

# THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL ROLE OF HEALTH TOURISM AS A PART OF THE GREEN ECONOMY IN THE FUNCTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC SERBIA

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**Abstract:** *Pronounced multidimensional effects of the development of health tourism are reflected through direct, indirect and induced impacts, namely on GDP, employment, investments, etc. The aforementioned multidimensionality stems from the fact that tourist consumption is a reflection of several interconnected activities that make up health tourism. Bearing in mind the cross-sectoral connection of various activities, the main purpose of this work is to study the basic determinants of ecological sustainability in health tourism and, on that basis, especially the impact of tourist consumption on the achievement of sustainable development goals in*

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*the Republic of Serbia. The intersectoral connection of various activities, especially emphasizes that tourism as part of the green economy is a necessary condition for sustainable development. The paper deals specifically with issues of product quality, that is, tourist services and, accordingly, how it affects consumers in health tourism. The interactive involvement of users of health tourism services gains new importance in destination strategies, focusing on the quality of the overall offer package. Moreover, creating experiences at the convergence of tourism production and tourism consumption is a very important topic in the function of health tourism development.*

**Keywords:** *health tourism / development multiplier / resource attractions/destination strategies*

## INTRODUCTION

The multidimensional and complex character of health tourism stems from the fact that tourist consumption is the result of several interconnected and interrelated activities of the national economy of a country. The institutional framework of sustainable development starts from the social dimension of the national economy, which is based on the development of human resources, knowledge, new technologies and innovations, and accordingly, the balanced regional development of the national economy. Based on that, sustainable development is determined by two key segments, first, the environment and natural resources and their rational use in the function of environmental protection, second, the economic dimension of development in the focus of the competitiveness of the national economy. The attitude towards the green economy, when it comes to primary market institutions in production, trade of goods and provision of services, is of key importance in the development of the national economy and access to the EU market. It is certain that intense changes are taking place in our national economy, which include health green tourism as a focus of sustainable development. It is a vital and sensitive sector of the economy characterized by a turbulent, changing and uncertain business environment. According to the aforementioned findings, in the current phase of building the market model of the economy in Serbia, a clear national strategy and policy for the sustainable development of health tourism is necessary. We need such a model of health tourism development, which will satisfy the needs of

consumers or service users with its product in a high-quality way. The development of tourism in the long term presupposes its constant economic growth and development, but with socially responsible business operations and the use of cleaner technologies.

Recognizing the potential contribution of the green tourism sector in the focus of climate change and ecotourism (Wilkes and Reddy, 2015). Ecological tourism, among other things, especially includes activities that take into account the expectations of tourists or users of health tourism for responsible management of natural resources by tourism entities. The basic goal of sustainable tourism, and therefore of health tourism, refers primarily to the growth of efficiency in the focus of energy and natural resource use. (UNWTO 2012, Toubes and Arujo-Vila, 2022). All this further indicates that it is necessary to investigate and determine the position of health tourism as part of the green economy and to what extent it can be a function of the further strategic development of tourism. The mentioned approach provides the basis for defining the subject of research in this paper. The subject of the research refers to the study of the importance of green orientation in health tourism as an important way to achieve sustainable development from the aspect of natural resource attractions and ecological sustainability, and based on their value establishing a clear diagnosis of the state of further development. The main research method is based on the collection of secondary data and sources of information based on relevant literature. In the following segments of the work, the content of the work is focused on green health tourism when it comes to resource natural attractions and their ecological sustainability in health tourism, thus giving a specific feature to the trust destination of the region or local community.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY OF NATURAL RESOURCE ATTRactions IN HEALTH TOURISM**

