

## BASIC ASPECTS OF QUALITY IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

Ljiljana Kosar, Nikolina Kosar

***Abstract:** The paper deals with the specifics of quality in tourism and hospitality. Primary characteristics of quality are based on the specific service in tourism and hospitality. This service is complex and heterogeneous. Consumption of this service is a process that is repeated. Deliverers and customers actively participate in the process of tourist and hotel services consumption. All this makes the quality in tourism and hospitality complex category. This paper points to problems of consistency of quality. The paper highlights the importance of hotel industry for the quality of tourist destination product. It also highlights the quality as market and measurable category. It is indicated that employees are the key factor of quality in tourism and hospitality. Special importance is given to the competence of employees and the relationship between the satisfaction of employees and the satisfaction of tourists.*

***Key words:** quality, tourism, hospitality, employees, competence, satisfaction*

### Introduction

Quality is one of the categories that are not conceived from the perspective of the essential meaning because it is generally considered that everyone knows what the quality essentially is. Quality is the common term that is often used in everyday speech, also in various written forms, and more recently especially in the professional literature in the field of management. Therefore, quality is a broad meaning term. However, the term "quality", without further definition, per se is already associated with "a good thing". The overall approach to quality involves thinking and action aimed at improving the existing one. In contrast, low quality itself reflects "something bad". The next question that logically arises concerns the essential meaning of the term "good". Specifically, for whom something is "good"? Understanding of good and bad is a matter of individual (socio-cultural and economic conditional) belief. This indicates the relativity of the concept of "quality" and the need for its objectification and concretization. Quality of tourism should be approached as a market category, which means that it is a tourism product quality that makes the chain of tourism services. The key link of the chain determines the hospitality that forms the base of the tourist product. The heterogeneity and complexity of tourism, and hotel products are its main

characteristics. This requires the definition and measurement of quality approaches meticulously, with full appreciation of the multidisciplinary commitment to quality criteria, as well as the methods and techniques used to measure it.

### **Quality as a market category**

The market functions as the totality of the relationship between supply and demand. It is about the quality of material goods and services that are the subject of functioning. Term “quality” operates in the theory and practice of marketing and management. The relativity of the term is inevitable, given that its identification is inseparable from the needs and expectations of consumers. The customer is considered to be the most important link in the production chain. One of the most important doctrines of the quality that the Japanese management had begun to implement even in 1950 refers to the necessity of studying the needs of customers and providing after-sales service. This doctrine is based on two fundamental principles: first, the research needs of customers to create products and services that will provide a better standard of living in the future; second, the unpredictability of future losses that occur as a reaction to unsatisfied customer (Deming 1996).

The starting point of defining linked to the quality approach with two basic viewpoints – producers’ on one hand and consumers’ on the other. On the supply side, quality is compliance with the requirements, rules and procedures of production. From the customer's perspective, quality is the totality of characteristics of a product that has the ability to satisfy explicit (spoken) and implicit (implied) needs. Product quality in terms of manufacturer engaged in the American engineer, practitioner and theorist of quality management Philip B. Crosby (Crosby: 1980). He assumes that defining quality precedes a precise definition of the production process. When you identify the requirements of the production process, the quality of the product is created as a logical consequence of complying with specified requirements. Quality, as rightly believes Crosby is the compliance with the requirements and can be measured. However, one should bear in mind the approach to defining quality from the user's perspective, where a need is a key term. One of the world leaders in the field of quality JM Juran, the quality of the product directly associates with the characteristics of products that match the customer's requirements (Juran 1997). The extent to which a product conforms to the requirements of the customers is determined by its ability to meet the customer’s needs. Access to the quality and its definition must be guided by the requirements of the customer. European Organization for Quality EOQC offers the following general definition of

quality: Quality is the degree to which the product meets the needs of users – consumers (Mitrović 1996.).

