

CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TOURISM SERVICES, A METHOD OF INCREASING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Anca MADAR¹

Abstract: *Quality is and will always be an important, if not the most important, factor of competition. Improving quality has been integrated into quality actions. It appears in the ISO 9000 series as a quality management function, performed systematically through quality management systems. The present paper analyses and exemplifies how the continuous improvement of the quality of tourism services through the implementation of the certification strategy has increased the satisfaction of N & C Turism's clients, which has resulted in the increase in the number of tourists and the number of overnight stays.*

Keywords: *quality, tourism services, customer satisfaction, quality strategy*

1. Introduction

Given the current socio-economic environment, quality has become a strategic tool of global business management, as well as a determinant of their competitiveness. Also, by its importance to consumers and citizens, quality is an essential factor in the service of civil society and the environment. The general concept of quality is used in various fields, with different meanings, corresponding to each of them; the meanings of this concept are philosophical, logical, technical, economic, and social.

Starting from the etymology of the word "quality", originating from the Latin "quales" that has the meaning of "way to be", a standardized definition of "quality" developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has been reached, according to which "Quality SR EN ISO 9000: 2000) is the extent to which a set of intrinsic characteristics meet the requirements (Stoican, Sonea and Camarda, 2013).

Taking into account the importance of quality, this paper aims to illustrate how the quality of service can be improved by implementing the certification strategy. For this, the author made both bibliographic research and fieldwork. The results of the research show that, in the analysis performed in this paper, the implementation of the

¹ *Transilvania* University of Braşov, ancamadar@unitbv.ro

certification strategy has led to the modernization of the techniques, working methods, and equipment used in the activity, the shortening of the reaction time to clients' complaints regarding incidents or hotel anomalies, training, and awareness the staff to achieve the quality objectives, which in the end resulted in an increase in the number of clients and the number of nights of accommodation.

2. Literature Review

Tourism is still one of the major economic sectors recognized as an important factor in regional development (Commission of the European Communities, 2010). As Sharma (2004) specifies, tourism contributes to the stability of regional and local economies, primarily due to its positive multiplier effect, which acts to create business opportunities across a broad range of activities and significantly influences the development of work in the region. The competitive advantage comes not only from the potential possibilities of the external environment, but also from the internal characteristics, ie from unique sources and methods of their use (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington 2008, David, 2009).

In its work program, World Tourism Organization (OMT) views the quality of tourism as "the outcome of a process that satisfies all legitimate consumer, product, and service needs, demands and expectations at an acceptable price, in accordance with the contractual terms of a mutual agreement and determinants adjacent to the quality of security and protection, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity, and harmonization of tourism activities with the human and natural environment "(Rondelli, Cojocaru, 2004). As Peters T. and Waterman R.H. Jr. (2015) state, "Quality of the product is not everything, but everything is nothing without quality". Quality, which means the quality of processes and results, is and will always be an important, if not the most important, factor of competition.

The term "quality" in tourism has several dimensions. Through "quality management", efforts are being made to take account of the growing importance of individual quality issues. For example, for Swiss tourism, a program with different tools has been designed with the aim of systematic promotion and ongoing assurance of quality development. The program is based on quality of service and quality management (Koch, 2004).

Štětina, (2002) by (Grenčíková, A., Vojtovič, S., Gullerová, M., 2013) points out that in the tourism activity geography-related factors represent an unchangeable objective variable that does not depend on human activities. Instead, the range and quality of services and infrastructure depend on behaviour, education, qualification or human experience. This is also emphasized by Grenčíková, A., Vojtovič, S., Gullerová, M. (2013), which states that value is not made up of material goods and facilities based on tourism, but of the skills, knowledge, and abilities of each employee.

The same authors show that investment in the tourism industry and tourist facilities affect the overall performance and efficiency of the industry and contribute to improving the infrastructure and quality of accommodation, restaurants, and other facilities (Grenčíková, Vojtovič, Gullerová (2013).