Pearce, Markandya and Barbier (1989), first used the concept of ecological economics in their report on the green economy, prepared for the UK government. Jacobs (1991) indicated the basic goals of the "green economy" as "zero growth" ie "sustainable development". Ecological sustainability of natural resurnish attractions and health tourism represent and health tourism represent vital mutually conditioned segments of sustainable tourism. Promotional activities of health and ecological tourism in a national economy represent, on the one hand, a

means to achieve the overall sustainable development of green tourism, and on the other hand, represent an adequate approach for repositioning the observed national economy as a tourist destination on the world market. It is necessary to redefine three basic key areas when it comes to the concept of sustainable development: finance, social responsibility and ecology, which are interconnected and interdependent (Rosha and Lace, 2015). When it comes to finances, a particularly important question concerns the influence of accounting regulations on the quality of financial reports (Anđelković, Vapa Tankosić, Liberakos, 2023). This issue is particularly important when it comes to tourism (Anđelković, Ivaniš, 2022). At that, Isa, Sivapathy. and Kamarruddin. (2021) indicate that the application of modern technology in the field of green economy is a determinant that ensures the balance of economic development on the one hand and environmental protection on the other.

The relationship between environmental protection and tourism is not only the relationship between one person and a certain regional social community, but it is the problem of the entire population. Care for nature and its protection does not exist only for the sake of tourists, but represents the need to preserve the environment for the local population, both today and for the future. Nature protection in health tourism must not be reduced to the protection of individual objects or smaller and larger geographical entities. Certain natural resources, regardless of their degree of tourist attractiveness, cannot solve all the needs of tourists or users of services. Nature protection for the needs of health tourism has a specific character, bearing in mind that in addition to the usual factors, in this type of tourism, the originality of thermo-mineral springs must also be preserved. Nikolić (1998) particularly focused on the protection problems of spa places in Serbia, who determined the methodological procedure and criteria for evaluating the special natural values and overall ecological potential of spa places in Serbia. When evaluating spas, the aforementioned author used the following criteria: natural characteristics of thermomineral springs; natural environment; arrangement and equipment; urbanization, and alteration of the natural landscape. When evaluating the spas based on the mentioned criteria, Nikolić singled out the first ranking group of seven spas: Kuršumlijska, Brestovačka, Vrnjačka, Ribarska, Vranjska, Jošanička and Sijerinska Banja. It is evident that the mentioned spas, in

the observed period, with the exception of Vrnjačka, are not among the most developed spas, from which a conclusion can be drawn that indicates a low degree of preservation of the natural environment, a high degree of urbanization and insufficient arrangement and communal equipment of these tourist places. Today, in the modern attitude towards green economy and tourism, we cannot say that success has been achieved when it comes to Sijarinska banja, Jošanička banja and some other spas. The ecological values of Serbian spas can only be preserved through active and continuous protection, which represents one of the priorities of the green economy in the development of these places. The environment is very important for the development of health tourism. Tourists use natural resources for the purpose of health and recreation, and often also valorize other types of tourism. With the development of mass tourism, the quality of the environment, due to an inadequately formalized strategy for the protection of nature and resources, is increasingly declining, especially in tourist places. Continuous monitoring of the quality of the environment, as well as remediation of the observed negative consequences of their use, should be the task of every local government, respecting the requirements of the green economy. Bearing in mind that health tourism resources are primarily intended for maintaining health, i.e. it is intended for those who care about their health, their stricter control than other resources is necessary. In health tourism, spa springs have the priority of protection. As part of that, it is necessary to pay attention to the green environment, control the construction of new buildings near resources, control waste water flows, seek protection from air pollution, etc. Only after securing these elements, the spa can be considered as a health-tourism resource and can be put into the function of health tourism.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned findings, as well as the need to remediate the existing ecological consequences, in the future, legal solutions should be adopted, starting from urban planning to educational ones, all with the aim of preserving the environment. All this indicates that a strategic sustainable development of health tourism is necessary, with the rational use of resources accompanying health tourism and the training of competently needed professions within the framework of the "greening" of the economy. It is also necessary to provide support within the institutional framework for a more efficient development of sustainable health tourism through stationary accommodation facilities

