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IQM OF A TOURISM DESTINATION AS A TOOL OF COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract

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As the example above shows, the tourists' satisfaction level from staying at destination depends not only on their experience on specific tourist services, but also or more intangible factors, for example hospitality, safety and security, and cleanliness. The success of a destination is therefore a function of many independent components. It underscores the need for an integrated approach to managing the quality of tourist destination. The objective of the article is to specify the preconditions of a destination for implementing Integrated quality management (IMQ) and to demonstrate the possibilities for using the methodological approaches of the Qualitest tool in the tourist destination of Znojemsko and Podyjí. The obtained results show problematic utilization of Qualitest in full extent and the necessity to modify it for its use in the conditions of the Czech Republic destinations.

Integrated quality management (IMQ), tourism destination, Qualitest

The quality of offered products is the basis of a long-term success on the market. In case of the area of services it is necessary to consider certain specifications of services, such as for example their intangibility, evanescence or changeability. So the quality of services is very difficult to measure. Nevertheless, it is possible to evaluate it successfully according to the level of customer satisfaction. A satisfied customer is the one who has got what he or she has expected, possibly even more. He or she usually broadens positive references and returns to a firm. On the other hand, a customer who is dissatisfied with a service can influence the reputation and subsequently the success of a company significantly. In case of companies offering tourism services a satisfied customer and positive references are important marketing and competition advantage. That is why it is necessary to specify quality in a given company, to work on its increasing and to evaluate it continuously. It is important to know customers' requirements to be able to maintain quality and so to meet their requirements.

American authors EVANTS and LINDSAY (1999) maintain a position that quality cannot be determined unambiguously. It is a relative term based on subjective evaluations of various criteria provided by individuals who have different roles in the marketing-production chain and so different requirements connected with this fact. At the same time their demands for quality still develop with the increase of their experience. So, for maintaining quality it is important to understand various points of view on the basis of which it is evaluated.

The official definition of quality was formulated in 1978 by the American National Standards Institute – ANSI and the American Society for Quality – ASQ. Quality was defined as "a set of the features of a product or a service based on the ability to satisfy given needs". However, later on many firms started to use an easier and consumer-oriented definition: „Quality is satisfying or exceeding a customer's expectation"[1]. It follows from many authors' opinions that quality can be ensured and maintained by various means. Palatková (2006) identifies with the

1 In: EVANTS, LINDSAY (1999)

opinion of BARTL, SCHMIDT (1998) and MÜLLER (1995) who consider a direct contact with a client and the identification of quality from a client's side to be the most reliable approach.

A tourist destination is a target place of a journey that disposes of a set of services provided in connection with the potential of tourism in the given area. It is a certain geographical space created by the offer of tourist attractions and all facilities necessary for realizing tourism services (accommodation, boarding, transportation, entertainment…).

Provided that a destination disposes of a quality potential for applying tourism it is inevitable to ensure the quality of individual services in all links of the chain that create a common product of the destination if we want to reach an overall quality of the destination. The competitiveness and economic efficiency of the destination then depends on the differentiation and quality of the product.

So, in a destination it is necessary to strive for quality in all areas, which for example according to BUHALIS (2000) means:

Attractions – basic or in other words primary offer of tourism that due to its amount, quality and attractiveness elicits attendance (natural, culture-historical potential).

Accessibility and ancillary services – general infrastructure that enables the access to a destination and movement to its attractions; here also belong the services used mainly by local inhabitants (telecommunication, medical, banking, postal and so on).

Amenities – derived or in other words secondary offer, superstructure and infrastructure of tourism that enable movement in a destination and using its attractions (accommodation, hospitality, sports-recreational, culture-sociable and other facilities).

Available packages – prepared product packages.

Activities – the possibility to use sports, cultural and other experience activities for individual market segments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The tool for reaching the quality of services in a destination is building and adapting a system of quality that has certain rules. The approach that considers overall satisfaction of all participating elements, such as consumers, service providers as well local inhabitants, is integrated quality management. The system of integrated quality management (IQM) is based on the model of exceptionality EFQM[2]. Its creation was initiated by European Commission (2003) on the basis of published studies providing the results of the best practices of quality management in selected European destinations.

Integrated quality management connects four key elements of a destination in its approach (the satisfaction of tourists, the satisfaction of service providers, the quality of local inhabitants' lives and the quality of the environment). Its objective is to monitor quality, compare it in time and improve it. It is an analytical and dynamic model that utilizes gained results for improving the conditions on the basis of which the quality of a destination is evaluated. It is a cyclic process consisting of five following steps:

1. Identifying partners and determining a leader who is able to make the others interested to reach a united objective.
2. Suggesting and selecting measures leading to improving the quality of a destination.
3. Realizing the measures.
4. Measuring the effects.
5. Evaluating and adapting.

For measuring the results of the quality of a destination concerning individual indicators it is possible to use the tool called Qualitest[3] that was created by European Commission as a manual for evaluating the quality of a destination.