The practice is imposed, a theory accepted the expansion of quality, as evidenced by the quality standards set by the International Organization for Standardization - ISO. According to the standards of ISO 8402 in 1986 the quality is defined as the set of all features of the product that is related to their ability to meet established and expressed needs. This definition was amended in 1994, so that quality is a set of characteristics that an entity has to be able to meet all requirements set, expected needs and preferences of the customer. The meaning of the term "entity" refers to a material product, service, process, activity, organization, system, employees, or any combination of these elements (Majstorović 2000). The shortest definition of quality in ISO 9000 from the 2000th is: quality is the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfills requirements.

There is no dispute that the quality is a market category. This means that it is the quality of the product and service that have a utility value and which are placed on the market as a commodity, at a specified price. Utility value of products and services indicates their essential feature that consists in the ability to meet specific customer needs. The offer must continually seek ways to meet not only the needs but also the desires and expectations of finicky consumers. This means not only to monitor and analyze their preferences, and satisfaction, but also to predict, suggest and modify their tastes. It is possible to achieve by proper quality of products and services. The quality is not a static feature of a product. It is a dynamic process that is involved in all phases of the creation of products and services, including input components. Quality can be measured. The definition of the European Organization for Quality indicates that it is a zone of acceptability from the standpoint of meeting the needs of users - the degree to which the product meets the needs of customers. Quality, therefore, involves ranking too. Bearing all this in mind, we come to the following definition: quality is a market category that encompasses the totality of creation and realization of tangible products and services, on the level to which their properties ensure compliance with the requirements of demand (Kosar and Rašeta 2005).

### **Basic features of tourist and hotel product quality**

The tourist product is essentially a multiplicity of services - a number of different, mutually conditioned and connected. Particular components of the tourist product consist of the material basis of its implementation (transport and communal infrastructure, hotels, restaurants and other tourist superstructure facilities and related

activities, located in an attractive area). However, authentic tourist product occurs only in the presence of the consumer – tourist. Holders of the tourist economy - tour operators, travel agencies and other tourism organizations and hotel and catering organizations, in cooperation with the traffic, and commercial organizations, utility infrastructure and health care, institutions for culture, entertainment, organizing events, sport and recreation, tend to create a more complete product or service complex associated in unique chain, which will meet the expectations of potential customers. Also holders of the tourism industry tend to present the tourism product to potential customers in the convincing manner by a range of designed marketing activities.

The relevant specificity of a tourist product is reflected in the spatial and temporal amalgam of its creation and realization. Its characteristics are manifested only through direct tourist's experience. A tourist does not spend it easily by single use. Tourists consume components of this product in the form of various services, including the key ones (accommodation, meals and other services in restaurants). Those services are repeated several times during the tourist trip and stay, depending on their duration. On the other hand, during a tourist trip (including mobile and stationary phase), tourists have different needs (entertainment, recreation, education, participation in events, exploring the cultural and historical monuments, customs and folklore of the local population, the need for personal services and others), whose satisfaction is also expected in the realization of the complex tourist product. The tourist product is based on the attractive attributes which manifest themselves as key factors for attracting tourists. The consumption of a tourist product is conditioned by the movement of consumers to the product, or by tourist trip.

At the beginning of a new century and the new millennium, tourism imposes another dimension of perceiving the relationship between people and space. Space, in the past uncontrolled "overspent" in the industry, and tourism purposes, largely destroyed, offers less and less, and the human, present and future tourist consumer wants, demands and expects more and more. Changes concerning the consumption are becoming apparent - the acceptance given clichés in market behavior replaces a growing individualism and meeting own needs, and consequently larger and much more "personal touch" consumption. Instead of passive and inert idler appears dynamic and active consumer who is less satisfied with the status of a participant in the mass, unified tours. Instead of passive recreation, modern tourist consumer expects much more from the trip - experience, learning, active participation, all of which should contribute to a complete physical and

mental relaxation. Demand based on similar travel tastes, typical of mass tourism, is replaced by differentiated and segmented demand based on the pluralization of tourist tastes. Expressed the individuality of modern consumer, especially of modern tourist makes his trip shorter, but more frequent He is finicky; he has an attitude to prices and require respect for the principle of “value for money”. To be quality, and hence the competitive the tourist product must be adapted to the needs of different customers and new tourist consumers - tourists of the future. This indicates to the need for such comprehensive and thorough approach to its quality.

