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Medscape: Emerging Notion of Medical Tourism Landscape in Geographical Studies

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Abstract: The global rise in the medical tourism business has reshaped and redistributed the resources at the micro-level and created its landscape. Here, medical technology is advanced, affordable, and available to all. Popularly known as "medscapes", these medical tourism landscapes are evolving to serve the dire needs of patients . Perhaps, The role and contribution of medical tourism to reshaping the natural and socio-economic landscapes at the neighborhood scale is yet to gain proper attention in academia. This letter aims to invite scholarly attention to this emerging notion of the medical tourism landscape in geographical studies by revisiting some of the existing literature.

1 Introduction

The notion of traveling away from your home for health and well-being is a well-established concept in academia. The spas of Hungary, baths of Turkey, and geysers of Sweden have been long been popular destinations for those seeking convalescence. However, medical value travel, or 'medical tourism' as a term has come to represent situations where consumers elect to travel across international borders to receive some form of biomedical services. Differences between medical and health tourism focus on the type of intervention, setting and particular inputs involved. It simply refers to people traveling to a place other than their own to obtain medical care. This medically motivated travel is driven by the inaccessibility and unavailability of the medical needs required at home. As a tool of wealth creation and a viable solution to address the healthcare needs of global patients, today medical tourism is valued as a multi-billion-dollar industry on a global scale. In response to growing medically motivated travel, many therapeutic spaces of the 21st century have been emerging at a much faster rate than before. The global rise in the medical tourism business has reshaped and redistributed the resources at the micro- level and created its landscape. Here, medical technology is advanced, affordable, and available to all. Popularly known as "medscapes", these medical tourism landscapes are evolving to serve the dire needs of patients. The aim is to serve medical visitors, earn foreign revenue, and generate new avenues of earning in addition to those normally developed by travel for leisure. This space is entitled to offer an exclusive medical tourism landscape and extends services in form of a medical tourism package including excellent medical and healthcare products combined with conventional tourism activities. Developing countries of the global south have witnessed the emergence of such medical tourism landscape, attributed to the influx of medical tourists across the borders of continents, nations, and federal states. Asian medical tourism landscapes of India, Thailand, and Singapore are well known to the global patients of America, Europe, and Africa.

However, in existing academic literature, the ethnographic investigations of medical tourists, travel profiles of medical tourists, motivations and experiences of tourists and their companions, destination image evaluation, and comparison with other competing destinations; are most commonly discussed research elements. The role and contribution of medical tourism to reshaping the natural and socio- economic landscapes at the neighborhood scale is yet to gain proper attention in academia. This letter aims to invite scholarly attention to this emerging notion of the medical tourism landscape in geographical studies by revisiting some of the existing literature.

2 What is known about the medical tourism landscape?

Medical tourism landscapes are characterized by their therapeutic value that attracts a significant number of medical tourists to access their biomedical resources. The concept of 'therapeutic landscape' is introduced by Gesler. This concept is a stream of landscape phenomenology exploring the holistic connections between therapeutic qualities, well-being, and health.

'Therapeutic landscape' initially refers to 'extraordinary' places that have long-established reputations for healing, and people often travel long distances to these areas to pursue health. The emergence of the therapeutic landscape into a medical tourism landscape amidst the post-colonial era is often blamed to provide necessary medical services to foreigners that are often unavailable to its citizens in their therapeutic landscape theory provide a multiscale interpretation of wellness tourism to explore how wellness tourists achieve health in healing places. A therapeutic landscape allows for 'viewing places as a symbolic system of healing' and it is essential to recognize the notions of 'symbol' and 'symbolic landscape' to better understand the therapeutic landscape'. Many locales featuring therapeutic landscapes have seen a rise with health tourism as noticed by Yan and He. Their study contributes to the relational thinking of therapeutic landscapes and health tourism and attempts to enrich the interlacing dynamics from the vantage point of the tourismscape.