Qualitest consists of 16 quality themes that provide information on basic factors of a destination and the quality of a tourist product itself. Each quality theme is evaluated by three indicators which are interlinked and reflect the integrated approach of quality management that is essential in tourist destinations.

Quality Perception Condition Indicators (QPCI) – state indicators – are considered to be the entrance points of quality management. They reflect the level of satisfaction of visitors and local tourism services providers. They are gained by a survey and based on subject opinions of the questioned people. Good results of these indicators are the main objective of integrated quality management. If the results are not satisfactory in case of any indicator (compared to previous years or similar destinations), the management has to check relevant QMI and QPI and conduct actions necessary for improving them. Then the survey has to be repeated so that it is found out whether the previous QPCI results have improved.

Quality Management Indicators (QMI) are qualitative and are based on the self-evaluation of a destination management. The level of a destination management is crucial for its successful development as one of the main activities of a destination management is ensuring the communication between investors and managers in the destination, for example by force of local organizations of tourism.

Quality Performance Indicators (QPI) are quantitative and make an objective counterpart of QPCI. QPI is

2 The model of excellence EFQM is a manager model that applies crucial concepts of total quality management (TQM) into the structured system of management. It allows the self-evaluation of an organization in all its activities and continual benchmarking (comparing to other top organizations).

3 Qualitest – A Manual for Evaluating the Quality Performance of Tourist Destinations and Services (2003) (www.ec.europa.eu). Annexe 1.

linked to QPCI and QMI again for each qualitative aspect. The number of complaints concerning public transportation in a destination per 100,000 passengers can be an example of QPI. VAJČNEROVÁ (2009).

RESULTS

The preconditions for implementing IQM in a tourist destination

- *Geographical demarcation of a destination*. For easier data processing it is suitable for the borders of a destination to be identical with the borders of autonomous demarcation. To obtain quantitative data for QPI it is necessary to base on the administrative classification of the Czech Republic into regions, districts and municipalities that conduct surveying and collect suitable statistical data. Nevertheless, from the point of view of a destination definition and its perception by a customer it is suitable to work with a marketing division of our republic into tourist regions (17) and tourist areas (40). The agreement of administrative and marketing division is optimal – this condition is complied with for example by Vysočina when talking about the level of region – tourist region, or Znojemsko and Podyjí when talking about the level of district-tourist area.
- *Creating partner relations and determining a leader responsible for IQM implementation* (a leader can be a destination agency or any other business or public subject that has personal and financial possibilities for evaluating the quality of a destination by Qualitest).
- *The existence of a functional tourist organization realizing destination management* for the purpose of obtaining data for QMI.
- *The conditions for conducting surveys of the satisfaction of customers and service providers* in tourism for the purpose of obtaining data for QPCI (forming a set of responders, forming questionnaires, collecting data, evaluating outcomes).
- *Unified persuasion of the subjects* providing tourism services about the benefits of partnership in the interest of increasing the quality of a destination.
- *The cooperation with the public sector* for the purpose of collecting data for QPI (the police, municipal authorities, Trade Supervisory Office).

The methodical process of evaluating the quality of a destination by Qualitest

For implementing IQM it is necessary to measure the quality of a destination and on the basis of the results to suggest and realize concrete measures for improvement. The evaluation of a destination quality can be conducted by Qualitest that consists of several surveys the results of which are assigned to individual quality themes in the chart that serves as a background material for implementing IQM.

Obtaining data for QPCI

The data for QPCI are obtained with the help of a primary research. For the purpose of gaining data for this indicator it is necessary to create a questionnaire for service providers in tourism and also for the visitors of a destination. The first set of responders consists of all providers of tourist services in a destination. The second set of responders consists of tourists who spend at least one night in a destination. For small destinations the minimum number of responders is 100, it is ideal to address a representative set of responders representing main market segments. Responders answer question formed in the connection with individual quality themes with the help of a five-level scale of answers from highly satisfied to dissatisfied. In the evaluation chart the answers are satisfied and more.

Obtaining data for QMI

The first precondition for obtaining the values of quality management indicators is an analysis of a given destination with the aim to find out whether there is a functional destination agency, or possibly a tourism organization, in the evaluated area. If there is such an agency or an organization, its self-evaluation is conducted by a qualitative research concentrating on gaining answers in connection with the quality themes evaluated by Qualitest. If there is not such an agency or an organization, it is inevitable to identify an organization that substitutes the activities of a destination agency at least partially. Nevertheless, in this case it is necessary to recommend establishing a quality and fully functional destination agency as the first step towards IQM implementation. The organization substituting the function of a destination agency can be determined by a qualitative research, too, using the techniques of in-depth discussions with the managements of organization that mention developing tourism in the content of their activities in a given area.

