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# ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF HEALTH TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN TOURISM REGIONS: THE CASE OF BULGARIA

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## Abstract

The topic of the current research is dictated by the growing importance and prospects of the tourism industry in Bulgaria over the past 15 years. The increase and diversification of the needs of tourists lead to the need for a more detailed study of the marketing management of specialized forms of tourism, one of which is health tourism. The relevance of the topic of the present study is determined by the current state of tourism in Bulgaria, as well as by the trends related to combining tourist travel with treatment or prevention of diseases. The importance of the topic is related to the possibility and need for specialized and improved marketing management by stakeholders in health tourism at the macroeconomic level. In the article a system of indicators for a comprehensive assessment of the marketing management of health tourism is developed. Based on the obtained empirical results, recommendations for the development of health tourism in the country are made, which are specified for the tourism region Sofia in the form of a strategic marketing plan. Based on it, strategic marketing plans for the development of health tourism in other tourism regions of the country can be prepared. This would help create a brand Bulgaria as a destination for year-round health tourism.

**Keywords:** Marketing management, health tourism, tourism regions, destination branding.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The object of the research of the article is health tourism at macroeconomic level in Bulgaria. The subject is the marketing management of health tourism and the opportunities it provides for the development of an appropriate marketing strategic plan to lead to its development in the country. For the purposes of the present paper, a methodological framework with criteria and indicators is created, which is applied in the empirical research in order to evaluate and forecast the subject of research.

The main goal of the research is to achieve improvement of health tourism in areas with basic and extended specialization in the field of health tourism using marketing management. The main thesis of the scientific

work is based on the statement that the knowledge and application of marketing management in health tourism is essential for increasing the competitiveness of health. The methodological framework is based on a systematic and holistic approach and covers in particular: analysis and synthesis; induction and deduction; analogy; modeling; abstraction; comparative analysis; statistical and descriptive methods; monitoring method; questionnaire survey and in-depth interview method.

## 2. HEALTH TOURISM - THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

One of the main priorities in government policy in developed and developing countries is the tourism industry. According to Constantin Alexandru (Alexandru, C., 2015) nowadays tourism is one of the most important sources of income in the economy in general. This necessitates the study of tourism management at different levels (macro, meso and micro) and the opportunities for its sustainable development and analysis of the various concepts and good practices regarding the macro level in this direction. The subject of the current study is analysis of the multi-level tourism management in the country of Bulgaria. The tourism industry in Bulgaria serves as a basis for the development and promotion of the country. Bulgaria is an attractive destination for both domestic and international travelers. The current research presents analysis of the tourism development strategies in health tourism management applied in Bulgaria in the context of various foreign practices. The analysis shows that establishing a robust marketing plan for tourism development both at macro and meso level is essential for efficient tourism management in Bulgaria. The current paper offers important guidelines for creating such marketing plan, by identifying the current issues in tourism marketing in Bulgaria and offering a structured response to overcoming these issues.

A number of studies, such as "Successful marketing in tourism - guidelines and prospects for Bulgaria" (Enterprise Europe Network, 2011) have identified various problems in tourism marketing since 2011. For example, one issue is the lack of strong brand image of Bulgaria as a tourist destination. Although international travelers might be aware of Bulgaria as a tourist destination, they might not exactly know where it is on the map, what it might offer, or what distinguishes it from other tourist destinations. Negative representations of the country's tourism in the media are contributing to this issue where the media coverage is often focused on accidents and corruption on the Black Sea coast. An example of this are the well-known videos made in Sunny Beach (a popular clubbing resort on the Black Sea coast), where tourists are seen abusing alcohol.

International practice shows that the best model for destination management in a market economy is the form of public-private partnership. Tourism depends on the provision of private and public services, as well as the use of private and public resources. Public and private sector institutions involved in tourism

organize the destination management and as such they should strive for consensus, coordination, and improvement of governance models for the sustainability of the tourism region and its successful promotion.

Creating a successful tourism marketing plan for Bulgaria is an important step. It must follow a certain algorithm in accordance with the specifics of the sector, containing an analysis of the tourism destination and its current state to assess what future steps are needed, analysis of target markets - it is necessary to track statistics on tourism markets where we have visitors from. It is important to know about their nationality and which tourism regions and locations they have visited in Bulgaria. Having this in mind, marketing actions can focus entirely on these target markets.

A study of various management models concerning the marketing management of Destination Management Organizations (DMO) in Europe, which will be presented later in this paper, finds that the criteria set out in the regulation needs to be expanded for effective destinations management. The concept includes geographical names of the regions. In the territorial scope of the regions are currently established Organizations for tourism region management in Bulgaria (OTRM), which in the literature of marketing in tourism, as well as in the practice of developed tourism countries, are known as Destination Management Organizations (DMO). For the purposes of this study, we assume that the two formulations for designating organizations - Organizations for tourism region management in Bulgaria (OTRM) and Destination Management Organizations (DMO) will be used as synonyms.

Tourism destination management is a widely used concept in theory and practice, and the destination image is of particular interest to researchers and managers in the tourism industry. The tourism destination is the connection between all components of the industry, their maintenance and operation, is a complex and specific element of the tourism industry and the subject of many studies worldwide.

The main task of the DMO is to promote a city, region or country in order to increase the number of visitors. It encourages the development and supply of the destination, focusing on conventional sales and on tourism and services marketing.

The authors in the field of tourism destinations marketing management offer different approaches for planning the management of tourism destinations and forming methods for building and maintaining their image, as a necessary condition for achieving competitiveness of the tourism region, sustainable positioning in the tourism market and differentiation of specific features and competitive advantages to which it is associated.

An analysis of the state of Bulgarian tourism shows that a large-scale national, regional and local policy aimed at the effective use of our tourism resources has not yet been implemented. Today, more than

ever, Bulgaria needs a clear strategy, marketing plan and targeted activities related to the marketing management in order to increase the quality and efficiency of the tourism industry. One of the main obstacles for the efficient use of tourism resources is the uneven geographical distribution and the disproportional sub-branch spectrum of our tourism industry. The main part of the tourism superstructure is concentrated along the Black sea coast and the predominance of sea recreational tourism is strong, which has a seasonal character and is on the verge of exhaustion of its growth potential. There is a need of development and management of some tourism resources, such as balneological ones, and the emphasis should be placed primarily on the creation of the appropriate state policy to guide and support the development of the tourism business and the management of the corresponding tourism regions.

In order the nature and specifics of health tourism to be clarified, first of all we should discuss the theoretical concepts concerning tourism as an industry, whose features, taking into account the diverse needs and requirements of tourists, determines the need to offer and differentiate specialized forms of tourism, contributing to the restoration not only of the vital forces of the individual and his recreation, but also in order to improve his health - mental, physical and emotional.

