

THE TOURIST SERVICES QUALITY CONCEPT

OANA MARIA REZEANU, EMILIA PASCU

ACADEMIA DE STUDII ECONOMICE, BUCURESTI, PIATA ROMANA NR. 6, SECTOR 1,

BUCURESTI - COD 010374, ROMANIA

oanamaria_rezeanu@yahoo.com, emilia.pascu@gmail.com

Abstract:

The role of tourism in national economy of various countries is particularly important given the complexity of this phenomenon, the scope of activities necessary for the emergence, maintenance and development. Tourism provides economic value and exploit the unique format of the riches that treasure of nature and climate, or left by history, folklore and civilization. Without tourist movement, natural riches, a country's cultural and historical will never be able to make a business able to create revenue.

But tourism activity has a maximum efficiency only in terms of the existence of quality tourism services. Currently providing quality services ensure the company's development and gain supremacy on the market.

Key words: quality, travel, quality assurance

JEL classification: A13, E20

1. Providing the Quality of Tourism Services

The tourist product results from combining material goods and services which are offered by the tourism staff and adjacent services. These play the role of valorizing both the elements of the tourist patrimony and the general and tourism facilities and also the advantages of the institutional framework. Hence, they are key elements for satisfying some specific motivations and also some general motivations of the tourism consumers.

A. In some authors' opinion, taking into account the definition of the tourist product, tourist services could be perceived as **tourist subproducts**. In general, it is taken into account the opinion according to which the role of the tourist product is to respond the tourist's multiple needs, providing at the same time a benefit or an advantage for the organizer/manager.

- This has two inseparable and complementary functions:
- The objective (concrete) function given by its physical performances;
- The subjective (psychological) function given by the satisfaction derived from consuming it.

As components of the tourist product, tourist services can be divided into the following categories:

- a) **Main tourism services:** transportation (on waybills), check-in services, room service, recreation and assistance guide;
- b) **Secondary tourism services:** medical assistance, exchange offices, transfers (from the airport to the hotel and from the hotel to the airport) etc.;
- c) **Auxiliary tourism services:** banking services, insurances, luggage, information etc.

From the same point of view it can be identified another services classification preferred by most authors, as it follows:

- a) **Primary services:** tourist-info, transportation, accommodation, balneary treatment, room service, recreation;

- b) Additional services:** guide services, reservations, commissioners, room service, other services (trip insurances, camping, backpacking etc.)

Another perspective on tourism services considers that their division into two categories is useful:

- ✓ Travel services;
- ✓ Sejour services.

B. Depending on the structure of the services, these fall into five categories:

- a) Services for preparing tourism expenditure: travel arrangements, info points, advertising, editing flyers and guide books, visa, bookings etc;
- b) Primary services: transportation, accommodation, lunch;
- c) Complementary services: recreation, amusement, sports, rentals etc;
- d) Special services: balneary treatments, services in special fields such as congresses, fishing and hunting etc.
- e) Unspecific services: repairing, maintenance, communication services, mail, exchange offices, commissioners etc.

The cultural level of a specific country is mostly given by the development level of the services oriented towards the population and we should distinguish tourism services as an important part of the Gross Domestic Product of a developed country. Starting from this point, we are going to analyze the evolution of the Romanian tourism services.

2. Service Quality Management

Service firms are determined to use the process of quality management as a main engine for their economic development.

Professional organizations assist at the processes of elaboration and implementation of different normative references. Therefore, it's vital to approach this matter at a global in order to obtain an effective performance and to raise the value of those services oriented towards the client.

The review of the ISO 9000 (2000 version) directions underlines two dimensions of the quality management concept:

- Process management
- Considering the client's satisfaction.

These new elements determine a whole new approach of the process which deals with a continuous organizations improvement.

These rules and legislative directions contribute to the management's dynamism and activation by means of listening to the expectations and the demands of the interested parts (clients, suppliers, personnel, stockholders, partners, public organisms). The efficiency of this managerial quality approach is based on two dimensions:

- ✓ Market action, renewing the conditions of loyal competition, playing the transparency
- ✓ card, identifying and ameliorating the offer.
- ✓ Business/Profession action, applying a structuring form, by means of quality
- ✓ management undertakings.

The service is sometimes co-produced by the client and the performer/provider: this makes even more difficult the exploitation of the data resulted from measuring and analyzing the causes of weak points.

For the service performer, measuring the attained quality and the perceived quality is not sufficient: he must assess the value that his client perceives. This involves a comparative analysis of the service value and the value of similar services performed by the competition.

