

Quality Management in the Hotel Industry in the Mountainous Area of Romania

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Abstract

The importance of quality in the tourism sector must consider the socio-cultural progress of people and their critique of their distance from nature.

Choosing as research object the quality management in the hotel industry in the mountain area of Romania we chose as barometer the numerical evolution of the tourist reception structures with accommodation function in the resorts in the mountain area with the intention to identify the quality of management in the tourism sector. The indicators chosen to analyze the quality management are the tourist reception structures with the function of tourist accommodation in the mountain resorts and the overnight stays in the tourist reception structures with the function of tourist accommodation in the mountain resorts; data collection was available with the help of official data provided by the National Institute of Statistics in Romania.

It is recommended to improve the destination management system by coalition of public and private environmental factors interested in developing and capitalizing on the tourist potential of the destination.

Key words: quality management, mountain tourism, strategy, hotel industry

J.E.L. classification: L1, L8, Z3, M5

1. Introduction

Romania's tourist potential in terms of the mountain area is very high, every year the number of those who choose to spend their free time increases. The mountainous area for Romania is one of the tourist riches of Romania, being fully exploited by those who want winter sports, but not only, because the mountainous area does not only mean winter and sports, but also summer, relaxation, spa, walks on the mountain paths, exploitation, unique caves and monuments, monasteries, and castles, being a perfect blend of modern, luxury restaurants, quality and traditional services, the old and the quiet of the mountain villages.

Nowadays, the use of the tourist service has gained great exponential importance with what we generally know about other sectors of the economy. The main objective underlying the choices of both tourists and suppliers is to obtain a "quality service". But quality is a very broad term that covers a wide range of possibilities.

Analyzing this concept, we can highlight the different notions that must be taken into account when establishing the quality of a tourist product: excellence that far exceeds the characteristics common to other products / services that make it superior; the added value that underlies the efficiency of use by the customer and that generates higher performance than the costs necessary to create it and the last notion is the functionality that exceeds the expectations of the tourist thus becoming an extremely efficient product.

In Romania, in the conditions of the market economy, the demand for mountain tourism products oscillates constantly, especially in an ascending sense in terms of material possibilities, transport facilities, the need for knowledge and extra-professional activities that act as an emulator to promote this process.

In Romania, tourism in the mountain area has been practiced since ancient times; it was practiced by soldiers who trained for defense and orientation exercises, by residents of neighboring rural areas to procure various fruits and vegetables that have been developed wildly in both forests and mountainous areas.

Quality management in mountain tourism requires a long-term strategy, which leads to a continuous improvement of the quality of mountain tourism products and services in conjunction with the management's ability to meet and exceed the needs of tourists, facilitating increased productivity and profit. In reality, the notion of quality designed only as an adaptation to standards must be resized so as to adapt to the needs and expectations of the customer. Due to these considerations, this paper aims to highlight a number of theoretical and practical aspects of quality management in the mountain environment, as it is the key process for attracting, gaining and customer satisfaction, loyalty and obtaining a profit and a way to ensure product competitiveness and services as well as the credibility of the tourism services market.

Accessing the tourist potential in the mountain area is possible by adopting four objectives: increasing the level of education and professional training of human resources in the hospitality and tourism industry; increasing the quality and performance of tourism destinations in Romania and ensuring the quality standards of products / services in the tourism industry; increasing the notoriety of the mountain tourist destination in Romania, as a quality tourist destination on the international tourism market and the sustainable development of tourism, by creating a coherent legislative framework (Torrente et al, 2004).

In order to increase the quality and performance of tourist destinations in Romania and ensure the quality standards of products / services in the tourism industry, it is necessary to improve the destination management system by forming a coalition of organizations and public and private stakeholders interested in developing and capitalizing on the tourism potential of the destination by facilitating access to mountain areas as a result of infrastructure development throughout the country.