According to Smith, M. and Puczko, L. (2014) health tourism is a specialized type of tourism in which ordinary tourist activities are associated with an active pursuit of improving human health. The scientific literature abounds with terms that meet this definition, including medical, balneo and spa tourism. All of them correspond to the traditional concept of health tourism, based on the use of natural healing resources for the treatment of patients (tourists) in a resort setting. The terms “restorative” or “curative” tourism, including fitness and wellness, are an echo of the relatively new trends in health tourism. The main idea of this innovative trend is the improvement of the physical condition of the client (tourist) and his health, which is not necessarily related to the application of natural healing resources, summarize Tsonev, N. and Basmadzhieva, S. (2017)

In addition to the Tourism Act in Bulgaria, which aims to create conditions for the development of specialized types of tourism - cultural, health (medical, spa and wellness and balneo), eco, MICE (meetings, incentive, conferences and exhibitions), adventure, sport, hunting and golf tourism, etc. on January 29, 2016 an Ordinance on the terms and conditions for certification of “ balneotherapy/medical spa center”, “spa center”, “wellness center” and “ thalassotherapy center” was created , after which it was revoked on the grounds of Art. 138, paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Tourism Act and Regulation № 04-14 of 9 October 2019 was issued on the terms and conditions for certification of “balneotherapy/medical spa center”, “spa center”, “wellness center” and “ thalassotherapy center”, according to which the types of centers subject to certification are determined according to the services they provide (Figure 1).

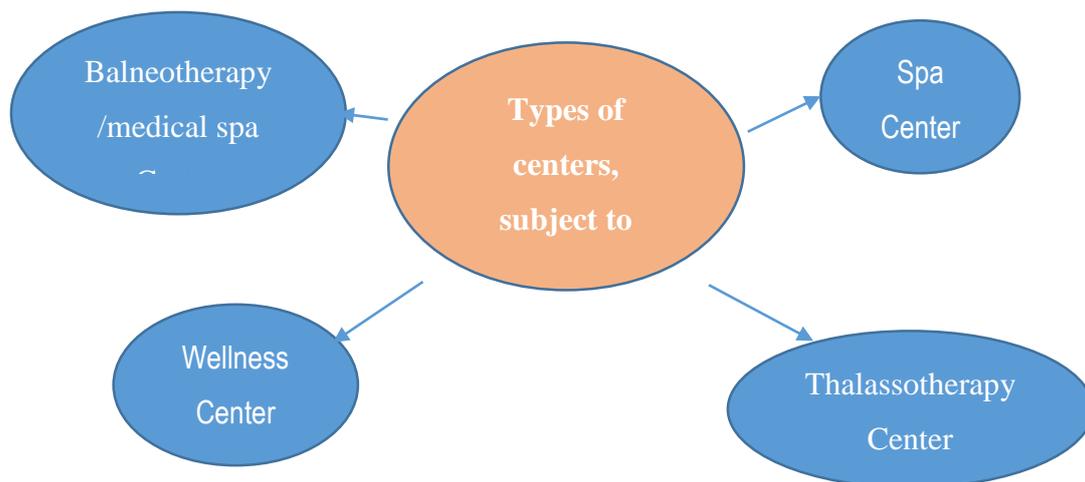


FIGURE 1 - TYPES OF CENTERS, SUBJECT TO CERTIFICATION  
 Source: Author's systematization according to Regulation № 04-14

Analyzes made by Georgiev, G. and Vasileva, M. (2010) show that there are different types of health tourism are playing a big role in the industry and have an increasing share of world tourism and this is reflecting the economy of some countries as well. The different theoretical solutions can be distinguished by some types of health tourism, such as: spa, wellness balneo tourism, medical tourism, sport tourism, weight loss center and addiction treatment center. In our opinion the addiction treatment center could be includes as a share of medical tourism, and the weight loss centers and sports tourism correspond to wellness tourism.

According to the Concept for the tourism regions in Bulgaria there are only three types of health tourism, as shown on Table 1.

TABLE 1 - TYPES OF HEALTH TOURISM

Type	Definition
<b>Spa and wellness tourism</b>	Related to body and soul comfort procedures based on various natural resources and products (mineral water, essential oils, healing mud, wine, chocolate, etc.)
<b>Balneo tourism</b>	Related to effective treatment and rehabilitation under medical control, through mineral water, healing mud, etc.
<b>Medical tourism</b>	The main purpose of the trip is the improvement or restoration of health through medical intervention.

Source: Author's systematization, adapted on the Concept for tourism regions in Bulgaria

In the future, this could be updated according to the global trends and it is necessary to give a unified classification of all existing types and subtypes of health tourism in all existing regulations.

The policy of the legislative and executive power related to the proper exploitation of the natural resources used for the purposes of health tourism, as well as the regulations concerning the rights to use them, are of major importance for the development of health tourism. Last but not least, the created specialized

superstructure has an impact, which in combination with the previously listed factors should help to increase the effect of the application of health tourism products related to improving the quality of life, prevention, rehabilitation, diagnosis and treatment. Marketing management in this direction should aim to achieve similar results for both national tourists and incoming international tourists.

Health tourism in Bulgaria is based on three types of natural healing resources: mineral water, healing mud, healing climate. The significant balneological resources of the country are represented mainly by a wide variety of hydromineral waters (spring and thermal) and deposits of healing mud. In terms of mineral water richness, Bulgaria ranks among the first countries in Europe. In combination with the favorable bioclimatic conditions of the country, they support the development of health and spa tourism.

Health tourism research on the North American continent must take into account the significant difference between the European and American interpretation of the term "spa". In the European meaning, it refers mainly to thermal baths, while in the United States, it is associated with facilities where service providers seek to create mental, intellectual and spiritual well-being and balance of consumers through various methods (meditation, beauty procedures, yoga, sports activities and healthy eating). According to studies on the supply of different types of spa services, it is established that day spas play a key role in the entire sector.

According to Eurostat statistics (2010), Bulgaria ranks second in Europe after Iceland in the number of mineral springs, providing all types of mineral water existing in nature.

In order to distinguish more precisely the types of health tourism and the use of unified terminology, based on officially accepted and market-imposed definitions worldwide, a classification of the main types of tourism and their subtypes adapted to the realities in Bulgaria has been developed.

Like any classification, this one is to some extent conditional. It is based on three key criteria - motivation to take the trip, type of tourist activity and environment for its practice.

According to the subject of this article, health tourism is classified into three types (spa and wellness, balneo tourism and medical tourism), according to the Concept for tourism regions in Bulgaria as already mentioned. It is time to update the subtypes of health tourism in the Tourism Act according to the new regulations, as well as with regard to the places of accommodation. The Tourism Act talks about medical spa centers, but there is no definition given to the medical tourism.