➤ **Practice and performance measurement methods**

Collaboration Stage	Needs Analysis	Choosing the provider and contractualization	Service Co-Production	Service assessment and prolongation
Practices				
Listening to the client	Listening to the expectations		Listening in order to adjust service performance	Listening for final assessment
Defining the functional tasks notebook	Communication for requirements determination	CSF contract basis		
Applying the project management		Contractual definition of project sequence	Project definition and review	Assessment of project results and feed-back
Risk Analysis	General risk identification	Taking risks under control	Risk diminishing and contract advance	
Service commitments	Identifying clients' main expectations	Defining performance commitment		
Using an Acquisition Guide	Prior identification	Setting up the contract		
Helping setting out the contract		Setting up the contract		
Measuring service quality	Defining and measuring the research results	Precise measurement criteria in the contract	During contract measurement	End of contract measurement
Identifying and developing skills	The identification of the required skills	Agreement over the required skills	Skills employment and experience transfer	Assessing the value of achieved skills

http://www.cyber.uhp-nancy.fr/demos/ROQUA-001/application/cours_5_1_1.html

Even it seems that a competitor is given similar services, judging the facts from the point of view of performance, material basis and facilities contents, the consumers don't perceive the services identically; therefore, they perceive in different ways those services which are offered by the performers. Consequently, they will choose those firms which, in their opinion, offer quality services. Although the benefits of performing

highly qualitative services are unanimously admitted by the consumers and the producers at the same time, quality remains a major problem for most enterprises in this field.

The features of the services and the particularities of the service performing activities are elements that influence the process of defining the concepts of quality, evaluation methods, quality improvement strategies etc.

3. The Concept of Tourism Quality as Perceived by the World Tourism Organization (OMT)

➤ OMT Quality Definition

As a main international institution in the tourism field, the World Tourism Organization is invested by the United Nations Organization with the central and decisive role of encouraging sustainable tourism, being aware of its responsibilities and also accessible; its main goal would then be contributing to economic development, to a good international interaction, prosperity and commitment to human rights system and fundamental liberties. OMT functions as a catalyst and encourages international transfers and cooperation, stimulating and developing partnerships between the Private and the Public Sectors, or encouraging the World Code of Ethics in Tourism so that member states, tourist destinations and tourist enterprises could maximize the economic, social and cultural positive effects and minimize, at the same time, the negative effects over the environment.

OMT perceives tourism as a method of stimulating economic growth and work places creation, to promote the protection of the environment and the cultural patrimony, peace, prosperity and human rights.

In 2006, OMT was composed by 150 states and 300 affiliated members from the Private Sector, education, tourism professional associations and local authorities. Romania has been a member of this organization since 1975.

OMT's work schedule defines tourism quality as "the result of a process which implies the satisfaction of all legitimate needs, requirements and expectations of the consumer in what regards both the product and the service, at an acceptable price, according to the contractual conditions of a mutual agreement and the adjacent quality determinants such as security and protection, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmonization of the tourist activity with the natural and human environment²".

The analysis of this definition's each notion would suggest complete measures that are to be assessed in relation to quality criteria, as it follows:

- ✓ **"Result"** states that the quality level is obtained and perceived at a specific moment. The result cannot exist without harmonizing all factors which influence the tourist experience. It can be measured according to client's satisfaction and social, environmental and economic consequences of the tourist activity.
- ✓ "Process" means that an isolated activity is not enough in order to provide quality. This requests a continuous effort which shouldn't be interrupted whenever a minimum of satisfaction appears. Quality implies a homogenous and flawless process which allows the assessment and the elimination of what we call offer constraints, the latter jeopardizing the tourist product and leading to direct and indirect losses for enterprises or destinations.
- ✓ "Satisfaction" brings subjectivity into discussion when perceiving quality. Clients have expectations and requirements which differ according to their characteristics.

¹ According to the definition given by the OMT Quality Support Committee, modified at the sixth reunion – Varadero, Cuba, May 2003

An open commercial and quality oriented policy takes into account these characteristics and divides the consumers according to their perceived quality level.