Quality management is the set of activities of the overall management function that determines quality policy, objectives, and responsibilities and implements them within

the quality system by means of quality planning, quality control, quality assurance, and quality improvement (EN ISO 9000: 2000). In short, quality management includes all the activities that organizations implement to manage, control, and coordinate quality. A good Quality Management System must have the following features: to be set in writing; to ensure that customer requirements are met; to ensure that the organization's requirements are met; to be applicable to all the organization's activities.

Unlike product quality, the quality of tourist services is harder to define, to judge or to be expressed in terms of quantity, because the service has few physical dimensions, such as performance, functional characteristics or maintenance costs that could be used for comparison or measurement.

In the hospitality industry, in order to be successful on the market, operators' resources must be directed to a management system that meets the needs and expectations of all current and potential customers. The quality of tourism services requires improvement as customers' expectations change dictated by technical and socio-economic progress. On the highly competitive market in Romania, the business of the international franchise chains, where the business management systems have integrated elements of quality management, have also been noted. The other hospitality operators treat quality of service and customer satisfaction from "simple intentions" imposed by legislative regulations to integrated management systems, based on ISO international references.

The strategy shows how the organization works, how it uses resources to fulfil its mission, and respect the policy it has defined. The formulation of the quality strategy, which is an internal problem of the organization, is based on the ability to achieve products or services at the level of standards or other normative acts, competitiveness, performance, price, and time so that the beneficiary of the products or services to be satisfied.

Through its quality strategy, the company's management aims at: meeting the needs of the beneficiaries and social needs; setting the quality level under the conditions imposed by market requirements and competitiveness; integrating quality into the company's mission and goals; changing staff mentality in ensuring total quality, processes, products, and human resource behaviour.

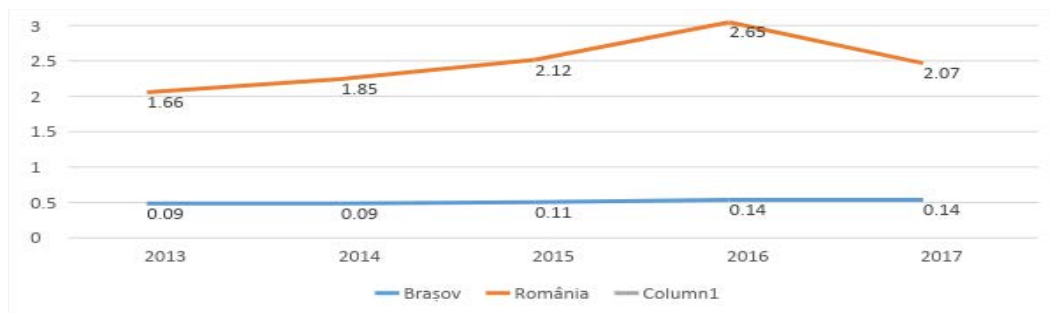
3. Research Methodology

For this article the author has used both bibliographic documentation, by consulting various papers in the field, and on-site documentation, the study of company documents and discussions with qualified persons. The field research was done at SC. N & C Turism SRL, which owns and operates the 4 * Design Cubix Hotel, a Romanian private capital company, founded in 2005.

4. Description of the Company

The hotel's object is the accommodation and the provision of services specific to the food for tourism, being classified in the 4 star category.

Besides accommodation and food services, Design Hotel Cubix has the necessary conditions for organizing conferences, seminars, business meetings, and leisure. It is located 5,8 km from the city centre of Braşov, on the DN1 national road. It has a restaurant and a bistro bar, with a capacity of 80 seats, with Romanian and international specialties and offers accommodation services to both tourists and business people, welcoming them with 57 comfortable and spacious accommodation spaces, 100 m far from Business Park, furnished in a modern style, equipped with: card access system, bathroom with bathtub and shower, cable TV (94 cm LCD), national and international calls, high speed internet access, air conditioning.



Source: <https://termene.ro/firma/18184437-N-C-TURISM-SRL>

Fig. 1. *N & C Turism SRL market share on Braşov and Romania*

As shown in Figure 1, the market share of N & C Turism SRL in Braşov and Romania, from 2013 to 2017, increased slightly.