The various challenges in the hotel industry indicate to management the directions to develop the quality system that continues to generate organizational processes resulting in high quality products and techniques, and the notion of total quality management (TQM) that is defined as a "management approach that emphasizes the continuous process and the improvement of the system as a means of obtaining customer satisfaction to ensure the long-term success of the company" (Summers, 2006).

Validation of challenges indicates the direction of management to overcome potential obstacles, which also contributes to reducing costs, time and resources; in addition, by knowing the appropriate strategies or critical success factors, management teams can make better use of their strengths, identify weaknesses and understand the process of maximizing and using resources.

The uniqueness of this study comes from the need to understand the notions of total quality management and the footprint of the tourism sector in the mountainous areas of the country the implementation of quality in the fields of hospitality, as well as in quality management.

2. Literature review

Mountain tourism is a type of "tourist activity that takes place in a defined and limited geographical area, such as hills or mountains with distinctive features and attributes that are inherent to a specific landscape, topography, climate, biodiversity (flora and fauna) and local community that encompasses a wide range of outdoor sports and leisure activities". (Pascal, 2013)

The mountain area is ultimately characterized by a high concentration of tourist resources, the relief is the support of all components of the geographical environment, it is also the support of tourism activities: therefore, it is considered the main component of the tourist potential of an area, this being all the more evident in the mountainous area.

The mountainous area in Romania consists of the Carpathian Mountains which represent a third of the country's surface and is located in 27 counties and in 2018 about 16% of the total population still lived in mountainous areas representing approx. 950,000 mountain households in the Romanian Carpathians.

At the level of the mountain area, the lower Carpathian floor, located below the limit of 1000 m altitude, corresponds to the most favorable conditions for human habitat, grouping the depressions and the intramountain valley corridors where most human settlements are concentrated. In the upper floor of the limit of over 1000 m, many households are grouped in the form of human settlements such as "scattered" villages and hamlets. On a household, the average surface varies according to altitude: 2.5 ha at 600-700 m and 3.5-4.5 ha at over 800 m.

Theoretically, rural and mountain tourism have a high potential to stimulate local economic growth and social change due to its complementarity with other economic activities, its contribution to the GDP and job creation and its ability to promote the dissemination of demand over time (fighting the season) and over a wider area.

The elements for which tourists are attracted to the mountain area - fresh air, diverse landscapes, rich biodiversity, and unique cultures - are under threat, partly due to poorly managed and unsustainable tourism. The investment, operational and managerial decisions of tour operators, other tourism professionals and the wider industry help to determine the level of both the negative and positive impact of tourism in mountain environments.

Tourism can have a series of impacts on mountain ecosystems, communities and economies. Although many of the impacts could be negative, tourism can also generate a positive impact, as it can serve as a force for peace, encourages pride in cultural traditions, helps urban relocations by creating local jobs, increasing employment. awareness and appreciation of visitors to natural, cultural and historical values and assets.

Mountain tourism produces effects at the level of three important directions, economic, socio-cultural and environmental effects. The economic effects are the easiest to quantify and explain, which is why we approached their analysis through economic indicators, the tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation function in the mountain resorts and overnight stays in tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation duty in mountain resorts.

The positive socio-cultural effects have direct implications in increasing the level of education of locals as a result of the need to facilitate the communication with tourists, both from a culturally point of view and from learning a foreign language, in increasing the living standards of disadvantaged people by creating jobs, but also their direct involvement in the design and provision of local products to tourists (Moisescu, 2017).

Tourism can contribute to increasing the quality of the community by developing the infrastructure of utilities, transport or energy (which is needed for the proper functioning of the tourist destination but will also benefit the inhabitants of the area) and by improving the quality and diversification of goods and services (to ensure the satisfaction of tourists in the area will appear a much more diverse range of goods and services, often at higher quality standards, which will have access to the local population), (Reisinger, 2009).