The main and leading type of health tourism is spa and wellness tourism. There are many definitions of recreation, wellness and spa. This collusion is based on the works of the following authors, who were

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analyzed for the purposes of the study: Stanciulescu,- G, Smith, M., Puczko, L, Myers, Sweeney and Witmer, Georgiev, G., Vasileva, M, etc.

According to the authors, the most basic characteristics of spa tourism are that it is a major element of the health and wellness movement and includes holistic treatment and prevention activities. For the wellness tourism we can summarize that it is: a state of balance - body, spirit and mind; holistic aspects related to self-responsibility, care for physical condition and beauty, etc .; holistic lifestyle and creating a healthy body, spirit and mind through positive interventions.

According to Efe, R. and co (2014), balneotourism is developing as balneological and therapeutic practices performed far from the permanent residence of individuals. Balneology is considered a “branch of medicine that deals with the treatment of diseases through mineral water and therapies based on its use by humans.” Other authors who have written in the field of spa tourism are Stankova, M., Kirilov, S., Lautier, M., Kervankiran, I. and others.

Among the main types of health tourism is medical tourism, which is one of the fastest growing types. There are several definitions of medical tourism and authors who have written about it - Smith, M., Puczko, L, JoannaGainesC, VirginiaLee, Ho, Kuo-Ting, Connell, J. and others, One of these definitions describe medical tourism as a trip to a foreign country for the purpose of a detox diet, dental treatment or for the purpose of performing an intervention or surgery. This trip must include at least one night at the place where the intervention took place. According to Jonathan Edelheit, president of the Florida Medical Tourism Association, “medical tourism refers to the travel of people to foreign countries other than their place of residence for medical treatment.”

In our opinion, the available resources of many countries, as well as the priority in terms of prevention for human health, provide an opportunity for the development of health tourism in all its forms. Health tourism sites should work together with the institutions of the respective countries to develop a unified policy for successful marketing management.

### 3. HEALTH TOURISM DESTINATIONS – ANALYSIS OF GOOD PRACTICES

This study examines and analyzes international good practices and opportunities for their application in marketing management, both for different countries whose priority is health tourism and for different destinations and travel companies.

.After the examined terminological statements about the essence of health tourism and its resource provision, the main problems of the spa and wellness sector in Bulgaria are studied. One of them is the impossibility to clearly distinguish the spa and wellness specifics, as well as the creation of a common

definition. Various cultural methodologies in health tourism have been studied and adapted, as well as world classification systems. The good practices of some leading countries in the three types of health tourism are analyzed - China, Thailand, Taiwan, India, Colombia, Greenland, Israel, Iran, Macedonia, Cuba, Malaysia, Turkey, Dubai and Spain. In the empirical part of the present article, Taiwan was chosen due to the successful government intervention in the development and management of international health tourism. As was already discussed, a large-scale national, regional and local policy aimed at the effective use of our tourist resources has not yet been implemented in Bulgaria. It is established that a strategy with a focus on the types and subtypes of health tourism in Bulgaria is needed in order to increase the quality and efficiency of our tourism industry. Therefore, in the model in the practical part of the article an example for such a strategy is developed.

One of the main obstacles to the efficient use of tourism resources in a number of countries, especially those with larger territories, such as the United States, China and India, is the uneven geographical distribution and disproportionate sub-sectoral spectrum of the tourism industry in them.

Some authors study and formulate in their scientific works different classification systems of spa and wellness tourism. For the purposes of the present study, the main ones existing worldwide are derived and distinguished. We focus on two of the most popular ones - the International spa association (ISPA) and the regulations of Australia.

Leading place in the literature and practice is the classification of the International spa association (ISPA). It gives the following definition of spa: "Spas are places dedicated to achieving overall well-being through a variety of professional services that promote the renewal of mind, body and spirit." Taking into account that definition, ISPA divides the sites offering spa products in several groups: destination spa; resort/hotel spa, cruise ship spa, mineral springs spa, club spa, medical spa, daily spa, cosmetic spa.

Tourism regulations in Australia use the following classification: Destination spa (Resort Spa, Hotel Spa, Spa retreat, Health Spa); Natural bathing spa (Natural spring spa, Hot spring spa, Natural mud spa, sea water spa); Day spa (Day spa, Wellness spa, Bathhouse Spa, MediSpa and CosmediSpa); Related spa (Salon spa, Dental Spa, Nails spa)

Taking into account the meso- and macro- health tourism destination management, the ones with biggest potential are spa destinations, spa mineral springs and spa hotels. They should be with highest priority in terms of creation and development of more sites, and the main purpose will be a targeted strategy and a comprehensive development policy creation.

Taiwan's successful marketing management as a health tourism destination is related to the following measures. In 2010, the government internationalized the healthcare sector. Its strategy not only expands

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the market volume of Taiwanese healthcare, but also promotes the destination worldwide. The execution of this health development strategy has identified two phases, which include the following steps:

Phase 1: Promoting the quantity and quality of the international tourism.

Phase 2: Creation of an international park of the healthcare industry.

Health tourism worldwide is a current issue and provides many opportunities for small and medium businesses investment and development. It is one of the most developed specialized types of tourism and there are many destinations that are a benchmark for some of its subtypes.

The policies of the leading health tourism destinations worldwide, along with the innovations they promote, can be adapted to the local policies in different countries around the world.

Analyzing the good practices in medical tourism in particular, we can base on the one of the latest Lonely Planet rankings, showing the top 10 destinations for health tourism. It emphasizes their popularity in terms of a particular area of medical tourism (Table 2).

TABLE 2 - CREATING A PUBLIC IMAGE FOR A CERTAIN MEDICAL TOURISM AREA:

Country	Medical tourism area
India	Ophthalmology
Thailand	Gender reassignment surgery
China	Acupuncture
Colombia	Surgery
Greenland	Injury operations
Israel	Treatment of diseases - from infertility to cancer
Iran	Plastic surgery (rhinoplasty)
North Macedonia	Dentistry
Cuba	Addiction treatment
Malaysia	Plastic surgery (breast augmentation surgery)

Source: Author's systematization according to Lonely Planet ranking

As a result of the analysis we can say that health tourism is one of the fastest growing specialized types in tourism, both in Bulgaria and worldwide, so it is essential to know and sustainable managing it. Evidence is the good practices in the field, the priority aspects in the theory and practice and the regulations in the industry.

Bulgaria (as well as countries such as the USA) have the capacity, base and resources to conduct effective marketing management in the identified locations for health tourism, which would increase

revenues and investments in the destinations, and also promote and affirm the countries with health tourism priority on the world tourism map.