As the material basis of the tourist product hotel product is primarily conditioned by the space. Location is one of the key criteria of hotel product typology. Hotel product is, therefore, a component of the tourist product, of decisive influence on its physiognomy, structure, quality, in a word, on its complete profile. Therefore, the closer definition of hotel product clarifies the main features of the tourist product. If the hotel product resulting from operation of the hotel, which is a representative hospitality facility, then it is founded to conclude that hotel represents the products of other types of hospitality facilities. In this context, a hotel product can be attributed to the wider meaning, as it in its complex structure contains a wide range of hospitality and tourist amenities. The complex structure of the hotel product comprises three main groups of components - spatial, technical and technological (material) and organizational and process (intangible). The hotel product is a compound of tangible and intangible elements, each spatially and functionally related to the integral whole which manifests as a range of services arising from the needs, wants and desires of consumers, or hotel guests (Kosar 2002). Creators of working process in the hotel industry strive to predict as many different needs of potential customers and offer them the satisfaction of these needs in the form of complex services, which are an integral product composed of a material - physical and technological and immaterial - organizational and personnel components. The base components of hotel product are common to all users, although those vary depending on consumer preferences (type of room, board, half-board, bed and breakfast). However, the hotel product is not exhausted by implementation of hospitality components. The individual needs of guests who choose from the spectrum of the options what suits them dictate the individual dimension of hotel product realization. Each hotel guest practically creates his or her own product, which is the authentic and unique combination of services. Thus, the process of hotel product “finalizing” is left to the guests and lasts as long as their stay at the hotel. The

heterogeneity and complexity of the technical, organizational and personnel structure of a tourist product and of a hotel product as its material basis, as well as the degree of specialization of a hotel product reflect the level of tourist development in certain areas. To establish a tourist product actually means to establish the quality consistency of its individual components and to ensure the harmonization process of service delivery by spatial and functional connecting in the integral whole. Having in mind a general approach to quality, the quality of tourist, or hotel product is a market category that includes its tangible and intangible components, spatially and functionally related to the integral whole, as well as the implementation of associated services, on degree to which the services provided compliance with the requirements of tourists - hotel guests.

### **Measuring quality of tourist and hotel product**

Access to quality in tourism as a measurable category requires establishing quality criteria and tools for their quantification. As the hotel product makes the material basis of the tourism product, specificities of quality measurement in tourism will be illustrated by specific examples from the hospitality.

#### **Measurability of quality in the context of Hospitality Facilities Categorization**

In many countries legislation regulates the mandatory minimum hotel product quality. Fulfillment of prescribed minimum requirements provides a minimal guaranteed quality. Minimal guaranteed quality is the basis for leveling mandatory quality, namely for the categorization. Categorization is the process of ranking the mandatory quality based on established Criteria and it includes environmental, technological, organizational and procedural features of the hotel product. The abundance and variety of criteria indicates the complexity and comprehensiveness of the categorization process whose implementation is based on the basic features of hospitality. Spatial, technical and technological categorization criteria because of their material substance can be expressed and ranked by using precise indicators. So, it's about quality components that are relatively easy to measure. This refers to the dimension of hotel facilities, room capacity, relations between capacities in the accommodation and food sector, the capacity of the parking places and garages, the capacity of green space nearby etc. Categorization criteria relating to the process of service delivery, as well as the personnel carriers of the process, is harder to rank according to the quality, or to transform into measurable categories. The range of

offers in the food and beverage sector is measured by the number of menus, number of meals to order, the number of wines of varying quality. The range of hotel services (concierge, luggage carrier, room service, exchange operations, serving breakfast and main meals etc.) is qualitative criteria that could be quantified by the working time providing these services. Longer-time means higher ranking quality or higher category. Staffing issues are often formalized with the standpoint of evaluation and quality measurement capabilities. It comes down to the required level of qualifications appropriate profiles for specific jobs and the specialized knowledge and skills (the number of foreign languages into which enabled understanding, knowledge and presentation of food and beverages, mainly wine, finishing dishes in front of guests). Since the personnel represent a key factor of service quality in the tourism and hospitality, it is necessary to determine the methods and techniques to measure their competency. This is necessary for self-evaluation and quality evaluation by service providers.

