

Ensuring and Maintaining the Quality Standards in the Tourism Enterprises' Activity

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Abstract

The systematic analysis of the quality of tourism services and adoption of the necessary measures are priorities of utmost importance in the current period. In order to improve the quality of products and services, a tourism enterprise needs to know how consumers perceive the quality and what quality they expect to receive from the service provider.

In this article, the author describes: the issue of quality management in the tourism industry, the stages of implementation of a quality assurance system in tourism enterprises, the opportunity to use the PRCA process model aimed at implementing the change, the aspects of identification of the quality characteristics, the principles of quality improvement, managerial errors that can occur in quality promotion.

Key words: quality management, quality control, tourism services, tourism products, tourism-consumer.

J.E.L. classification: M 1

1. Introduction

Quality management is a special subject of management, which is increasingly studied as a stimulating factor in the development of the tourism enterprise.

The interest in quality is explained by the fact that, with the liberalization of the visa regime for Moldovan citizens on April 28, 2014, the tourism offer of the country for outgoing tourism has become much more diversified and the tourism-consumer has become more demanding in organizing the holiday.

In this context, the tourism market in the Republic of Moldova, which tends to have a higher economic performance, needs to adjust its visions in order to ensure and maintain the quality standards, removing those deficiencies that delay this process.

In order to achieve the quality, not only compliance with standards is used, but collective performance that serves to meet the needs, requirements and expectations of tourism-consumer is used.

In our opinion, the main factors determining the tourism destination are the quality of tourism, environment and innovation. Those who administer the tourism objectives at the national or local level must clearly ensure the quality of services, protection of the environment and, last but not least, the implementation of innovative processes. This will help them to better characterize and monitor their tourism products, to define their desired quality level for tourism products, to be properly prepared for the market segments preferred by visitors and to attract tourism-consumers as many as possible.

2. Actuality of the topic proposed for investigation

Currently, more and more employers in the tourism industry have begun to show an increased interest in the subject of ensuring quality standards in the activity of the tourism company. Interest in this theme is major, largely due to the decrease in the number of tourism-consumers who prefer

to organize their holidays through travel agencies or tour operators. The information technology era has put a hard mark on this subject. Tourists, based on on-line platforms, began on their own to organize their holidays, thus avoiding tourism businesses. Under these circumstances, in order to protect their business, tourism companies try to remedy the situation by increasing the quality of tourism products and services.

It is recognized the fact that the effectiveness of the work that was done and implicitly the economic and financial results of a tourism enterprise depend on the qualities and professionalism of employees and managers. But these results also depend on the enterprise's desire and tendency to modernize. In order to understand this specific problem-solving mode, it is necessary to go beyond certain figures, endowments, etc. in what is known as quality management.

Every enterprise has its own institutional management that reflects its history, ways to approach issues, practices of managing activities, managerial style, attitude to risk, to competition, to consumers and, of course, to employees. Thus, through this institutional management, the quality standards that the enterprise needs to meet competitive competition can be implemented.

Arguments for research of this theme are:

- study of theoretical and methodological fundamentals regarding the quality of products and services in tourism enterprises;
- clarification of quality criteria defined by the World Tourism Organization;
- determination of the role of services quality in the performance of the tourism enterprise;
- reasoning on the need to implement quality standards in the tourism enterprise;
- the role of the quality over the perception of tourism product by the tourism-consumer.

The aim of the research is to study and analyze the issue of quality management in the activity of tourism enterprises in the Republic of Moldova, the trends that are attested in this field, as well as the formulation of some proposals that would contribute to the improvement of the performances of the tourism enterprises, together with the implementation of the quality standards. The theoretical and methodological support of the investigated topic will be provided by the work of scientists who have made research in this field.

Relevance of the article. The investigation and development of this theme will enable the author to generalize certain conclusions on this subject and as a result it will be possible to offer the tourism business environment certain proposals and recommendations capable to accelerate the processes of implementing the quality standards in the activity of the tourism enterprise.

3. Applied methods

When developing this article, the author has used 3 research methods as follows:

Fundamental research has allowed elucidating the current trends in the field of ensuring and maintaining quality standards in the activity of tourism enterprises, while reflecting the prerequisites for the change in the researched field. Fundamental research included investigations in the form of theoretical studies that led to the formulation of reasoned scientific conclusions.

Research for development aimed at using those processes and devices that can directly influence the practical work in the field of implementing quality standards in tourism. Thanks to the use of this method, it was possible to demonstrate in practice the need to use quality standards in the activity of tourism enterprises.

Applied research was tasked with providing data for directing practical work, in order to increase the methodical work. The result of the applied research has led to the conclusions on the role of quality in the provision of tourism services. Also, applied research has helped to find solutions and direction that can solve various problems.