#### 4. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH OF THE MACRO MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN BULGARIA

The current paper presents results of combining secondary and primary data collection to study current health tourism marketing management practices in Bulgaria's seven main health tourism regions. The following established tourism regions were included: Rose Valley, Thracia (Plovdiv), Rodopi, Rila-Pirin, Sofia, Black Sea North (Varna), Black Sea South (Burgas). We used secondary data from established sources of tourism practices of health tourism in Bulgaria. Importantly, we used three main primary data collection methods: observation, and a survey and interviews of tourism managers and experts in the field, using the digital research platform Kwik Surveys. Collecting data directly from tourism practitioners and experts is essential for understanding current marketing management practices in Bulgarian tourism (Krasteva, 2013; Zhelev, 2007). The main participants are tourism marketing specialists and managers, experts from the Ministry of Tourism and from other institutions participating in health tourism development and its marketing management in Bulgaria such as Organizations for tourism region management in Bulgaria (OTRM). Since our focus is specifically to establish a model for best practices of health tourism management in Bulgaria, including management decisions of marketing specialists in established and other relevant organizations, at this point our study does not include a consumer survey component.

The collection of primary information in the present study was made in the period May-September 2019 on the basis of a developed methodological framework of criteria and indicators.

We based our system of criteria and indicators on the theoretical concepts in the tourism field, as well as on the good practices of leading countries in health tourism. The system of criteria and indicators used in the survey questionnaire includes indicators such as (see Table 3):

1. External factors influencing health tourism marketing management such as political, economic, and environmental factors.
2. Legislation system used in Bulgaria
3. Destination marketing practices and used tools in targeting external markets: digital marketing; event marketing (e.g., conferences, festivals), cooperation programs, art tourism marketing, historical marketing.
4. Infrastructure in the country – transport (roads and airports) and communications (internet)..
5. Other internal factors - superstructures of hotels, restaurants, vehicles and equipment, as well as intermediary and commercial superstructure.

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6. Other internal factors - specialized superstructure of medical centers, spas, wellness, balneological, and telasotherapeutic centers.
7. Brand image of Bulgaria as a health tourism destination – brand recognition, brand equity as per price / quality ratio, and destination image perception.
8. Other internal factors - human resource management such as tourism professionals' education, qualifications, skills and expertise.
9. Other external factors influencing health tourism marketing management such as innovative treatment methods and medical equipment, and medical park.

TABLE 3 - TABLE OF CRITERIA FOR THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

No	Criteria	Indicators	Significance factor
1.	External factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism in the destination	1.1. Political factor 1.2. Economic factors 1.3. Environment	0,05
2.	Legislation	2.1. Strategy for sustainable development of tourism in Bulgaria 2014-2030 and regulations 2.2. Law on Tourism in its part concerning the specialized types of tourism 2.3. Regulation № 2 on the terms and conditions for certification of "balneotherapy (medical spa) center", "spa center", "wellness center" and "thalassotherapy center".	0,06
3.	External marketing of the destination	3.1. Web marketing 3.2. Events, conferences, festivals 3.3. Cooperation programs 3.4. Tourist exhibitions 3.5. Advertising 3.6. Sightseeing tours 3.7. Publications and brochures	0,11
4.	Internal factors - Infrastructure	4.1. Airports 4.2. Internet 4.3. Road infrastructure	0,07
5.	Internal factors - Superstructure	5.1. Hotel superstructure 5.2. Restaurant superstructure 5.3. Vehicles and equipment 5.4. Intermediary superstructure 5.5. Commercial superstructure	0,12
6.	Internal factors – Specialized superstructure	6.1. Medical centers 6.2. Spa and wellness centers 6.3. Balneological and telasotherapeutic complexes	0,20
7.	Image and perception of Bulgaria as a health tourism destination	7.1. Recognizability, brand 7.2. Price/quality ratio 7.3. Tourism destination image 7.4. Perception of the tourist place	0,14
8.	Internal marketing – human resources	8.1. Education and qualification 8.2. Knowledge and skills (specialized)	0,12
9.	Specific factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism	9.1. Innovative treatment methods 9.2. Innovative medical devices 9.3. Medical park	0,13
		Significance factor	1.00

Source: Author's systematization

The survey was composed of a questionnaire, which is targeting two different groups. The first group includes marketing specialists and other management staff such as managers of hotels, travel agencies, tourist complexes, and members of professional health tourism associations. The second group includes experts, consultants, and educators from various tourism industry bodies such as The Ministry of Tourism in Bulgaria, municipalities working in the tourism sector, the Committee on Economic Policy and Tourism in the National Assembly, other professional associations in the health tourism field, consulting companies in the tourism field, as well as university tourism programs.

The questionnaires contain the same questions but are divided into two separate surveys according to the type of respondents, to compare the assessment of employees in specialized enterprises with that of experts.

Furthermore, we conducted a semi-structured interview as well, to be more comprehensive and representative of the summarized results. We have interviewed 6 experts in total – 2 of which are managers in travel agencies, 1 in a hotel, 2 are educators in the University of National and World Economy and New Bulgarian University and 1 is working in the Ministry of Tourism. They determine the importance of the criteria as the average score for each criterion of the six interviewees is set as such in the overall score.

The questions included in the semi-structured interview with experts from the tourism industry and consultants in the field of tourism are listed below:

- Question 1 (Introductory question): What is your opinion about the marketing management of health tourism in Bulgaria at the national level at the moment?
- Question 2: In your opinion, what is the significance of the influence of **External factors** on the development of health tourism in the destination?
- Question 3: In your opinion, what is the significance of the **Legislation** in tourism for the development of health tourism in the destination?
- Question 4: In your opinion, what is the significance of the development of the **External Marketing** of the destination for the development of the health tourism in the destination?
- Question 5: In your opinion, what is the significance of the **Infrastructure** for the development of health tourism in the destination?
- Question 6: In your opinion, what is the significance of the **Superstructure** in tourism for the development of health tourism in the destination?
- Question 7: In your opinion, what is the significance of the **Specialized Superstructure in Health Tourism** for the development of health tourism in the destination?
- Question 8: In your opinion, what is the significance of the **Image and the perception** of the specific country as a health tourism destination for the development of health tourism in it?

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- Question 9: In your opinion, what is the importance of **Human Resources** for the development of health tourism in the destination?
- Question 10: In your opinion, what is the significance of **Specific Factors** such as innovative treatment methods, innovative medical procedures and medical park for the development of health tourism in the destination?
- Question 11: Please try to rank the various factors we have talked about so far in a certain order - from the most important to the least important for the development of health tourism (from 1 to 9).
- Question 12: Taking into account everything so far, what **recommendations** would you give for improving the marketing management of health tourism in Bulgaria?

## 5. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

We analyzed the results from a total of 40 responses from marketing specialists and a total of 10 responses from experts. We summarize the results below and compare the results of the two respondent groups.