With a rising trend in biomedical resource consumption, Michalko, Ratz, & Hinek presents an internet-based research project that aims to map the medical care landscape and its characteristics in Hungary. At the micro-scale, Han identifies the distinctive attributes of a healthcare hotel in framing the medical tourism experience. Whittaker & Chee evaluated the experiences of health care seeking and producing changes to hospitals in terms of their design, organization, and spaces. The spatial organization within such settings may either highlight cultural defense or help to create culturally safe spaces. Some of these hospitals are involved in longer-term care such as neurology patient rehabilitation. This study suggests that hospital settings catering to medical travel patients present highly complex cross-cultural intersections]between staff patients and other patients.

3 Case study on Mukundopur – Medical Tourism Landscape of Kolkata

Rai (2019) mentions the emergence of Mukundopur as a medical tourism landscape in Kolkata serving the dire need of patients who are originating from South Asian countries. To unwrap the impact of medical tourism activities on the social landscape, she conducted a

door- to-door survey and found the emergence of the unique landscape at the periphery of eastern Kolkata. As a cluster of major tertiary care hospitals in the city, Mukundapur hosts medical tourists throughout the year. This cluster is characterized by the emergence of flourishing hotels and motels in the vicinity of the big corporate hospitals. Most of the residents have found a second source of income by offering their apartments to medical tourists on a rental basis. The advent of the medical tourism industry brought opportunities to the local retail market which is characterized by the presence of small businesses including food and beverages, pharmacy stores, grocery, clothing, fruits and vegetable vendors, and mobile recharge businesses. Medical travel agencies and travel agents also found the niche domain of growth. This small cluster of medical tourism has been growing as the major private and public service facilitator as observed in Figure 1. Rai (2019) found that "As a spatial marvel, medical tourism assumes a solid part in reshaping and redistributing neighbourhood assets and making a nearby space into a therapeutic tourism space to serve a particular portion of the international community of migrating patients. As an apparatus of wealth creation in a developing nation, medical tourism space portrayed by the arrangement of neighbourhood assets to serve foreign patient community"

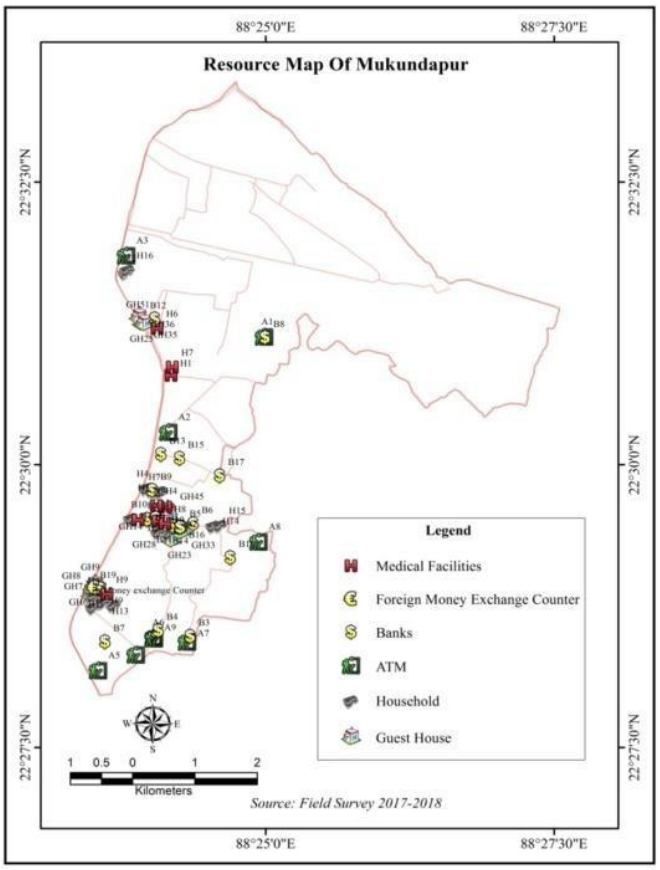

Fig. 1: Distribution of major facilities at Mukundopur, Kolkata (Source: Rai 2019)

Referring to Figure 2 it is noticed that medical tourism widly influences the livelihood of the neighbourhood economy. Based on the response of the sample, the medical tourism region may be delineated to three zones namely as high, moderate and low influencial zones.

