it also considers national economic development; when steps are taken to

encourage tourism and provide facilities required for it. The importance of tourism may be summed up as follows:

- Foreign tourist receipts are their hard currency, deposited by what foreign tourists spend.
- New job positions and offices are established to reduce unemployment rates.
- Total income increases because of tourist expenditures and new investments.
- Improvements in psychological, haptic, and social well-being resulting from tourism in the form of relaxation and leisure will bring about a better productivity.
- Historical sites are maintained and promoted with the help of and protection provided by tourism.
- Traditional industry and culture will be promoted and encouraged<sup>10</sup>.

It is fair to say that economic development in any country certainly causes social development similar in characteristics. This indicates that these two fields are inter-related and inter-dependent. Tourism can be assumed to be a sector that contributes to the supply of foreign exchange and tourism can lead to increase contribution to the public treasury and reduce the level of unemployment and improve the quality of life. Overall, this will have a positive social impact on livelihoods. One can also not neglect the role of tourism in learning more about the cultures and traditions of a visited country. All these factors taken into consideration, one can argue that the tourism process can be more effective and contribute to an increase in pace of development on a local, national and international level. Lastly, I also want to focus on the improvement of psychological and social factors. It is clear that tourism is beneficial for humans' health and societal health.

### **3. Tourism Objectives:**

However, it is an indispensable operation in the life of people and society. Society on all levels includes social level, economy culture health politics. Out of these five respects, tourism comes into being. From this standpoint, let us now cite an example list of prominent goals of tourism:

- Meeting and Satisfying Tourists' Needs: Tourism organizations work earnestly to meet and satisfy the needs and wishes of stranded travelers.

- Provide a clear and complete tourist image for the place or country under sale. This will serve as part of the process on attracting tourists.
- Bring about changes in the behavior of the client or tourist in favor of the product being marketed.
- Tourism marketing plays a vital role in the growth, development and enlargement of business operations in the tourist sector and the incoming tourists.

According to the criteria of the trip, tour categories can be divided into several types: eco-tourism, religious tourism, leisure tourism, culture tourism, sport tourism, sea travel and so on. More substantial from a sociological point of view perhaps the most important category of them all we are discussing at present is Medical Tourism.

#### **4. Medical tourism :**

is considered as one of the most important kinds of modern tourism, especially in the countries that contains sulfur springs and wells that encourage and help on healing some skin and bone diseases. This type of tourism also go back to the post-technological technical development and so on of the increasing speed, hardship of life and shortness of time, which lead to the appearing of multiple diseases such as psychological pressure, stress, heart diseases and nervous system disorders. This what motivated doctors and specialists to search about an alternative through natural treatment by sulfuric and mineral waters or the use of sand baths, hot waters and the sun light along with some herbal medical traditional uses or the popular medicine in treating rheumatic pains such as joint and back pains, through burying those parts in the sand as it is practiced in our deserts.

However, there has to be a distinction between medical tourism in general and health tourism and prevention tourism in a particular as follows:

4.1. In medical tourism, the tourist tend to have treatment or have a specific surgery in one of the medical centers and in this case, the tourist is under a specific medical supervision team or at a clinic according on his condition.

The illness that often remains for couple of weeks which the patient needs a purifying period after it, by spending time in one of the resorts, and where he can practice some other tourism activities during this period according to his health condition.

Health Tourism means to reside in different clinics or medical resorts that has healing perks treatment to general health, such as visiting places with mineral

springs, sulfuric springs, mud or sand baths or hot waters, and that aims for relaxation and healing through natural treatments from some of the skin and psychological, neurological and respiratory diseases like asthma and rheumatic diseases. Examples include renowned thermal baths like Hammam Guelma, Hammam Khemis, Hammam Elouan, and Hammam Soukna in the state of Setif, as well as marine spa tourism, such as the resort located in Sidi Fredj in the state of Oran. Sand bath tourism has been wide spread for some time, given Algeria's vast desert areas, which are among the hottest regions in the globe and have the highest level of sunshine exposure, particularly in regions like Ouad Souf and Béchar.

4.3. Preventive Tourism: where the tourist have trips that aims for enhancing the natural performance of body and mind, through residing in places with the necessary conditions, and it might be a in a free will manner without the presence of supervision and in this case it is called "unorganized preventive tourism". As for the organized one, the activities are practiced inside the clinics under medical supervision. One of these activities is regulated nutrition, entertainment, health culture, healing sports. Which goes back to the individual with a healthy body and thoughts, and it does not stand preventive tourism only on these activities, it is also considered as complementary activities for some patients during the recovery period, so the doctors advise patients to stay a period of time limited according to the illness condition that the patient practice all special activities with this kind of tourism in it. <sup>11</sup> .

### **5. Components of medical tourism:**

It concentrates on many fundamental components makes it reach sustainable local growth developments goals, which can be stated in the following:

- the availability of mineral and sulfuric waters, along with a diversity of particular mud that has special perks or radioactive sands.

-the availability of stable health environment far from all kind of polluted areas.