With positive implications we add the promotion of tolerance and mutual understanding between peoples through the multidirectional chance of knowing other cultures directly and eliminating ignorance by eliminating some stereotypes. We mention the intention of tourism to keep alive the traditions but also the effort to redesign the declining traditions by keeping the diversity and local specificity in a world subjected to globalization (Beech et al, 2016).

Among the socio-cultural effects with negative impact we mention the discrimination in occupational patterns that occurs in the tourism sector; as well as the proliferation of kitsch through the emergence of pre-events and pseudo-artifacts that do not bring direct benefits to the local community but only to tourism entrepreneurs; intercultural conflicts and increasing crime.

The effects of tourism on the environment contribute to the protection of the biodiversity by transforming rare species of fauna and flora from parks and reserves into tourist attractions in antithesis with pollution, consumption of natural resources, certifications and ecological labels that represent the negative effects of the environment.

In the conditions of the market economy, the quality management in tourism depends on the uniqueness of the relief, on the performance of the activities, the modernization of the flow, the

technologizing, the sustainable responsibility, and the definition of the organizational characteristics. At the cognitive level, only the simple association of quality management in the hotel industry in Romania in the mountainous area can provide positive results in terms of the theoretical approach of the notion in choosing, defining, mapping the tourist product or service.

3. Research methodology

The mountain area is characterized by the existence of two periods of season with tourist activity of similar intensities, but the duration and mobility of travel are different so that the mountain areas meet the requirements of a bi-seasonal activity - winter for snow and sports, summer for rest and hiking, mountaineering (Turcu, 2008).

Choosing as research object the quality management in the hotel industry in the mountain area of Romania we chose as barometer the numerical evolution of the tourist reception structures with accommodation function in the resorts in the mountain area with the intention to identify the quality of management in the tourism sector.

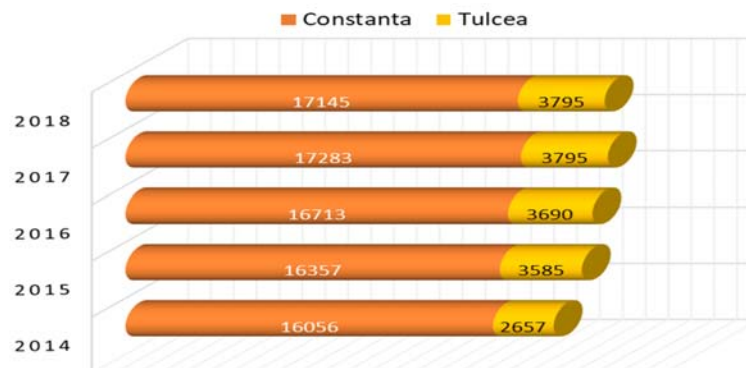
The data collection was done with the help of statistical directories available nationally and accommodation units are divided into hotels, hostels, motels, inns, tourist villas, tourist cottages, tourist pensions, agritourism pensions, campsites, tourist stops, holiday villages, bungalows, students and preschool camps, tourist cottages and accommodation on ships.

The vision and strategic objectives offer the obvious directions of the contribution of quality management in the development of the tourism industry in the mountain area by: protecting the environment and natural resources correlated with responsibility and accountability; improving the economy through the economic opportunities of the tourism industry by increasing the number of jobs and enriching connectivity by increasing the movement of people, goods and information; providing public services as a consequence of modernizing the area; promoting efficiency, accessibility and sustainability.

The application of quality management in the development must also take into account the requirements of respecting the quality of the environment, rely heavily on the human factor, which is mandatory to have a culture and information on environmental issues, thus helping in the process of attracting, gaining and customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and profitability, as well as a way to ensure the competitiveness of products and services as well as the credibility of the area in the tourism market.

The indicators chosen to analyze the quality management are the tourist reception structures with the function of tourist accommodation in the mountain resorts and the overnight stays in the tourist reception structures with the function of tourist accommodation in the mountain resorts; data collection was available with the help of official data provided by the National Institute of Statistics in Romania.