### **Measuring the competence of employees**

Competence is a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for work performance associated with the main characteristics of this work, which can be measured based on the accepted standards and improved through education and training. (Lucia and Lepsinger1999: 5). The essence of competence can be explained by three groups of characteristics: knowledge required for work – Kn, desire for work – Ds and opportunity for work – Op (Stanivuković 2000). Knowledge should be treated as knowledge required for work. In this regard, it can be extracted category of functional knowledge, which refers to the possibility of using knowledge available for the work. The basic components of functional knowledge (FKn) are: theoretical knowledge (TKn), practical knowledge (PKn) and work experience (WEx). Given that the functional knowledge is a complex category, it is necessary to pay more attention to its quality. This refers to the definition of its structures and the measurement opportunity. In this context proportionality coefficients (ranging from 0 to 1) can be introduced, in order to define the relationship between theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge and work experience. The structure of the functional knowledge is neither universal nor static. It is primarily determined by the type of activities and the demands of the workplace. The functional knowledge of a hotel receptionist for example, should have the following assumed optimal structure: theoretical knowledge –  $K_{nt} = 0.2$ ; practical knowledge  $K_{np} = 0.3$  and work experience  $W_{ex} = 0.5$ . An agent for marketing communications for example, should have different structure

of functional knowledge:  $K_{nt} = 0.4$ ;  $K_{np} = 0.3$ ;  $W_{ex} = 0.3$ . Previously determined coefficients on the scale, for example from 0 to 5, quantify the quality of theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge and work experience, based on predefined criteria (descriptive score). So, as the lowest level (0) we can determine ignorance or even overcome the theoretical and practical knowledge that is not applied in practice, and also the lack of work experience or inadequate work experience, limited only to years of working. As the highest level (5) can be determined adoption of the latest theoretical and practical knowledge, verified by renowned institutions, as well as work experience, specified in performing tasks whose effects are measurable at the organizational level. In this context, the complex approach to the structure of functional knowledge should be illustrated by following formula:

$$F_{kn} = k_{tkn} \cdot T_{kn} + k_{pkn} \cdot P_{kn} + k_{wex} \cdot W_{ex}$$

Work experience without new theoretical and practical knowledge, does not significantly contribute to the increase of the functional knowledge. On the basis of theoretical knowledge in the field of hotel management, we can distinguish the importance of the work performed for the quality of concrete guest experience. The awareness of their own responsibility and personal contribution to the quality of hotel guest authentic experience is treated as the main driving factor of functional knowledge improvement.

The desire for work is conditioned by economic, ethno-cultural and socio-psychological factors. It is manifested in the perception of work as an integral component of a human and his or her self-affirmation. In underdeveloped societies of low economic standards the work is primarily manifested as a need. The increase of the standard of living and in the educational level of the population reduces their perception of work as a need. On the other hand, the desire for work reduces with increasing years of service, which is primarily the result of fatigue and aging process. Years of service do not always guarantee relevant work experience, i.e. the experience gained in jobs that contribute to the adoption and practical application of new knowledge. If we don't innovate knowledge and skills in accordance with modern trends during the years of service, not only the desire for work, but also the competence will be reduced, considering to the feelings of insecurity as a result of lack of adaptation to the new demands of the workplace. In this context, competence can be represented as the ratio between functional knowledge and years of service:

$$K_{mt} = F_{kn} / Y_{os}$$

In order to maintain competence at the satisfactory level, it is necessary to constantly increase functional knowledge, given that years of service inevitably increase over time. The way to increase competence is the way of constant knowledge innovation and lifelong training, in order to ensure faster growth of functional knowledge in comparison with the years of service.