As a result of the survey and summarized through the Kwik Surveys system, the following results can be derived, both in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and criteria and indicators. Based on the results of the first 31 questions (with a score from 1 to 5) from the first questionnaire - to marketing specialists and managers, statistics as follows, incl. means, standard deviation, skew and kurtosis:

TABLE 4 - SURVEY RESULTS

Question	M	SD	Ske	Kur
1. Evaluate the degree of influence of political factors on the marketing management of health tourism?	3.65	1.01	-0.75	0.86
2. Evaluate the degree of influence of economic factors on the marketing management of health tourism?	4.3	0.64	-0.4	-0.55
3. Evaluate the degree of influence of the environment on the marketing management of health tourism?	4.3	1	-1.32	0.59
4. Evaluate the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in Bulgaria 2014-2030 and the regulations in their part concerning health tourism (page 49-62; <a href="https://www.strategy.bg/FileHandler.ashx?fileId=4758">https://www.strategy.bg/FileHandler.ashx?fileId=4758</a> )?	2.75	1.09	-0.2	-0.25
5. Evaluate the Tourism Act in its part concerning the specialized types of tourism and in particular the health tourism (page 2, 76, 89-95 and 129-130; <a href="http://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/documents/2018-06/zakon_za_turizma.pdf">http://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/documents/2018-06/zakon_za_turizma.pdf</a> )?	2.65	0.85	-0.77	0.11
6. Evaluate Regulation № 2 on the terms and conditions for certification of "balneotherapy (medical spa) center", "spa center", "wellness center" and "thalassotherapy center"? ( <a href="http://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/documents/2016-02/naredba-08-02-2016.pdf">http://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/documents/2016-02/naredba-08-02-2016.pdf</a> )	2.85	1.19	-0.26	-0.97
7. Evaluate the web marketing, which Bulgaria applies in its promotion as a health tourist destination ( <a href="https://bulgariatravel.org/">https://bulgariatravel.org/</a> ; <a href="https://ilovebulgaria.eu/">https://ilovebulgaria.eu/</a> )?	2.1	0.94	0.56	-0.45

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Question	M	SD	Ske	Kur
8. Evaluate the number of events, conferences and seminars in the field of health tourism that are organized or attended by the Ministry of Tourism and the individual municipalities that you know about?*	2	0.89	0.45	-0.69
9. Evaluate the tourist exhibitions / fairs in the field of health tourism that Bulgaria visits or organizes?	2.1	1.27	1.13	-1
10. Evaluate the campaigns with which Bulgaria is advertised as a health tourism destination in the last 2-3 years?	1.65	0.79	0.77	-1
11. Evaluate the quantity and quality of publications and brochures in the field of health tourism that Bulgaria issues ( <a href="http://www.tourism.government.bg/bg/kategorii/informacionni-materiali/broshuri-na-bulgarski-ezik">http://www.tourism.government.bg/bg/kategorii/informacionni-materiali/broshuri-na-bulgarski-ezik</a> ) ?	1.9	0.83	0.77	0.35
12. Evaluate the quality of the airports in Bulgaria?	2.95	1.28	0.1	-1
13. Evaluate the quality of the internet in Bulgaria?	4.4	0.8	-1.55	2.61
14. Evaluate the quality of road infrastructure in Bulgaria?	2.55	1	0.16	0.28
15. Evaluate the hotel superstructure in the health tourism regions (Rose Valley, Thrace, Rhodopes, Rila-Pirin, Sofia, Varna, Burgas)?	3.2	1.07	-0.7	-0.28
16. Evaluate the restaurant superstructure in the health tourism regions (Rose Valley, Thrace, Rhodopes, Rila-Pirin, Sofia, Varna, Burgas)	3.05	1.07	-0.11	-0.02
17. Evaluate the vehicles in the health tourism regions (Rose Valley, Thrace, Rhodopes, Rila-Pirin, Sofia, Varna, Burgas)?	2.6	0.86	0.43	-0.76
18. Evaluate the intermediary superstructure in Bulgaria (travel agencies)?	3.45	1.02	0.15	-1.07
19. Evaluate the trade superstructure in the health tourism regions (Rose Valley, Thrace, Rhodopes, Rila-Pirin, Sofia, Varna, Burgas)?	3.3	0.78	0.06	-0.27
20. Evaluate the quantity and quality of medical centers in Bulgaria?	3.1	1.14	-0.21	-0.61
21. Evaluate the quantity and quality of spa and wellness centers in Bulgaria?	3.65	0.91	-0.49	-0.39
22. Evaluate the quantity and quality of balneo and thalassotherapy centers in Bulgaria?	2.95	1.28	0.41	-0.95
23. Assess whether the branding of Bulgaria as a health tourism destination is recognizable?	1.4	0.59	1.24	0.78
24. Evaluate the price / quality ratio of health tourism products and services offered in health tourism sites in Bulgaria?	2.9	1.09	-0.29	-0.42
25. Evaluate the image of Bulgaria as a health tourism destination?	2.05	0.86	0.4	-0.53
26. Evaluate the perception that is created in tourists visiting Bulgaria for health tourism (according to your or official published data)?	2.8	0.99	0.1	0.19
27. Evaluate the level of education and qualification of employees in the field of health tourism in Bulgaria?	2.75	1.04	-0.02	-0.01
28. Evaluate the specialized knowledge and skills that those employed in the field of health tourism in Bulgaria have acquired in practice?	3.05	1.02	0.19	-0.37
29. Evaluate the use of innovative methods of treatment in the field of medical tourism in Bulgaria (innovative methods of treatment, operations and cosmetic procedures)?	2.9	1.09	-0.54	-1.08
30. Evaluate the use of innovative medical devices in the field of medical tourism in Bulgaria (eg use of artificial intelligence, devices for recognizing hidden symptoms of diseases, etc.)?	2.71	1.14	0.25	-0.58
31. Evaluate the medical park in the health tourism field in Bulgaria (number of hospitals and clinics, number of beds, conditions of hospital and after hospital stay, etc.)?	2.31	0.99	0.12	-1.07

Source: Author's systematization

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Demographics. Most respondents were women (70% from the marketers and managers' group and 80% of the experts). From the results analysis, the following summaries can be made. First of all, from the point of view of the respondent's demographic characteristics, gender, age and education are considered, according to the standards of such kind of research. In summarizing the results by gender, women predominate. Among marketers and managers most are people between 31 and 40 years (50%), followed by respondents aged up to 30 years (45%), and among experts is an equal number of people between 31 and 40 years and those over 50 years old (40% each group), followed by respondents aged between 41 and 50 years (20%). From the above data we can conclude that the average age of the surveyed experts in tourism is higher than the surveyed marketing specialists and managers. 100% of first target group have completed higher education, while for experts they are 80%, the remaining 20% have completed secondary special education.

In the following exposition a comparative analysis of the results on all the above criteria and indicators is made.