or green catering, green destinations, green tourist products or the promotion of environmentally conscious users of tourist services. The institutional framework is a prerequisite for the development of the National Strategy for the Sustainable Development of a National Economy. According to Shimova (2019), "the strategic goal of sustainable development in the national strategy is to ensure a high standard of living of the population and conditions for the harmonious development of the individual through the transition to a highly efficient economy based on knowledge and innovation, while maintaining a favorable environment for the current state and future generations." According to Bučar (2007), the countries of the Western Balkans contributed little to the application of the green economy concept in tourism. It is necessary to adopt an explicit implementation of the green strategy when it comes to the sustainable development of tourism, which will provide long-term benefits to both the local community and the economy as a whole. In a study based on empirical research, which refers to the regional green economy, Gunay, Kurtishi-Kastrati and Krsteska (2023), "support the efforts of the European Union to tackle climate and environmental issues,

The aforementioned interdependence, which is related to the green economy and sustainable development in tourism, should be viewed through the realized income, more precisely the realized profit that enables further investment in green tourism and stable employment. Cevirgen, Kesgin, and Kaya (2008, pp. 269-289) point out that the competitiveness of a tourist destination depends on the attractions it has, and their inclusion in the list of available activities plays a key role in the satisfaction and experience of visitors and tourists. Today there are many attractions. Many authors have dealt with their divisions. However, Kušen's division of attractions is the most acceptable (Kushen, 2022, p. 147). Lew (1994, p. 44) states that resources become attractions only when the established tourism system marks them as such. , i.e. raise them to that status. Therefore, it is necessary to observe the key outcome and ultimate goal of the green economy, which is the subject of research in many works related to the satisfaction of consumers or users of tourism services as part of the green economy (Lucrezi et. al. 2017) It is very important that research in this area refers to the application of green standards in health tourism facilities, to consumer demand for products or services that are additionally offered in green tourism. An

important determinant is the consumer's willingness to pay extra for the specified products or services (Nelson et al. 2021; Fudurich and Mackay 2020). In accordance with this marketing concept and approach to the green economy, profits from the use of protected areas should be reinvested for the needs of further local community development and employment. The role of human resources (innovating knowledge and rewarding environmental behaviors) makes a special contribution to the quality of the environment (Pham et al. 2019). The new model of health tourism requires the inclusion of all interrelated participants of the green economy, related to public administration, economy, tourists or users of health tourism services and the local community.

## **HEALTH TOURISM AS A MULTIPLICATIVE FACTOR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SERBIA**

Starting from that, the institutional framework of sustainable development is determined by two key segments, first, the environment and natural resources and their rational use in the function of environmental protection, second, the economic dimension of sustainable development in the focus of the competitive structure of the market in the function of economic growth. The attitude towards the green economy, when it comes to primary market institutions in production, trade of goods and provision of services, has a crucial role in future economic development. It is certain that intensive changes are taking place in our national economy, which include health tourism as a focus of sustainable development. When talking about health tourism as a multiplier of economic development, it is assumed that a certain country has a developed key structure of the sector of economic activities with the aim of meeting the needs of service users.

Tourist consumption as a result of customer satisfaction directly affects the economic effects of activities related to health tourism. By researching the tourist market, information can be obtained that indicates the mutual connection and dependence between the achieved tourist consumption and its profitability. Better product quality, brand, prices and other specific packages of tourist offer directly contribute to higher tourist consumption. If it is assumed from the data that domestic tourist consumption is RSD 137,736,710,025 (WTTC 2013, Serbia Travel), and that the number of tourists in 2011 was 2,068,610 (RZS,

2012), then individual tourist consumption would be RSD 66,584 . For the sake of easier calculation of the multiplier of tourist consumption in Serbia, which drives economic activity, this amount should be rounded to 70,000 (Milićević, 2016, p. 182).