5. Results and Discussions

In 2014, an analysis of customer satisfaction and comfort requirements revealed that customer needs are: sufficient space to conduct activities in conference rooms, hotel rooms that provide a sense of comfort, the ability of the hotel's services to meet customer needs, in other words, the ability to attend to customer needs with care and promptitude. The staff must be courteous, thus creating a relationship of respect and trust between the customer and the service provider.

To meet customer requirements, the hotel management implemented the quality certification strategy in accordance with EN ISO 9001: 2015. Applying this quality standard, N & C Turism demonstrates customer care to provide high quality services with highly trained people.

This strategy has resulted in the following measures to improve the quality of the services offered:

1. First of all, they focused on renovating and modernizing the rooms. Emphasis has been placed on a simple yet sophisticated design, as it has emerged from a more in-depth analysis that potential customers are attracted to urban style.

2. Each room was equipped with state-of-the-art plasma, being replaced approximately every 3 years. Conditioned systems have been replaced by new ones that have more features. Access to the rooms is based on a magnetic card, compared to the previous system, with the key.
3. For the hotel's kitchen, different high-performance machines have been purchased, such as: multifunctional cooking machine, ovens, mixers, dishwasher, freezer cabinets for freezing and refrigeration.
4. Purchasing these machines was necessary to provide a more diversified range of dishes to facilitate faster customer service and increased food security. The kitchen owns equipment from SC DACTRUST SRL.
5. A coffee machine was also purchased for the hotel reception area so that people waiting at the hotel reception will have a quality waiting time when there is a larger flow of customers wanting to stay and queues are formed to which customers obviously have to stay. The reception was provided with a new and more efficient system in which the employees at the reception are operating. With this new system, employees manage their customers' accommodations and reservations more easily and much faster.
6. Conference rooms have been upgraded and expanded in such a way as to provide space that can be used more efficiently. New video projectors have been introduced as they prove to be necessary when holding important meetings. Flipcharts were also introduced.
7. The hotel staff needed training to learn how to use the new machines, how to behave and how to interact with potential customers to establish from the beginning a relationship of trust with them or to consolidate the one with older customers.

It has worked a lot on personal development so that employees have the ability to react or act as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The process of improving service quality through the implementation of the certification strategy has led to increased customer confidence in the services provided by N & C Turism.

This was evidenced by the increase in the number of customers and the number of overnight stays in the coming years, as shown in Tables 1 and 2, but also in the increase of income and profit, as shown in Table 3.

Table 1

Evolution of the number of clients during 2012-2018

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of clients	1,900	2,000	2,300	2,450	4,600	5,000	5,500

Source: *internal company documents*

Table 2

The evolution of the number of overnights during 2012-2018

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
The number of overnights	3,800	4,000	4,600	5,900	9,200	10,000	11,000

Source: *internal company documents*

Table 3

Evolution of economic, financial, and operational indicators of N & C Tourism during 2013-2017

Financial indicators	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total Income (Lei)	4,166,712	3,608,640	6,502,995	6,684,689	6,586,235
Total Expenses (Lei)	3,679,009	3,529,388	6,596,026	6,789,072	6,819,886
Gross Profit (Lei)	487,703	252	-107,759	75,000	72,413
Operational indicators					
Average occupancy rate (%)	71%	68%	71,5%	77%	79%
Average rate rented room (lei)	195	205	220	250	270
Commercial Restaurant Rate (%)	188%	200%	210%	198%	204%
Occupancy degree of conference rooms (%)	22%	18%	19%	20%	21%
Human resources indicators					
Average number of employees	25	26	50	68	70

Source: www.mfinante.ro

Table 3 shows that in 2013 the company posted a profit of 487,703 lei. Then, this profit decreased to 79,252 lei due to the fact that the revenues from the corresponding year did not increase. One year later, the company recorded a loss of 107,759 lei due to the fact that it had expenses with the implementation and certification of the quality management system, but also due to the increase in the number of employees. In 2016 the profit increased to 75,000 lei, and in 2017 the profit was 72,413 lei.