### **Measuring quality in the context of compatibility with the tourists requirements**

Quality of tourism and hotel product must be considered from the point of the consumer. This means measuring the degree of compliance with the customers' requirements, and the level of their satisfaction. According to the power of arguments, science more often succeeds in imposing to tourism and hospitality industry, primarily to managerial structures, awareness of the need for permanent research market. However, usually stays at that level, which indicates the intellectual and financial inability to implement specific research projects. It is necessary to find adequate answers to questions such as: Who are our customers? What are their needs? What do they want and expect? What price they are willing to pay? It means to build and to apply appropriate methodological instruments for the realization of this task. In other words, the practical achievements of tourism and hotel management should not be reduced just to findings of what to do, but also how to do it. Overcoming the disparity between "what" and "how" is possible by using statistical methods. Statistical methods should be used for forecasting, monitoring and interpretation of tourist hotel guest behavior. The research results should point to errors and omissions and create space for their elimination in order to improve the quality of services.

Among the most famous techniques of objective customer satisfaction measurement is ACSI - American Customer Satisfaction Index. ACSI model determines the degree of customers' satisfaction as a function of their expectations and perceived (obtained) quality. Customer expectations are based on the perceived needs and external stimuli. For example, the location, layout and equipment of tourist and hotel facilities, or behaviour, professionalism, appearance of employees can have a very significant impact on forming customer expectations. Perceived quality involves the customer's perception the value of realized services. The perceived value is the value that results from the comparative analysis of the customer's expectations and the perceived quality of realized services. Customer's complaints are measured in percentage of customers who have complained directly to the company at a particular time. Customer's loyalty entails the probability that the

customer will yet again seek and use services created by the same company and to remain loyal in the future. Customer's loyalty is a critical component of the model because loyal customers are the greatest asset of any company. ACSI is located at the intersection of three key issues: the overall contentment, unfulfilled or exceeded expectations and comparison with the ideal. Thanks to the basic ACSI model companies create models and methods to measure the level of customer satisfaction by criteria relevant to their business, and the job they deal with (Kilibarda and Manojlović 2008).

### **Conclusion**

Business orientation towards customer for tourism and hospitality industry is "conditio sine qua non". The quality of hotel and tourism product is ultimately reduced to the quality of the customer experience. Therefore, methods and techniques of measuring the quality should be accepted as flexible, dynamic categories that must adapt to changes in requirements, needs, desires and expectations of consumers. Measurement of quality in tourism and hospitality must be a continuous and meaningful process, focused on the detection of non-compliance with the customers' requirements, as well as finding ways for their elimination. Measuring the quality of tourism and hotel product has also a preventive function, given that potential conflicts should be predicted and avoided by using the results from previous period. Considering that the tourism product functions as a compound of numerous and various mutually conditioned and related tangible and intangible components, for measuring their quality are used different methodological procedures. Objectivity of measurement is provided using appropriate models that integrate mutually compatible methodologies, based on carefully selected criteria and elements of tourism and hotel product and their position on the list of customers' priority requirements.

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### **Notes on the authors**

#### **LJILJANA KOSAR, PhD, full professor**

She graduated and obtained her Magister's and Doctor's degree at the Department of Tourism at the Faculty of Sciences, University of Belgrade. Since 1979 she has been working at Universities. Since 1991 until now, she has been working at The College of Hotel Management, Belgrade, Serbia. She was elected full professor in 2003. in the University of Novi Sad (Faculty of Sciences, Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management). Scientific fields of interest: hotel management, classification, categorization, standardization of accommodation facilities, the structure of hotel product, branding in hotel industry, global hotel chains, management of quality in the hotel industry. She is the author and coauthor of about 100 scientific papers and 12 textbooks. She participated in numerous national and international conferences.

#### **NIKOLINA KOSAR, PhD candidate, teaching assistant**

She finished The College for Hotel Management in Belgrade. She graduated at the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University Singidunum, Belgrade. She obtained her Master's degree in the area of Business Economy at the University Singidunum. She completed her PhD studies at the Faculty of Geography, University of Belgrade. Her doctoral dissertation has been approved at the same faculty. She published 11 papers from the area of tourism, hospitality, leadership and environmental management and participated in several national and international scientific conferences. She has been working as a teaching assistant in The College of Tourism in Belgrade.