- ✓ “Legitimate” introduces the concept of rights. Consumers shouldn’t expect to receive more than they paid for or something else besides those elements dictated by social constraints or environment. The role of tourist entrepreneurs is that of correlating the quality criteria, quality levels, paid prices and external constraints.
- ✓ “Need” refers to legitimacy and implies the necessity of fulfilling vital needs which must not be neglected when other aspects are added to projects and tourist programs in order to make them more attractive. These needs are essentially correlated with the adjacent determinants of the quality concept, even if the expectations in the field of fundamental needs magnitude constantly change. We have to say that even these vital needs have developed into different systems as time has passed by.
- ✓ “Product exigency” underlines the necessity of correlating the use of a product/equipment and the product seen as a whole or the tourist experience. A highly qualitative service is not sufficient for assessing the value of the tourist product, even if it might lead to favorable impressions, making the consumer to ignore possible flaws of the product.
- ✓ “Service exigency” gives quality a personal dimension, which is at most times immaterial and hard to measure, evaluate and quantify, in opposition to physical features of those tourist equipments which define and evaluate different installations. However, there are some quantifiable service components such as waiting time, frequency (house cleaning, for example), number and types of services included in the primary price etc.
- ✓ “Expectations” define the necessity of communication and positive perception over the product features in the case of a possible consumer. The components of a product or a service must not leave room for unpleasant surprises and the consumer should be given what he requested (and even more). Moreover, these expectations have to be legitimate and also have to respect certain boundaries. There are some expectations which cannot be fulfilled no matter how high the price.
- ✓ “Consumer” refers to individual (final) consumers, including groups of people (families), collective consumers (enterprises which buy trips for their employees) and commercial subcontractors. The latter could ask for their representatives or third parties to evaluate the quality of the product.
- ✓ “Reasonable price” states the fact that client’s expectations cannot be satisfied at any cost and that “good surprises” shouldn’t be too good; this mistake underlines the conclusion that poorly paid resources are used in countertrade. The client shouldn’t ask for a low price if the product is exceptional.
- ✓ “Contractual conditions of a mutual agreement” have been added to the definition by the OMT Quality Support Committee at the request of the Private Sector. It introduces commercial and juridical elements and it is related to the concept of transparency. The agreement is either explicit or implicit, according to the existing legislation in this field and it must be signed, as opposed to other transactions which request only a prior price assessment, before the acquisition of that service.
- ✓ “The adjacent quality determinants” state that there must be some general and irrevocable quality criteria, which are very important to the consumer, no matter the product category, construction, installation or service. They represent the consumer’s minimum protection level whenever quality, or total quality, cannot be achieved, or the absence of a determinant reduces the quality of the tourist experience.

- Security and protection – a product or tourist service cannot put life, health or consumer’s integrity in danger (not even when we talk about adventure tourism). Security and protection legislation are normally defined by law and they must be perceived as quality guidelines.
- Hygiene – accommodations, for example, must be clean and safe and these rules are to be applied not only to higher class hotels, but to all hotels. There must also be applied food security rules, not only in the case of street merchandisers, but also for fancy restaurants.
- Accessibility – this concept wants to eliminate physical and communication obstacles in order to allow all social categories, without discrimination, to use tourist products and services, independently from natural and achieved differences².
- Transparency – is an obligatory element of the consumer’s legitimacy and also of consumer’s protection. This refers to the necessity of supplying and transmitting correct information on the product’s characteristics or its global price. It should be mentioned what it’s included in the price and what it’s not included in the product.
- Authenticity – in a world governed by trade, authenticity is the most difficult to respect quality criterion and also the most subjective one. On the other hand, it cannot be separated from the concepts of marketing and competition. It is culturally determined and has as a consequence the separation of the product from other similar products. Authenticity must answer the consumer’s expectations. It diminishes and then disappears when the product is no longer connected to its cultural and natural context. In this respect, an ethnic restaurant cannot be truly authentic outside its country. This doesn’t mean that such a restaurant cannot be interesting or that it’s impossible to assess the quality according to production (content and conception), marketing distribution, sale and delivery of the specific product. A thematic park showing unknown regions and cultures is a good example of an artificial tourist product which can create by itself an authentic imagery. Moreover, an authentic product can also develop in order to respond different needs and expectations.
- Harmony – the harmonization with the human and natural environment goes hand in hand with the principle of durable development, on a medium and long term. Maintaining this durable development requires a good handling of environmental, social and economic consequences, establishing environmental indicators and maintaining the quality of tourist products and tourist markets. We cannot talk about a durable tourism without taking into consideration the concept of quality³.

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3. www.wttc.org

² Conclusions of the First International Congress on Accessible Tourism, Islantilla, Spain, 2004

³ OMT guideline to local authorities’ attention: durable tourism development