Figure no. 1 Evolution of the number of profitable companies presented by county and period



Source: Authors' study based on the INSE indicators

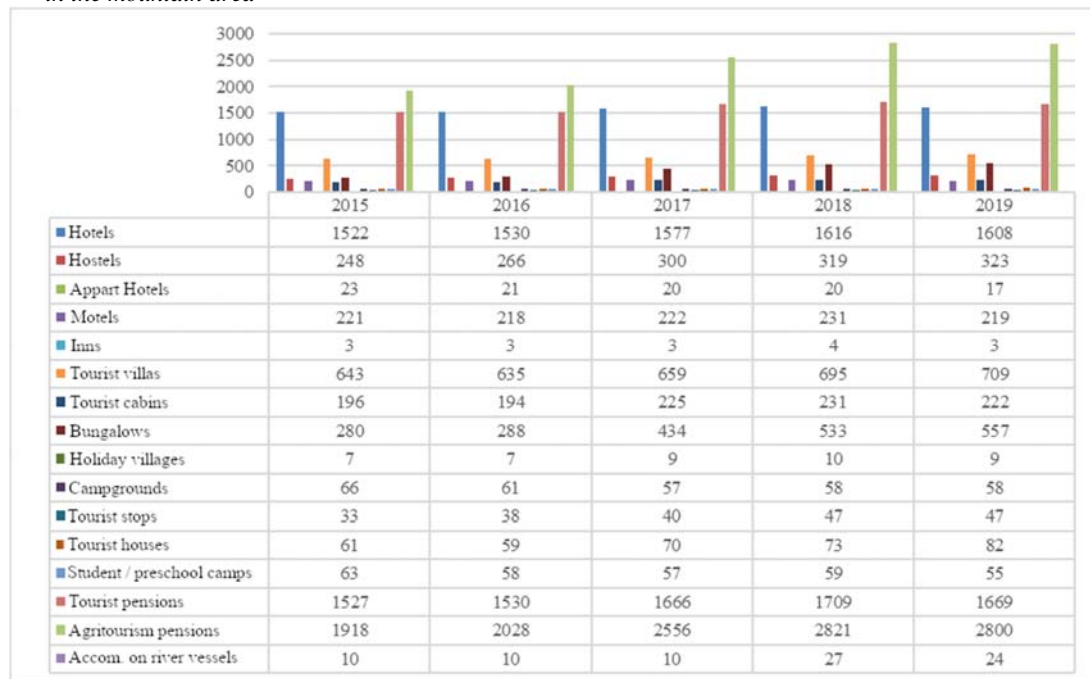
4. Results

The development of tourism activities in mountain destinations generates a series of economic effects that should ensure economic growth, social progress, and environmental protection, all in the long term and in conditions of sustainability. The World Tourism Organization indicates sustainable tourism as "tourism that takes into account both its current economic, social and environmental impact and its future impact."

The literature identified three approaches to the impact of tourism on the economy: undervaluation, overvaluation, and the realistic approach that tourism is an important component of the tertiary sector of the economy, with significant effects on the economy, which ensure sustainable economic development through synergy with other economic sectors (Postelnicu, 2006).

The tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation function have as priority the protection of tourists and are classified quality-price ratio according to the constructive characteristics, endowments and quality of services offered for the purpose of tourists, accommodation services and public catering.

Figure no.2. Evolution of the number of tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation function in the mountain area



Source: made by the author based on data from statistical yearbooks

The mountainous area of Romania has a unique character and a valuable cultural endowment, the socio-economic evolution of each country brings differences in the development stage through the importance of tourism activities in the sustainable development of a tourist area with a specific form of tourism based on cultural and historical assets, so, we appreciate the figures presented in the previous graph as the engine of a growth market that produces favorable images of Romania.