**Table 1.** *The impact of tourist consumption on the economy of Serbia (according to the input/output table) - multiplicative effect (first transaction)*

Donors, Recipients		Hospitality	Traffic	Trade	Craftsmanship	Total
1.	The amount that enters	44,261	14,266	8,981	2,492	70,000
2.	Industry and mining	5,047	658	2,093	112	7,910
3.	Agriculture and fisheries	224	0	56	0	280
4.	Traffic	1,547	1,155	126	42	2,870
5.	Trade	6,020	672	2,072	280	9,044
6.	Hospitality	2,835	70	7	7	2,919
7.	Craftsmanship	574	798	35	154	1,561
8.	Communal activities	1,505	140	28	49	1,722
9.	Other commercial activity	266	112	28	14	420
10.	Import	7,168	1,309	3,416	504	12,397
11.	Amortization	1,680	2,240	42	84	4,046
12.	Income	17,129	6,930	973	1,197	26,229
a)	Personal income net	8,274	3,486	168	609	12,537
6)	Means of general and joint consumption	7,196	2,604	595	385	10,780
и)	Allocated for the fund	1,659	840	210	203	2,912

Source: Milićević, R. (2016). Resursne atrakcije kao multiplikativni factor razvoja zdravstvenog turizma Srbije, Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Economics in Kragujevac, p. 183.

From table 1, it can be seen that out of a total of 70,000 dinars, tourists



spent 44,216 dinars in catering facilities (of which between 35% and 50% for food, which amounts to 15,419.35 to 22,130.5), on traffic 14,266, in trade 8,981 dinars, craftsmanship 2,492 dinars.

In the next transaction, these amounts are included in the general economic turnover of all branches and activities that make up the tourist system, i.e. 44,261 dinars, realized by hospitality and tourism, are divided into industry and mining 5,047 dinars, agriculture 224 dinars, trade 6,020 dinars, catering 2,835 dinars, etc. Amounts 5,047, 224, 1,547, 6,020, 2,835, 574, 1,505. dinars, represent net income in mutual relations with tourism and catering (because for example, 184 consumed agricultural and food products in the amount of 15,419.35 and 22,130.5 dinars, receive + 224 dinars in the second transaction). In this transaction, the import is 12,397 dinars, the depreciation is 4,046 dinars, the income is 26,229 dinars, of which the net is 12,537 dinars, the joint consumption is 10,780 dinars, while the funds allocated to the fund are equal to the amount of 2,912 dinars. Putting all five transactions into a single table of intersectoral relations of tourist consumption and other economic activities, which make up tourism as a system, the data written in the following table is obtained (table 2).

**Table 2.** *The impact of tourist consumption on economic activities, input/output relations*

Commercial activity	Transactions					TOTAL
	1	9	3	4	5	
Industry and mining		11,620	11,494	8,085	5,285	36,484
Agriculture and fishing		224	420	224	210	1,148
Traffic	14,266	3,619	1,694	1,071	735	21,385
Trade	8,981	20,916	12,901	7,315	5,271	55,384
Catering	44,261	3,927	854	357	280	49,979
Craftsmanship	2,492	1,841	980	630	413	6,356
Communal activities	-	2,107	966	595	399	4,067
Other commercial activities	-	1,225	924	665	448	3,262
<b>TOTAL</b>	70,000	55,202	38,080	24,640	16,933	204,855

Source: Milićević, R. (2016), op. cit., p. 188.

If Clement's multiplication coefficient (Milenković, 1994, p. 219) is applied to these data, the result is:

$$K = \frac{1}{1 - \frac{134.855}{204.855}} = \frac{1}{1 - 0,6582} = \frac{1}{0,3417} = 2.93$$