Based on the results of the study related to the first criterion, we find that the marketing management of health tourism is most influenced by economic factors, followed by environmental factors, and on a last place influenced by political factors. Therefore, the choice to use a tourist product in a specific tourism region for health tourism is made by the respondents provided that the environment (climate and natural resources related to prevention, rehabilitation and treatment) favors positive effects on the tourist. The conclusion is that countries with underdeveloped economies cannot encourage the development of health tourism and attract solvent tourists. It is interesting that the political stability of the destination, in particular the tourism region is not of paramount importance for the choice of a specialized health product, unlike the mass tourist products related to maritime summer and winter mountain tourism.

The data from the questions related to the second criterion show that all respondents put above average assessment of the normative acts, based on which tourism in Bulgaria is currently developing. Therefore, we can conclude that there is a solid basis for upgrading the opportunities for development of Bulgarian tourism.

In the analysis of the normative acts, it can be considered that the most successful for the development of tourism and of health tourism is the developed Strategy for sustainable development of tourism in Bulgaria 2014-2030. In this regard, when building the model in the last part of the work there are no recommendations for this document.

From the results of the study, we conclude that both target groups give a low rating to the overall external destination marketing, related to its promotion as a destination for health tourism. In this regard, our

opinion is that Bulgaria should be positioned and branded as a destination for health tourism in the developed model in the last part in the form of a strategic marketing plan.

For the overall assessment of the indicator events, conferences and festivals, the data show that 85% of the surveyed marketing specialists and managers and 40% of the surveyed experts have not heard of any event, conference or festival of health tourism organized by the Ministry of Tourism or municipalities for the last 2-3 years. 15% of professionals and managers and 40% of experts have heard of 1 to 3 of these types of events, and 0% of practitioners and 20% of experts have heard of more than 3 such events. From the above data and the huge discrepancy in the results we could conclude that the Ministry of Tourism and municipalities either do not organize such events in the field of health tourism or do not give enough publicity for this and the people who should advertise them or participate in them are not aware of their existence.

There is an additional question asked - which are the events that the respondents remember and can point to a specific example. According to the results, only 15% of them have heard of more than 1 event, but most cannot give an example. Recognizable events in the field of health tourism are Vacation and Spa, Spa and Health Tourism, BUSPA Conference and the Conference of Dentists, Conference on Medical and Health Tourism 2017. It is noteworthy that the Ministry of Tourism actually participates in the organization only of the Conference on Spa and Health Tourism and the Conference on Medical and Health Tourism. The other listed events are organized by non-governmental organizations or private legal entities.

Experts in the field of tourism point to many examples of events and conferences organized by the Ministry of Tourism or municipalities, including the National Conference on Medical and Health Tourism, held annually hosted by various municipalities - Velingrad, Mineral Baths - Haskovo, Chepelare, National Conference on Medical Tourism, Medical Tourism in Bulgaria, Status and Opportunities for Development and others. Here the question can be raised about the lack of sufficient publicity of the events, due to which the employees in the field of tourism are not familiar with.

In the authors' model, created in the last paragraph of the study, they bring out a mandatory component - developing a calendar of events at the level of destination and at the level of tourist region (tourism region), as well as forms of their announcement.

The last clarifying question on this indicator is how many events, conferences, and festivals in health tourism, initiated and / or organized by branch organizations in the field of health tourism (balneal, spa or medical) in the last 2-3 years the respondents have heard about. The results also suggest the need for additional measures regarding the announcement of this type of event.

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Regarding the indicator of programs for cooperation in the field of health tourism with other countries, 60% of the respondents are not aware of such, and not 40% of those who are informed about such cannot give a specific example. Recognizable for the audience programs are - programs for cooperation with Greece and Russia and private agreements for balneotherapy of elderly people from Germany without state intervention by Bulgaria. The analysis of the surveyed experts is different - a larger percentage of them have heard of similar agreements and programs, among which are: Development of tourism in the cross-border region Bosilovo-Garmen and a program of cooperation with Poland and Germany.

In the results analysis of the fourth criterion related to the assessment of the country's infrastructure, an average assessment (3.16) is given to the indicator by the managers, and a higher one (3.6) is received by the experts. The results are similar for criterion 5 - superstructure of health tourism.

TABLE 5 - SUMMARY INDICATORS FOR COMPLEX ASSESSMENT OF THE MARKETING MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH TOURISM AT THE MACRO LEVEL IN BULGARIA ACCORDING TO MARKETING SPECIALISTS AND MANAGERS

Criteria	Significance factor	Absolute indicator P	Base value Pib	Relative value O	Differentiated and complex assessment
External factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism in the destination	0,05	4.08	5	0.816	<b>0.041</b>
Legislation	0,06	2.75	5	0.55	<b>0.033</b>
External marketing of the destination	0,11	1,95	5	0.39	<b>0.043</b>
Internal factors - Infrastructure	0,07	3.16	5	0.632	<b>0.044</b>
Internal factors - Superstructure	0,12	3.12	5	0.624	<b>0.075</b>
Internal factors - Specialized superstructure	0,20	3.22	5	0.644	<b>0.129</b>
Image and perception of Bulgaria as a destination for health tourism	0,14	2.29	5	0.458	<b>0.064</b>
Internal Marketing - Human Resources	0,12	2.90	5	0.58	<b>0.070</b>
Specific factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism	0,13	2.59	5	0.518	<b>0.067</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>26.06</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>5.212</b>	<b>0.566</b>

Source: Author's systematization

The fifth criterion considers the superstructure as an element of the internal factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism in Bulgaria and includes five indicators - hotel superstructure; restaurant superstructure; vehicles and equipment; intermediary superstructure and commercial superstructure. The results of the respondents' answers to the questions related to the fifth criterion show that marketing specialists and managers give an average assessment of the superstructure of health tourism in the country again slightly above average - 3.12, and tourism experts give again a slightly higher assessment - 3.4 . In summary of the considered fifth criterion in further studies it may be necessary to make a more differentiated identification of the considered concepts, in order to synchronize with the understandings of the respondents and the evaluation of the individual indicators. When analyzing the

issues of the criterion "specialized superstructure in health tourism", we find that marketers give a low assessment of the availability (quantity and quality) of balneological and thalassotherapy centers, due to lack of information about the quantity, condition and activities of such existing centers. . In contrast, experts give a higher score. Based on that, the recommendation for the need to promote the balneological and thalassotherapy centers in the country, as well as the need for training and seminars. We believe that such seminars should be organized by the Ministry of Tourism and established Organizations for tourism region management in Bulgaria (OTRM), and participants in them should be business professionals. The seventh criterion - Image and perception of Bulgaria as a destination for health tourism - again found a significant difference in the assessments of the two groups of respondents. Managers, unfortunately, report low results regarding the perception of the image of destination Bulgaria as such for health tourism. Therefore, in the developed model, the emphasis is on additional activities related to PR. Examining the results of the respondents' answers on the criterion "Internal Marketing - Human Resources" again there is a significant difference in the respondents' assessment. Once again, managers are much more critical in assessing internal activities related to human capital. Regarding the last criterion - Specific factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism - which has specialized indicators, it should be noted that the difference in the results of the two groups is not significant. This is due to the fact that these questions are not mandatory and not all of the respondents answered them.