From the time period analyzed at the end of 2015 there were built and functional 6,821 accommodation units in the mountainous region of Romania, following an increase of 1.02 in the following year, aspects that were possible with the help of economic growth, sustainable investments and jobs in which adds the first steps in the subsequent progress of mass digitalization.

Predominantly from the analysis of the graph is the upward trend of the indicator presented in the analyzed time period, from which results the favorable effects of mountain management in Romania, effects that have impacted the positioning of mountain tourism in the list of reasons for tourists, both domestic and foreigners.

Thanks to the need for relaxation coupled with the trend to maintain muscle tone, the number of people who began to practice mountain tourism to exercise, as well as the number of sports competitions held in mountain areas, increased at an astonishing rate which is why we notice an upward increase over the analyzed period of time of the number of accommodation units.

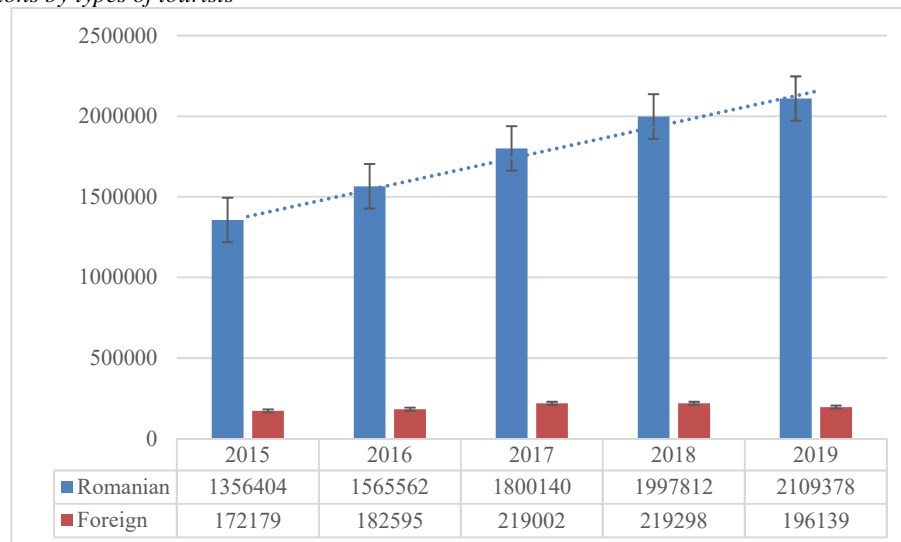
The year 2016 represented the year of ascent of the area regarding the fast growth rate of accommodation units, the total number of reception units increased compared to 2015 by 1.14% which validates the positive assessment of quality management in tourism development in the mountain area having in view of the complexity of the situations where the catalyst of evolution took into account the conservation and sustainable development by stimulating and cooperating in the region but also by highlighting the mountain tourism as a landmark for Romania.

The previous table shows numerically the reception structures in tourist pensions and agritourism pensions which in 2019 represent 53.18% of the total number of accommodation units, respectively 8,402; in 2018 this indicator had the value of 8,453 and in 2017 were 7,905 accommodation units.

The increase in the number of reception units is supported by a variety of factors, namely: improving the legislative conditions for building an accommodation unit, the support of the government through programs that offer benefits, transshipment of important cultural events, the possibility to practice sports activities specific only to the area, the existence of diversified and attractive cultural heritage from the tourist point of view, the consolidation of the infrastructure and the means of communication, the revitalization of some cultural objectives and their integration in tourist circuits.

After a series of debates, a consensus was reached on the definition of the concept of tourism, which refers to "activities carried out by people, during trips and stays in places located outside the usual residence, for a consecutive period not exceeding one year, for leisure purposes, for business or other reasons". (Minciu, 2005)

Figure no.3. Number of tourist arrivals in tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation functions by types of tourists



Source: made by the author based on data from statistical yearbooks

An annual increase in the number of domestic tourists arriving in the mountainous areas of Romania can be observed. The trend of the number of foreign tourists in mountainous areas is fluctuating, so that the number of tourists who arrived has experienced an upward trend since 2015, with annual increases compared to previous years.