C = changes in consumption = 134.855

Y = changes in income = 204.855

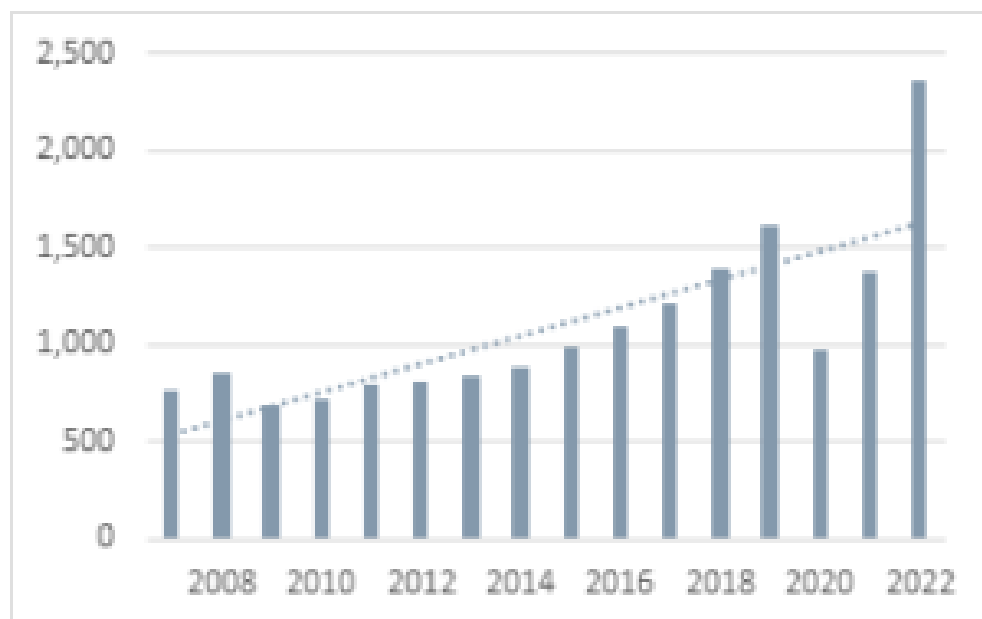
This coefficient means that the multiplier of tourism spending is 2.93, that is, the money spent on all types of expenditures in tourism is reversed almost 3 times in all economic branches within one year. If, on average, tourists in Serbia allocated about 45% of the initial value of their consumption (70,000) for food, i.e. 31,500 dinars, at the end of the fifth transaction, 33,782 units of income will be obtained, or 2,282 units of changes in consumption. If the impact of tourism consumption on Serbian agriculture is calculated, the multiplication coefficient is 7.70, which indicates that tourism still has a very small impact on the development of agriculture and the increase of its income in the observed area (Milićević, 2016, pp. 188-189).

Expressed multisectoral effects of tourism development arise from the multidimensional nature of tourism as a system through direct, indirect and induced impacts on GDP, employment, investments, etc. The multidimensional nature of tourism results from the interactive relationship of dependence with many other activities that make up tourism as a system. Many economic activities, indispensable and related to tourism, arise from this. It is about transport, agriculture, some branches of industry, cultural and recreational activities, payment transactions, etc. On this basis, tourism, and therefore health tourism as part of the green economy, plays a major role in creating jobs for the local community and represents a key factor in sustainable development - which is why it deserves special analytical attention. In the previous table 1, the analytical impact of tourist consumption on the economy of Serbia (according to the input/output table) is shown - a multiplicative effect. Also, in table 2, on the basis of cross-sectoral relations of tourist consumption and other economic activities, which make up tourism as a system, the influence of tourist consumption on economic activities,

input/output relations is shown. It should be emphasized that tourist consumption is a highly variable economic category and depends on numerous factors and limitations.

Looking at it as a whole, tourist consumption is very sensitive to the basic factors that determine economic trends, i.e. the trend of consumption. On the basis of the illustration shown in the graph (figure 1), a big drop can be observed in 2009, after the spillover of the world economic and financial crisis to Serbia, and an approximate oscillation at the given level until 2015, when a growth trend can be observed. The observed years are characterized by low economic growth and high unemployment. With the strengthening of economic growth, there was also an increase in employment and real wages, which influenced the increase in tourism consumption - in 2019, it was approximately twice as high as compared to a decade before.

**Figure 1.** *Tourist consumption in the period 2007-2022.*



Source: NBS Consumption of tourist services, 2007-2022, in millions of euros.

Compared to countries from our immediate or distant environment and some other countries abroad, the daily consumption in those countries is

much higher than the daily consumption of tourists in Serbia. This is influenced by the fact that Serbia does not have a sufficiently developed tourism package as a whole, and therefore also in health tourism. It is about additional contents of the tourist offer that can encourage users of tourist services to even greater additional spending. It is necessary to approach the market research of tourist services to a greater extent, which can popularize domestic tourist destinations to a greater extent in order to increase tourist consumption.