TABLE 6 - SUMMARIZED INDICATORS FOR COMPLEX ASSESSMENT OF THE MARKETING MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH TOURISM AT THE MACRO LEVEL IN BULGARIA ACCORDING TO EXPERTS

Criteria	Significance factor	Absolute indicator P	Base value Pib	Relative value O	Differentiated and complex assessment
<b>External factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism in the destination</b>	0,05%	3.66	5	0.732	<b>0.037</b>
<b>Legislation</b>	0,06%	2.86	5	0.572	<b>0.034</b>
<b>External marketing of the destination</b>	0,11%	2,52	5	0.504	<b>0.055</b>
<b>Internal factors - Infrastructure</b>	0,07%	3.60	5	0.72	<b>0.050</b>
<b>Internal factors - Superstructure</b>	0,12%	3.40	5	0.68	<b>0.082</b>
<b>Internal factors - Specialized superstructure</b>	0,20%	3.53	5	0.706	<b>0.141</b>
<b>Image and perception of Bulgaria as a destination for health tourism</b>	0,14%	3.05	5	0.61	<b>0.085</b>
<b>Internal Marketing - Human Resources</b>	0,12%	3.80	5	0.76	<b>0.091</b>
<b>Specific factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism</b>	0,13%	2.87	5	0.574	<b>0.075</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>29.29</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>5.858</b>	<b>0.651</b>

Source: Author's systematization

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In addition, based on the interview and determining the coefficient of significance of each criterion, a comprehensive assessment of the marketing management of health tourism at the macro level in Bulgaria was made according to marketing specialists and experts:

After summarizing and analyzing the results of the empirical research concerning the current state of health tourism in the country, as well as the factors influencing its development, an improved model is developed.

## 6. MODEL FOR MARKETING MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH TOURISM DESTINATIONS BY DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN

Based on the good practices in the field all over the world, already discussed in the article, as well as the regulations governing health tourism in the country, in the last part of the article we create a Strategic Marketing Plan for development and management of health tourism in a particular region in the country in the context of his specialization, which is the model of this article. This model does not exhaust all the parameters when developing a strategic marketing plan. This is placed as a limitation of the study by the authors.

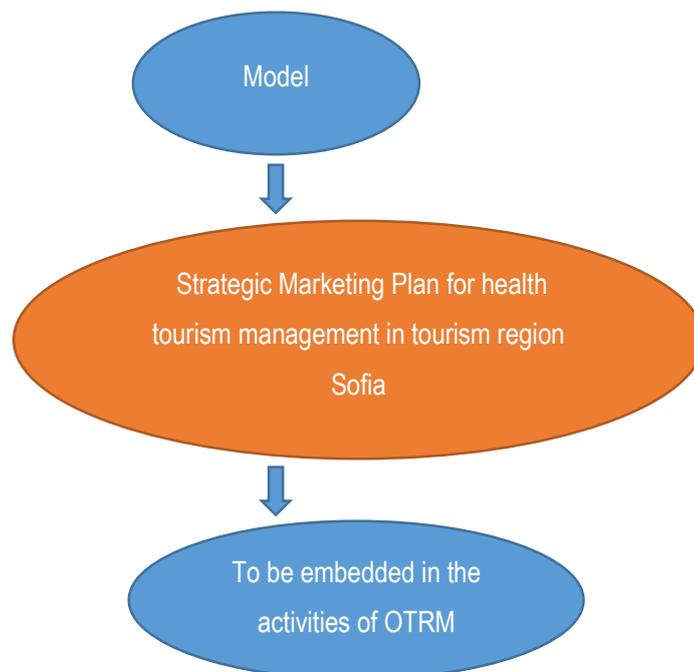


FIGURE 2 - MODEL OF STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN FOR HEALTH TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN A TOURISM REGION

Source: Authors' systematization

From all the good practices mentioned in this article, of particular interest is the example of the successful intervention of the Government of Taiwan in the health tourism development and promotion reviewed

and analyzed by Ho, Kuo-Ting (2015), including the health development strategy promoting the quantity and quality of international tourism and creating an international park for the healthcare industry. Another interesting example is borrowed from countries such as China, Thailand and again Taiwan, where we found established leading practices for the application of specific factors influencing the marketing management of health tourism. These practices are associated with innovative treatments such as massages, manual therapies and procedures used for spa and wellness technology. The classification of ISPA from the point of view of the specialized superstructure related to the establishments offering spa products is also considered, among which were highlighted - club spa, daily spa, spa destination, spa mineral springs and spa resort / hotel. Currently the most popular of all is the spa resort / hotel. Examining the new Ordinance (Ordinance № 04-14) it is found that it does not set different requirements for certification of different types of spa center.

In our opinion, this Ordinance covers only the most popular site - spa resort / hotel, and some of the requirements are not applicable to a spa club, daily spa (or also popular as a city spa), as well as a spa destination. Based on the above, the plan sets a recommendation for normative differentiation of the types of spa establishments. It is also recommended to adapt the minimum mandatory requirements according to the specifics of the site. From the point of view of the health tourism macro management in Bulgaria, we see the greatest prospects in the spa destinations management, spa mineral springs and spa clubs, which is why it is necessary to encourage the creation of more such sites. The main argument for this is that these three types of spa sites can be combined with other specialized tourism types such as business, rural and eco-tourism and wine tourism. Such a management approach is necessary in terms of compliance with new trends in tourism, namely the satisfaction of combined tourism needs. Such an approach is also associated with the need to position our country as a European tourism destination for specialized types of tourism. Last but not least, the approach corresponds to the possibility of branding Bulgaria as a health tourism destination, which is why the authors create a map for the branding of Bulgaria as such at the end of the model. As a result of the developed strategic marketing plan in labor, in subsequent scientifically applied developments, it will be possible to develop such plans for the specific tourist regions of Bulgaria. These plans will stem from the specific resources available, such as cultural and religious sites or others in the area, which favor the development of the particular type of tourism. Based on the already presented main and extended specialization of the tourism regions, in Table 3 we have presented the main and extended specialization of the tourism regions in health tourism with specific examples of locations.