4. Results and discussion

All the companies are facing today increasingly complex, complicated and difficult problems that have to be tackled and solved. The great changes in the current society, strong competition and globalization require managers to sustainably mobilize all the available resources in order to adapt to this new context in which they run their business (Vagu, Stegăroiu, Croitoru, Duică, 2014, p.29).

Thus, nowadays, if it wants to survive and thrive, a tourism enterprise needs to improve its practice and managerial conception in the field of quality.

Reforming an enterprise can be done through technological innovations, through the emergence of consumer needs or other changes that raise a new product to the viable and potential opportunity for a business.

The notion of "quality assurance" is largely similar to quality management. This concept is defined as the totality of activities undertaken to achieve quality, activities that are found in all stages of the development of tourism products and services.

The most widely accepted definition of quality management is currently, the one provided by the ISO standard. Thus, *"quality management represents all the activities of the general management function that determine quality policy, objectives and responsibilities and implement them within the quality system by means such as planning, controlling, assuring and improving quality"* (Deac, 2014, p.400).

American Professor J.M. Juran, considered a true protagonist of quality management, defines quality management through its functions. In his opinion, quality management comprises three main categories of management processes: (Juran, 1980, p.28).

- quality planning;
- keeping quality under control;
- improving quality.

In our opinion, these three categories of processes are also relevant to the tourism industry.

Quality assurance of tourism products and services must be provided by the tourism enterprise at the early stage of planning its activities. This category of processes should include:

- establishing the quality objectives;
- identification of potential consumers of tourism products and services;
- studying the needs of tourism-consumers;
- developing the characteristics of tourism products and services;
- developing the characteristics of the process through which the product or tourism service will be obtained.

Quality control in the tourism enterprise should provide for the application of the management control function at the level of quality management. This category of processes requires:

- establishing and approving the characteristics of the tourism products and services to be provided;
- tracking the processes to be respected in quality assurance;
- setting the expected levels of controlled features;
- designation of a person or group of persons to exercise control;
- verification of process performance to the established characteristics;
- interpreting deficiencies;
- taking actions when finding out deviations from the established rules.

Improving the quality of tourism products and services must be a priority in the work of travel agencies and tour operators and should provide for the following processes:

- finding the need for improvement;
- finding weak places in the management of the tourism enterprise;
- diagnosis of the causes that have led to the diminution of the quality of tourism products and services;
- fighting with resistance to change;
- organization of working teams;
- fixing the problems;
- maintaining the made improvements.

Although quality management represents the responsibility of all levels of management, the coordinating role belongs to the top management, and the implementation of quality management can only be achieved with the participation of all employees of the tourism enterprise.

A quality assurance system within a tourism enterprise must include a set of organizational structures that contain responsibilities and procedures, processes and resources, aiming to implement the quality management (Platon, 2014, p.51).

The implementation of a quality assurance system in a tourism enterprise requires some stages, as follows:

1. Choosing and development of an appropriate standard system of the quality management.
2. Training staff in order to use the implemented standard;
3. Staged implementation of the quality standard.
4. Undertaking the internal audit of the enterprise in monitoring the implementation process of the quality standard.
5. Performing managerial analysis of implementation processes.
6. Continuous improvement of the internal organization of the tourism enterprise.

For the successful implementation of the quality standard in the tourism enterprise, in our opinion, it is appropriate to use the **PRCA** process model, thought by W. Edwards Deming, a great expert in the field of quality management. The model provides for a four-step cycle, aimed at implementing the change: (Deming, 1993, p. 132)

Stage I: **Planning** – recognizing an opportunity to start a change.

Stage II: **Achievement** – the process of testing the change takes place. A small-scale study is carried out by designing an experiment.

Stage III: **Control** – the results of the experiment are analyzed and problems are identified.

Stage IV: **Action** – acts according to the obtained result. If the change did not produce the desired results, the cycle resumes with another improvement plan. If the change has produced some improvement effects, it is implemented within the large-scale tourism enterprise.

After completing the PRCA cycle, it is necessary to ensure that the level of quality achieved is maintained. For this, a so-called maintenance level is applied, which implies compliance with the rule system by standardizing the achieved level, verifying if the standard is effective and produces positive effects on the business of the tourism enterprise. Also, it is possible to introduce some corrections to reach the set goal.

In its work program, the World Tourism Organization operates with the concept of quality in tourism, the definition of which is as follows: "*quality is the result of a process that involves satisfying the legitimate needs of products and services, consumer requirements and expectations at an acceptable price in accordance with the quality standards related to ensuring the safety and security of tourists, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmony of tourism activity with the human and natural environment*".