High Influential Zone: Medical tourism influences on the livelihood of the samples ranges from 75.01% - 100% indicating that most of the livelihood in the region is influenced by medical tourism. The region is characterised by:

- the presence of four major tertiary care hospitals (RNTIICS, Medica Super specialty Hospital, AMRI and Peerless Hospitals);

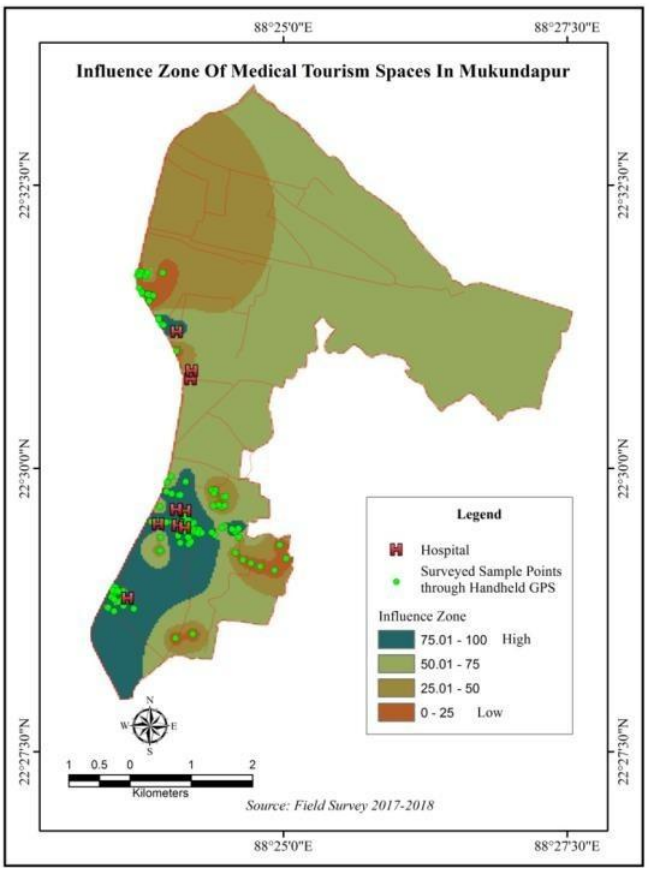

Fig. 2: Estimated Medical Tourism Influence Zone Mukundopur, Kolkata (Source: Rai 2019)

- major concentration of financial assets like Bank, ATM and Foreign Money Exchange Counter
- Around 50+ guest houses are developed in this zone.

Moderate Influential Zone: In this zone medical tourism influences on the livelihood of the samples ranges from 75%-25.01%.

- This zone is present in the adjacent of high influential zone.
- This zone also present in the northern part of Mukundapur where Ruby Hospital, Desun Hospital and Fortis Hospitals are situated.

Low Influential Zone: Approximately 25% of the samplesfound to be dependent on the medical tourism.

4 Future Prospects

A quick review of existing literature reveals that different dimensions of medical tourism including its salient features, functionality, and structure considering both developing and developed countries are highly explored. But the capacity of medical tourism in creating its therapeutic landscape considering the contemporary example on a microscale is missing from the existing knowledge of academia. Perhaps, it is crucial to understand the spatiality of medical tourism to fully rip the potential benefits of this giant industry. It is crucial for geographers, to acknowledge the role of medical tourism as a spatial phenomenon, explore its salient feature on the Spatio-temporal scale and design a framework to delineate the "medscape" amidst changing paradigms of global healthcare values and beliefs.

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