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TABLE 7 - MAIN AND EXTENDED SPECIALIZATION OF THE TOURIST REGIONS IN HEALTH TOURISM

	Tourism region	Main specialization	Extended specialization	Locations based on the extended specialization
1	Rode Valley Region	health and cultural tourism	1. Balneo, spa and wellness tourism	Hisarya, Pavel Banya, Maglizh, Banya, Yagoda village, Sopot, Karlovo, Sliven
2	<b>Thracia Region</b>		5. Health tourism (all types)	Stara Zagora, Mineral Baths, Haskovo, Dimitrovgrad, Plovdiv
3	Rodopi Region		3. Balneo, spa and wellness tourism	Velingrad, Devin, Narechen, Narechenski Mineralni Bani, Pamporovo
4	Rila-Pirin Region		4. Balneo, spa and wellness tourism	Blagoevgrad, Bansko, Garmen, Dobrinishte, Dupnitsa, Kostenets, Sandanski, Sapareva Banya
5	<b>Sofia Region</b>		4. Health tourism (all types)	Sofia, Belchin, Bankya
6	<b>Varn Region (Black Sea North)</b>		5. Health tourism (all types)	Varna, Golden Sands, St.St. Constantine and Helena, Balchik, Albena
7	<b>Burgas Region (Black Sea South)</b>		4. Health tourism (all types)	Burgas, Pomorie, Sunny Beach, Nessebar, St. Vlas

Source: Author's systematization according to the Concept for tourism regions in Bulgaria

The argumentation for selection of research objects regarding the health tourism marketing management in Bulgaria is based on the mentioned Concept for the tourism regions. Based on it, seven of the nine tourism regions have expanded specialization in some of the types of health tourism (spa and wellness, balneo tourism and medical tourism). Only one of the seven (Rose Valley Region) is listed as having a main specialization in health tourism.

For the purposes of creating a strategic marketing plan for the development of health tourism at the destination level, the Sofia region is selected.

The motives for choosing Sofia Region are related to its better characteristics in terms of:

- its economic development;
- the strategic geographical position, due to the location of the capital - Sofia in the region where it originates and;
- the possibility to hold more events, conferences, festivals and other events related to the external marketing of the country;
- favorable infrastructure ;
- developed superstructure;
- the presence of a specialized superstructure ;
- the recognizability of the region again due to the location of the capital in it.

As tourism is a priority sector in the Bulgarian economy, it is necessary to consider all aspects of its marketing management. We use a similar approach in the analysis of the marketing management of Sofia Region, focusing on both the microenvironment and the macroenvironment.

The tasks of the strategic marketing plan for the development of Bulgaria as a tourism destination and in particular for health tourism can be listed as:

- Formulation of priorities, both in health tourism in general and in its subtypes (spa and wellness, balneological and medical tourism).
- Human resources management in health tourism. Qualification of the staff, investments in the creation of university specialties in health tourism. Development and conducting of seminars and courses for additional specialization in health tourism.
- Analysis of Bulgaria as a health tourism destination with the implementation of activities through a marketing plan and to improve the regulations in our country.
- Properties coordination that are placed in the strategic marketing plan for development of Bulgaria as a health tourism destination with the strategic plans for the individual tourism regions, established Organizations for tourism region management in Bulgaria (OTRM) needs to be created or updated.

The scientific and applied results presented in the article are grouped and separated by the following measures:

1. Measures by types and sites for health tourism:

- health tourism in its entirety: creation of combined health tourism products with included cultural and historical programs in the region, as well as creation of combined products in health and religious tourism; certification of Sofia and other locations in the region as a destination for health tourism according to European requirements; development of joint tourism products for health tourism between Sofia and other capitals in the Balkans and others.
- medical tourism: creation of an international medical park, which will integrate all known medical centers, indicated for Sofia region; building international partnerships with hospitals or foreign tour operators; Creating links on the website of the Ministry of Tourism (in the section for health tourism) to specialized medical websites or clinics on the territory of Spfia Region and others.
- spa and wellness tourism: innovative methods of treatment - massages, manual therapies and procedures; differentiation of different types of spa center in Ordinance 04-14 and adaptation of the minimum mandatory requirements according to the specifics of the site, namely - spa club, daily spa, spa destination, spa mineral springs and spa resort / hotel; increasing interest in spa and wellness products as additional services to other specialized forms of tourism such as: urban, business, casino and others.
- thalassotherapy and balneological tourism: creation of a development plan of quality, sustainable and purposeful management of the Central Bath in Sofia; specialization of balneological hotels and centers for the needs of tourism and certification of services by type of treatment and type of mineral water and conducting trainings and seminars on the activities of thalassotherapy and balneological centers for Sofia Region by the Ministry of Tourism or OTRM, to which specialists are invited from business.

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- Measures for the external marketing of Bulgaria and in particular of the Sofia Region: creation of an advertising video for the Sofia Region as a health tourism destination; creation of an online 3D catalog of Sofia Region as a tourism destination with health orientation; developing a calendar of events in the field of health tourism at the location level and a comprehensive calendar for the Sofia Region; Nomination of Sofia in the international ranking of top destinations for health tourism (Lonely Planet or similar) and others.

The set tasks do not have to be performed in the algorithm specified in the model. The activities can be arranged or ranked according to the resource provision of the Organizations for tourism region management (including Sofia) for a 5-year period.

From marketing management point of view, we again come to the conclusion that it is appropriate for Bulgaria to be branded as a year-round health tourism destination.

In confirmation of the above, we have created a map of the brand Bulgaria, by identifying symbols for the three types of health tourism - spa and wellness, balneotourism and medical tourism. This map can be offered as part of the external marketing of Bulgaria, in order to promote it.



FIGURE 3 - BRAND BULGARIA AS A YEAR-ROUND HEALTH TOURISM DESTINATION  
 Source: Basmadzhieva S., Marketing Department for Development of Health Tourism Destinations

In conclusion, it can be summarized that in order to create an improved model for health tourism management in Bulgaria, it is necessary to follow a model based on a developed specialized framework

based on indicators typical of tourism in general, and for health tourism in particular. Based on the analysis of the answers of the respondents from the two surveyed groups (marketing specialists and managers and experts in the field of tourism), using the methods of correlation, regression and factor analysis, as well as determining the significance factor for each of the criteria using the interview method, we were able to establish in which aspects of marketing management it is necessary to take action to improve it. In seven out of the nine tourism regions we found an expanded specialization in the field of health tourism, which is why we can conclude that Bulgaria can be branded as a year-round health tourism destination. It is necessary to create a Strategic Marketing Plan for each of the regions with developed health tourism, and in this paper after an in-depth analysis we focused on the Sofia region, as the model of the article is expressed in the Strategic Marketing Plan of the Sofia region which can be included in the actions of the Organization for Management of the region for a period of 5 years.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Based on several analyzes, global good practices and empirical research, it can be argued that the health tourism in Bulgaria is in a period of growth, but there is a need for marketing management to develop it.

In the created author's model base, it is recommended the preparation and creation of plans and programs for the development of the tourism regions, from the point of view of the main and extended specialization of the tourism regions in Bulgaria, with emphasis on the management of the health tourism in Bulgaria. A recommendation has been made for branding Bulgaria as a destination for year-round health tourism with a map which can be used in the external marketing of the destination.

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