Quality in tourism is quite difficult to achieve on the grounds that the service does not always depend on the tourism agency or tour operator. It depends to a large extent on the service providers: the tourism accommodation structures with the functions of accommodation, the tourism accommodation structures with food functions, transport companies, leisure entities, etc. Therefore, in order to ensure the qualitative performance of the service, it is necessary to consider the following quality-determining concepts:

Table no. 1 Concepts that determine the quality of services in the tourism branch

N/o	Instruments	Description
1.	Service features	Consumption service that meets certain preset qualities. Example may be the accommodation unit. The accommodation unit must meet the requirements set out in the classification rules and ensure the level of comfort set out in the classification certificate. In order to avoid complaints from tourists, the possibility of deviating from the norms established by the legislation is excluded.
2.	Economic advantages	It is a financial effort that is made for the purchase of the requested service. This will greatly influence the consumer's satisfaction degree, as he will not be pleased with the fact that the purchased service generates large expenses.
3.	Recognition and identification	A well-known trademark can be a guarantor of the qualitative service delivery.
4.	Ecological aspects	An ecologically protected area will increase demand from potential consumers. The latest trend in tourism is the visit of pure organic areas, unaffected by industry.

5.	Ergonomic properties	There are appreciated from the perspective of the product-man relationship, these properties contributing to the maximum satisfaction for the consumer through the offered control, creation of good mood, etc.
6.	Informational platforms	Use of IT applications to launch, promote, distribute and market the service.

Source: Developed by author

Establishing quality standards for tourism companies is one of the key issues of a top-manager, who has an obligation to set realistic standards while motivating employees to meet and implement them (Rondelli, Cojocariu, 2004, p.81). Ideally, these standards can be perceived by those who will have to translate them into life as:

- significant in achieving important objectives;
- clear, except for doubts about the expected result;
- fair, in relation to all employees;
- adaptable, through the possibility of their rapid implementation, taking into account the objectives of the tourism enterprise;
- honored by obliging employees to respect them.

In establishing the quality standards within the tourism company, the top-manager must ensure their compatibility with those imposed externally and their relevance to its activity. Thus, in the process of deciding on the implementation of certain standards, there may be 3 problems that need to be addressed from the start.

Table no. 2 Ways of establishing quality standards in the tourism companies

N/o	Issue	Reasoning
1.	Is it reasonable to introduce this standard if it increases the amount of work done by employees under the conditions of maintaining the previous salary?	A top-manager may impose an excessive workload that cannot simply be achieved. Or, on the contrary, staff may not be used to its full capacity, in order not to generate fluctuation of staff, which is quite high in tourism.
2.	Do the objectives have to be maximized in order to go out among the leaders of the tourism market, or to be minimized, to keep the company afloat?	A team can be set a goal to give members a challenge and motivate them to achieve performance. Even if such an objective cannot be achieved, the achievements are better than if a more modest but a safer one was proposed. Sometimes, however, standards are used to define the minimum acceptable performance level. Both approaches are important, although each of them can lead to specific problems. On the other hand, goals that cannot be reached can create a sense of failure. Under these circumstances, the most important thing is to clarify how a particular standard or objective is used.
3.	Do standards have to be measurable?	It is assumed that a standard to be useful, it must be measured in one way or another. A qualitative approach does not require the objectives to be defined in numerical terms, but in statements that can be verifiable from a descriptive point of view. Whatever the goals, the best standards are those that allow the employee to easily spot the effects of performance.

Source: Developed by author

5. Conclusions

Having a quality system in the tourism enterprise is a proof of an efficient management, a management oriented to cultural values that specifies the quality as a fundamental factor of continuous progress. The cultural values promoted together with the implementation of the quality system are a consequence of the changes in the organizational culture.

All quality systems lead us to the conclusion that the quality issue must be systematically treated, constantly and fairly approached and thus may lead to the success of any tourism business.

In other words, a methodical approach is required not only to meet the accepted quality standards, but also to improve them.

The ultimate goal of implementing quality standards is certification of services, which should define a modern tourism enterprise. Standardization of services must be popularized so that it can be used as a criterion in the choice of the company by tourist-consumers.

As a *generalization*, we can say the following: if a tourism enterprise wants to achieve only quality products and services, it is necessary for the enterprise itself to be "qualitative", that is, to be able to satisfy as much as possible the requirements of the customers.

Proposals and recommendations

In order to manage the quality tracking system, we need to rely on a specialized organization in the context of demand developments and the adaptation of standards.

Therefore, certain aspects need to be taken into account in setting quality standards, such as:

- ✓ what the consumer really wants;
- ✓ staff skills;
- ✓ training staff to improve standards;
- ✓ eliminating certain constraints;
- ✓ equipment availability;
- ✓ availability of time for tasks accomplishment;
- ✓ linking the activity to legal parameters.

Considering the common features for all the quality systems presented, it is pointed out that:

- systems are established in writing;
- systems ensure the fulfillment of the client's requirements;
- systems ensure the fulfillment of the requirements of the tourism enterprise;
- systems are applied in all activities of the tourism enterprise, so as to interact with them.

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