-the availability of green fields, parks, relaxation spots and leisure such as valleys and lakes. the obligation to provide the condition of complete cleanness and calm, also specialized medical experience in this kind of treatment, meaning that condition of specialty inside these medical institutions must be present such as medical and nursing specialized in psychological natural treatment. Also, an accepted level is required for accommodation and catering at various levels. <sup>12</sup>

The concept of medical tourism or traveling for healing has evolved significantly. so after the goal was to preserve physical health, so it has expended to balance



between mental and physical health through practicing this kind of tourism that became known as a type of evolution and the growth in different fields that the world has witnessed along with it. Where in some countries, it has become an urgent necessity due to the prevailing lifestyle, especially in urban areas, characterized by air pollution, high levels of carbon dioxide, and a lack of sunlight leading to vitamin D deficiency. Additionally, the lack of green spaces and relaxation areas such as parks, noise pollution, and the pressure-based work culture contribute negatively to a life dominated by severe nervous tension. All these circumstances and other had majorly contributed in searching on an alternative in natural treatment in natural places which goes along with modern time needs, so from here health treatment can be considered with its new perspective as tourism that aims widely on benefiting and restoring health with its wide concept that encompasses mental, physical, psychological and social health.

### **6.Obstacles of Medical Tourism:**

When discussing obstacles, we find that the healthcare sector, in its broad sense, faces many obstacles despite being a significant resource for local and national economic development. However, it has not been given due attention and development. These obstacles include behavioral, cultural, and operational aspects, such as tourist awareness, service deficiencies, and practices. By examining these general aspects carefully, we can find obstacles more precisely, such as: Weakness in basic facilities in awareness in tourism destinations. Lack of attention to continuous and periodic analysis of springs and wells suitable for treatment purposes to ensure their optimal utilization. lack of use of springs and wells without proper planning. Shortage in establishing therapeutic resorts of all kinds. Lack of attention from investors and the government to environmental issues in general and health-related issues in particular. Weakness in transportation means and infrastructure leading to these destinations. Shortage or lack of expertise in medical therapy (spas). Poor planning and absence of structured programs to develop this sector, which is considered economically and recreationally significant.<sup>13</sup>

### **7. How to promote medical tourism:**

Establishing tourist residence facilities that suits the environment, whether desert, hilly, or coastal. This is crucial for attracting tourists in terms of construction, interior furnishings, the nature of services, and their quality and delivery. Focus on establishing new healing centers and resorts in coastal areas with special characteristics suitable for treating certain diseases through seawater, as well as in desert areas known for their radioactive sands. Establish mineral healing centers using mineral and sulfuric waters. Taking care of establishing studies that

benefits new tourism projects for medical, treatment, prevention purposes and especially after the visit made by tourism ministries to developed countries to plan new tourist areas and selecting them depending on the suitability of the site for investment and exploitation, along with presenting arab and foreign investment targeting creating touristic villages and cities for medical tourism purposes. Provide necessary facilities regarding material supply or equipment, as well as specialized lands for these projects, adhering to specific rules and overcoming obstacles. Expand and restructure existing service centers and establish modern comprehensive medical examination centers in a hospital system to allow traditional tourists to benefit from the treatment advantages of tourist areas. Explore the possibility of bilateral governmental agreements to subject treatment tourism areas to health insurance conditions, which gives the chance to foreign patients to benefit from treatment coverage by their governments as one of the methods adopted in foreign countries. Address the effects of pollution caused by industries through modern technological methods, with mandatory implementation. Pay attention to various services in different areas according to their nature, such as road maintenance and repair, providing ambulance units, offering transportation suitable for service according to the treatment environment, encouraging travel agencies by providing privileges for the development of this type of tourism for local and national development.<sup>14</sup>

## **7. The social effects of medical tourism:**

The social effects left by medical tourism and tourist activities on society as a whole represent one of the most important areas for research and study. Researching the resulting social effects helps identify the entities affected by the type of diseases, thus taking the necessary measures to address them. There are effects on the individual, as when a person travels, they encounter an unfamiliar environment, not only geographically but also personally, socially, and culturally. Consequently, they may face some problems that require finding solutions to enjoy their trip.

Indeed, we can focus on what can be left on this last from a deep effect concerning social cultural experiences that the traveler is exposed to inside the host society such as participating in festivals, holidays, social interactions and cultural immersion. in addition to take look on the dietary patterns, lifestyles, customs, and traditions unique to the host country from a cultural perspective.