Revenue values over the five-year period have been quite varied. From 2013 to 2014, there has been a decline in revenue. In 2015, revenue grew considerably. In the years 2016 and 2017 the company recorded revenues of 6,684.689 lei, respectively 6,556,235 lei due to the improvement made.

From 2013 until 2014, the company recorded a decrease in expenditures, and in 2015 the expenditures increased very much to the value of 6 596,026 lei. The following years, the company had expenditures worth 6 789,072 lei in 2016, and 6,189,886 lei respectively in 2017, registering an increase compared to 2016.

It can be concluded that this hotel has had a good development all these years. Even if some decreases in profits or other economic and financial indicators have been registered, N & C Turism has, as a whole, coped with and managed to grow from one year to the next.

The quality policy applied by N & C Tourism is based on the commitment of its management to provide products and services that meet customer requirements at a convenient price that is in line with current regulations.

The management of the company has committed itself to continuously designing, implementing and improving the quality of the services offered and ensuring the needs and expectations of customers, employees and other stakeholders, transformed into requirements and fulfilled in order to achieve customer and employee satisfaction.

Improving service quality results in better prices and, implicitly, higher profits, which in turn can be reinvested in R & D activities (improving and permanently adapting product / service characteristics to customer requirements, designing new products, improvement of manufacturing methods and technologies).

Applying quality-oriented strategies at the company level takes into account:

1. Improving the company's reputation - the reputation of the company is created by the quality of the products and services offered. It is gained over time by a concern to offer customers the products they want at predetermined standards.
2. Developing the product market - efforts to increase quality and improve product performance lead to increased market sales, even if prices are increased.
3. Cost reduction - by eliminating additional costs generated by non-quality.
4. Compliance with company commitments - deviations from standards require corrections, fixes, tests, certifications, due to the lack of robustness of the product.

6. Conclusions

Under the conditions of our country's alignment with the requirements of the European Union, the Romanian market has increasingly shaped the need to provide high-quality products and services in response to increased customer demands and competition. Quality is therefore part of the values of N & C Turism, being integrated into its long-term development strategy.

The service is considered "quality" if it provides adequate performance at an acceptable price level. Increasing the hotel's competitiveness through a quality-focused strategy implies its adoption of a systemic quality control concept that refers not only to productive activities but to all its functional departments.

Obtaining quality management system certifications according to ISO 9000 standards has resulted in generating competitive advantages over other companies in the same field.

References

EUR_Lex (Access to the European Union Law). Boosting international tourism in Europe, SUMMARY OF: European Commission communication (COM(2010) 352 final) —

- Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination — a new political framework for tourism in Europe. [online] Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/LSU/?uri=celex%3A52010DC0352>> [Accessed 3 April 2019].
- David, F. R., 2009. *Strategic Management: Concepts and Cases*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Grenčíková, A., Vojtovič, S., Gullerová, M., 2013. Staff qualification and the quality of tourism-related services in the nitra region. *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series* No.21, pp. 41–48.
- Johnson, G., Scholes, K. & Whittington, R., 2008. *Exploring Corporate Strategy: Text & Cases*. Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- N & C TURISM SRL, TERMENE.RO 2019. [online], Available at: <<https://termene.ro/firma/18184437-N-C-TURISM-SRL>> [Accessed 3 April 2019].
- Peters, T., Waterman, R.H. Jr., 2015. *In search of Excellence*. Profile Books Ltd.
- Rondelli, V., Cojocaru, S., 2004. *Managementul calităţii serviciilor din turism şi industria ospitalităţii*. Editura THR-CG.
- Sisteme de management al calităţii. PRINCIPII FUNDAMENTALE ŞI VOCABULAR. (2001). [online], Available at: <<http://www.elth.pub.ro/~mcleante/14%20SE/standarde/SR%20EN%20ISO%209000.pdf>> [Accessed 14 March 2019].
- Sharma, K. K., 2004. *Tourism and Regional Development*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.
- Štětina, V., 2002. *The menu, tool and the matter of prime importance*. Praha: Editpress.
- Stoican, M., Şonea, C. G., Camarda, A. L., 2013. *Managementul calităţii*. Chişinău: Editura PRIMEXcom.