## CONCLUSION

Health tourism and tourist consumption that arises in connection with it, has a great impact on all activities that make tourism as a complex system. It can be concluded that there is a pronounced interdependence between the realized tourist consumption in health tourism and the development of certain activities of the tourism industry. The model of green health tourism is considered a prerequisite for encouraging the long-term economic and ecological development of geographical areas and places characterized by resource attractions. Health tourism is significantly effective in terms of marketing when it comes to the green economy, and it becomes a suitable agent of economic propaganda. It can be considered an important determinant of the transition of tourism as a whole and its sustainable development.

In this context, realizing the potential of green tourism requires the application of mechanisms, and on that basis, adequate instruments that contribute to its sustainable development. In that process, the support of the appropriate institutions of the state is necessary. The countries of the Western Balkans have accepted the idea of a green economy as a function of sustainable development, but in practice they have remained insufficiently consistent in practical application when it comes to green orientation in tourism, especially its part related to health tourism. Serbia, as well as other countries of the mentioned region, should define and concretely implement green strategies for the future development of tourism in order to ensure long-term effects on the economy of the region, the local community, and the environment. Future research in the thematic area requires that more attention be paid to the needs of consumers and their satisfaction, which must be supported by the

adequate quality of the tourist package offer, and thus health tourism. In this context, significant gaps remain in our country and in the world regarding knowledge and empirical research related to the intangible determinants of the green economy. We consider it very important to research and study the behavior of consumers as users of tourist services when it comes to the environment and other determinants of the green economy.

The results of the research in the paper indicate that a strategic sustainable development of health tourism is necessary, along with the rational use of resources that accompany health tourism and the training of competently needed professions within the framework of the "greening" of the economy. It is also necessary to provide support within the institutional framework for a more efficient development of sustainable health tourism through stationary accommodation facilities or green catering, green destinations, green tourist products or the promotion of environmentally conscious users of tourist services. In this context, it is necessary, among other things, to support adequately available public finances, as well as sources of private financing, in order to realize the strategically set goals. It is especially important that the development of health tourism in Serbia supports the overall sustainable development of tourism and the repositioning of Serbia as a tourist destination on the international market.

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# MULTIDIMENZIONALNA ULOGA ZDRAVSTVENOG TURIZMA KAO DEO ZELENE EKONOMIJE U FUNKCIJI ODRŽIVOG RAZVOJA REPUBLIKE SRBIJE

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**Sažetak:** Izraženi multidimenzionalni efekti razvoja zdravstvenog turizma ogledaju se kroz direktne, indirektne i indukovane uticaje, i to na BDP, zaposlenost, investicije itd. Navedena multidimenzionalnost proizilazi iz činjenice da je turistička potrošnja odraz više međusobno povezanih aktivnosti koje čine deo zdravstvenog turizma. Imajući u vidu međusektorsku povezanost različitih delatnosti, osnovna svrha ovog rada je proučavanje osnovnih determinanata ekološke održivosti u zdravstvenom turizmu i, na toj osnovi, posebno o uticaju turističke potrošnje na postizanje ciljeva održivog razvoja u Republici Srbiji. Međusektorska povezanost različitih delatnosti posebno naglašava da je turizam kao deo zelene ekonomije neophodan uslov održivog razvoja. Rad se posebno bavi pitanjima kvaliteta proizvoda, odnosno turističkih usluga i, shodno tome, uticaja na potrošače u zdravstvenom turizmu. Interaktivno uključivanje korisnika usluga zdravstvenog turizma dobija novi značaj u strategijama destinacije, fokusirajući se na kvalitet celokupnog paketa ponude. Štaviše, stvaranje iskustava na konvergenciji turističke proizvodnje i turističke potrošnje je veoma važna tema u funkciji razvoja zdravstvenog turizma.

**Ključne reči:** zdravstveni turizam / multiplikator razvoja / atrakcije resursa / strategije destinacije.