The tourism effects on the family un doubly define the family as the most important primary social institutions, it has an essential role and a high status in society, so that taking care of the study of tourism effects on family helps improving the life quality, the tourism activity has a deep effect on the family

built and on forming its directions and social relationships network. Moreover, transitioning to different societies provides families with a different social space from what they are used to, they become knowing of different types of social relationships and other cultures, in addition to the change of atmosphere and entertainment gives it a new breath in communicating and throwing away stress and anxiety.<sup>15</sup>

The effects of tourism on local society are numerous, as the local society presents the widest third circle after individual and family on the social side, so in speaking about local community we find some fundamental considerations that tourism has left as effects. Firstly, affecting the local society itself on understanding and appreciating others.<sup>16</sup>. Meaning that the tourism may present from an economic revenue that can guarantee them development and knowing rival cultures from tourists, all of this falls within mutual social interaction. Secondly, it is related to government's effort to promote tourism through facilitating touristic operations, modernizing, and make it easy for the rise of the sector that leads to the necessity to improve local and national growth that is meant mostly to develop economic tourism like providing work opportunities and elevate the financial revenue that contributes in improving the lifestyle. As well as, developing and maintaining environmental touristic areas and the advancement of craft industries, and the support of popular arts, all of which falls within the cultural aspect.

### **8. The role of tourism in local sustainable development:**

There is no doubt that the tourism sector is an effective tool in sustained local growth, given its features that is related to the partial economy such as profit and liquidity. But more of that, is its role in sending social economic transactions itself is a development rule on local level. This role takes various forms and types that corresponds with the country development, as for the developed countries, some of their areas knows a decline in economic activity either it is on the closure of some industrial establishments or the lack of agricultural activity which reflects negatively on economy. This leads to explore other ways to boost their economy. Thus, it is a must for the governments of these countries to address this crisis by promoting tourism qualifications and enhancing the sector, as exemplified by France<sup>17</sup>.

As for developing countries, which face different challenges compared to developed ones, such as geographic isolation and centralized decision-making, the contribution of the tourism sector to the development of remote areas appears to have a clear and effective impact by addressing the isolation of these regions. In these countries, tourism is often limited, either as recreational tourism, such as summer tourism where tourists seek beaches for entertainment, or treatment

tourism where tourists visit therapeutic areas. Additionally, providing the necessary raw materials and highly qualified workforce to exploit them is crucial to meet the basic requirement of attracting tourists. There is a focus on the necessity of using tourism resources through work development and establishing a structural tourism base with all its essentials, including opening roads and crossings for basic preparation such as hotels, tourist cities, and other achievements that contribute to the development of the sector<sup>18</sup>.

### **9.Challenges facing therapeutic tourism in Algeria:**

When discussing medical tourism as an alternative sector in economic operation for local development, it is inevitable to go through the most important challenges that faces the touristic sector especially medical tourism in Algeria, there are many short-comings that hinder the operation of medical tourism development and it some of it can be mentioned as the following:

- Challenges related to the management of the tourism sector, with the most prominent being the lack of strategic planning for tourism development by the tourism directorates at the level of their regions. Additionally, these directorates do not distribute tourism maps and informational materials highlighting the importance of medical tourism.
- Real estate challenges and obstacles are among the most significant hindrances to medical tourism. The ownership of tourist real estate, whether private or public, poses a challenge, and investors, whether domestic or foreign, struggle with the high costs of medical tourism real estate in Algeria, especially for properties with natural therapeutic materials such as mineral baths.
- Administrative and legal obstacles, with the most prominent being the near-complete absence of financial and banking institutions specialized in financing investment in medical tourism. Additionally, there is a lack of motives targeted at investors in the medical tourism field.
- Challenges related to the performance of local communities are faced, especially those located in areas with important medical tourism potential. Several obstacles hinder these local communities, including:
- Weakness in the development of medical tourism, concerning medical tourism plans, particularly for municipalities that has tourism qualifications specializes with a managing responsibility which goes back to lack of local communities to the necessary tool to cover fundamental touristic requirements for that particular area.

- Shortage of qualification and professionalism among employees and administrators responsible for managing these facilities.
- Lack of accommodation capacities and their poor quality, if available.

The absence of controlling modern techniques for the market concerning travel agencies, in addition to the massive incapability to marketing in the direction of Algeria, especially in the field of medical tourism that remains limited in exploiting it regionally in terms of visitors and governments.<sup>19</sup> .

### **Conclusion:**

From what already mentioned, we extract that medical tourism aims significantly and clearly in achieving industrial local and national growth, plus a continuous balanced increase in touristic resources, whereas the fundamental focus in the development operation is on humans, who is considered as a principle tool. So it is required from the organizations to strive to provide all what is needed in the humanitarian resource from different capabilities under the concept of that industrial tourism is a practical labor-intensive development relies on its essence on the human element in a primarily in all its stages and forms, achieving tourism development goals requires the combining efforts of both official and community sectors. These efforts should be in harmony with the cultural, social, and regional construction of Algerian society, so that tourism, in its entirety, becomes the axis and tool for achieving growth and development, rather than a factor of stagnation and contradiction with the principles of tourism marketing and prosperity.

### **Recommendations:**

Establish touristic resident resorts that goes on with environmental geographic climatic nature.

Investing in establishing new healing areas and centers with taking an attentive care of the nature of every area.

Facilitate for investors in the field and establish committees its purpose is to follow up and limit obstacles for the rising of the sector.

Work on presenting studies for private projects for medical tourism which has an importance that serves national and local growth.

Introduce new specialties in the field of tourism and hospitality and make it public in universities to acquire frameworks in the medical and tourist sector.

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