

Title: From Health Care Migration to Health Tourism, a Case Study of Dental Tourism in Hungary

## Abstract

Dental tourism is an important segment of the growing health tourism industry. Patients generate relevant tourism revenues for the destination country beyond the direct income of the dental clinics. This paper illustrates the development of dental tourism in the case of Hungary based mainly on price competitiveness of treatments.

Economic drivers such as favorable exchange rates, differences in insurance coverage, the integration of Central-European countries into the EU and the increase of low cost airlines are the main reasons for dental migration having gradually been transformed into dental tourism. The first part of the paper traces this development in the case of Hungary on the base of in-depth interviews with representatives of the sector arriving at the conclusion that the treatment element still dominates the tourism experience. The question therefore arises whether a more destination based strategy would allow for a sustainable future.

To respond to this question, the second part of the paper models the experience of the dental tourist in three phases - get there, stay there and live there – focusing on trip duration, expenditure, type of intervention and tourists' activities. This model permits to discuss the implications of the current economic crisis on essential vs. non-essential treatments and the impacts of the eventual introduction of the Euro and the subsequent price adaptations. Finally, implications for destination marketing strategies to overcome prospected future decline are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

The research is focusing on the tourism components of a specific medical treatment abroad. Medical tourism captured worldwide attention only in 2006, when medical journals started to publish papers on the topic, as awareness of the phenomenon in both developing and