The development of information technologies followed by the general decline in prices for tourist travel has contributed to the increase in the number of tourists and the ongoing process of globalization. The number of tourists who arrive in the mountainous areas consuming a product or service is also the main feature of the tourist offer in that area, differing from other services. Thus, the result of the forecasts is that the number of tourists tends to increase in the coming years. As can

be seen, in 2019 there was an increase in the number of domestic tourists compared to 2018 by 1.05%.

In the analyzed period, 2019 was a year detached by comparison with the other years for the number of foreign tourists who visited the mountain areas, so that they arrived in Romania in a number of 219,298 with 1.27% increase compared to 2015.

In the category of domestic tourists who accessed the mountain areas, we note the year 2019, which saw a number of 2,109,378 tourists.

The selected indicators are numerical dynamizing elements that are the object of the national calculation and follow the accuracy of the information simultaneously with the manifestation of the conclusions that appear as a result of the application of quality management in the tourism industry in Romania.

5. Proposals and recommendations

The quality of tourist services is a priority for mountain tourism in Romania, correlated with natural resources and development potential. Particular attention can be paid to the specialization of the skilled worker or managers, the explosion towards a customer-oriented mentality, empathy and relationship with the needs of the tourist.

The quality of tourist services is a priority for mountain tourism in Romania, correlated with natural resources and development potential. Particular attention can be paid to the specialization of the skilled worker or managers, the explosion towards a customer-oriented mentality, empathy and relationship with tourist needs, increasing the number of foreign tourists, developing tourism schools by creating networks of establishment and training in the hospitality sector.

Increasing the level of education and training of human resources in the hospitality and tourism industry is the recommendation to be able to maintain the current growth rate, or even to be exceeded by the flow of tourists who are welcomed in an environment characterized by variety and heterogeneity.

It is recommended to improve the destination management system by coalition of public and private environmental factors interested in developing and capitalizing on the tourist potential of the destination.

Supporting the investments necessary to achieve an adequate infrastructure specific to accessibility in the mountain area; development of infrastructure for access to the high mountain area; expanding existing activities and introducing new ones for nature and adventure tourism; development of ecotourism destinations and related products; favoring the process of diversification of activities complementary to the accommodation capacity; restoration and development of certain mountain administrative capacities, all of which sum up the list of recommendations attributed to this study.

An overview of the strategy is recommended that is tangent to the following strategic objectives: protecting the environment and natural resources, improving the economy, improving connectivity, providing public services and promoting efficiency, accessibility and sustainability, consistent with quality management in accordance with technological progress.

6. Conclusions

Despite the lack of a single recipe for implementing a quality management plan in the tourism industry in the Romanian mountain area, it is worth mentioning the natural advantage that the country enjoys due to the positioning of the Carpathian chain, but at the same time it is necessary to apply a planning process, based on the inclusion of locals, authorities and the business environment aimed at cultivating the interest of mountain areas but also maintaining the relationship with it.

The success of the area as a tourist destination in the top of tourists' preferences is doubled by establishing a strong, well-structured management with sufficient financial and human resources for action involving autonomy, responsibility and a mix generated by the relationship between public authorities, private sector and local population.

This study produced findings that are applicable to improving quality practices in the mountainous area of Romania and is based on official data provided by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics, as well as studies and research published in journals related to quality and management in the tourism sector.

In conclusion, the creation of a partnership based on a close cooperation between all actors involved at local, regional, national and even international level to monitor implementation; forming a common vision for development by consulting the agencies involved and residents; attention to the balanced distribution of the positive effects due to the development of mountain tourism; the need for a complex policy to coordinate tourism activities and services; are the incentives behind this approach.

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