Obtaining data for QPI

Obtaining data for quality performance indicators appears to be the most problematic. The reason is that the most needed statistical quality themes in individual areas are evaluated according to administration division, which means according to regions or districts. Tourist areas that are tourist destinations for which measuring quality is meaningful are not able to provide most quality themes indicating the quality of performance for their geographical area (these quality themes can be the number of crimes, the amount of waste, the number of complaints about public transport and so on). However, for evaluating a destination by quantitative quality themes various data can be used that are available in the destination. Nevertheless, to be able to compare the level of a destination quality to other years it is necessary to use always the same quality themes.

Evaluating indicators for individual quality themes

The level of a destination quality is measured by three indicators mentioned above for 16 quality themes. As the sense of conducting a destination quality measurements by Qualitest lies in comparing the results in time, or possibly to competitive destinations, it is necessary to convert the obtained information into comparable figures and to create an evaluation chart where the gained figures and data will be demonstrated clearly and stored for the purpose of further comparison.

On the basis of the case study concerning the performability of the mentioned methodology in the tourist area of Znojemsko and Podyjí a model evaluation chart was created. It serves as a basic information source for the application of IQM.

DISCUSSION

Ensuring and maintaining the quality of a tourist destination is demanding as quality is directly dependent on the level of customer satisfaction. It is a customer who evaluates a destination as a whole. Besides the offer of basic attractions the quality of a destination is also formed by a set of offered services, the quality of the environment, local inhabitants' attitudes and the level of destination management. To harmonize all these attributes and to offer a quality whole to a customer needs a complex approach. IQM is the approach whose implementa-

I: *The model evaluation chart of the quality of the destination Znojemsko and Podyjí for year 2010*[4]

	Quality Themes	QPCI	QMI	QPI
1	**Viability of local tourism industry**			
	Satisfaction with performance	86 %	yes	
	Meeting management	43 %	yes	
2	**The support of tourism industry in the destination**			
	Satisfaction with the possibilities of support	61 %	yes	
	Awareness of the existence of the support programme	52 %	yes	
	Successful project of the support programme	25 %	…	
	Application for a financial support for enterprise	13 %	…	
3	**Marketing of the destination**			
	Satisfaction with marketing support	71 %		
	Checking marketing support	…	yes	
4	**The quality of the acceptance by local inhabitants**			
	Satisfaction with the acceptance by local inhabitants	94 %	…	
	Local inhabitants' opinions are respected		yes	
5	**Safety and security**	84 %	yes	
6	**The quality of air**	94 %	Do not know	
7	**The quality of the environment**	94 %	Do not know	
8	**Pre-arrival communication**	76 %	Do not know	
9	**Accessibility**	66 %	yes	
10	**Transport**	70 %	Do not know	
11	**Accommodation**	92 %	Do not know	
12	**Information**	80 %	yes	
13	**Boarding**	88 %	Do not know	
14	**Activities**	78 %	Do not know	
15	**Bathing water quality**	82 %	yes	
16	**Value for money**	60 %	…	

The questionnaire results from service providers
The self-evaluation of the destination agency
The results of a survey among local inhabitants
The results of a survey among visitors

Source: own work

4 The evaluation chart is not complete, the quality performance indicators are have not been processed yet and they are objects of further researching.

tion and application can lead to the required quality. In the article the methodology of Qualitest was introduced; it is a tool of IQM that shows basic quality themes influencing customer satisfaction and the ways how they can be measured. Nevertheless, the complete accomplishment of Qualitest is very demanding and so it is inevitable to modify it for an easier application in destinations. The conducted research, the partial results of which are introduced in the article, strives for proving the complete version of Qualitest so that it is possible to identify real problems in its conclusion and to create a less demanding model that could be commonly used by destinations.

SUMMARY

The quality of tourism services is connected with customer satisfaction. A customer is satisfied if he or she has got what he or she has expected, possibly even something more. The immaterial character of services and their variability significantly influence customer satisfaction and complicate maintaining required quality. Nowadays when competitive pressures are so intense the strategies of traditional tourist destinations are based primarily on the quality of services. Ensuring the quality in a destination requires the cooperation of subjects that participate on tourism development in the destination with their activities. Creating and implementing the system of quality that has a certain conception and internal rules is a tool for reaching the quality of a destination. Integrated quality management (IQM) is a suitable system. The objective of the article is to specify the preconditions of a destination for implementing IMQ and to demonstrate the possibilities for using the methodological approaches of the Qualitest tool in the tourist destination of Znojemsko and Podyjí. The obtained results show problematic utilization of Qualitest in full extent and the necessity to modify it for its use in the conditions of the Czech Republic destinations.

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	Quality themes	QPCI	QMI	QPI
Quality of the destination	Viability of local tourism industry	Percentage of local tourism industry professionals more than satisfied with business last season in comparison with the previous season	Networking and communication between the destination manager and the tourism industry in the destination is facilitated and functions effectively (Yes/no)	Percentage growth of the tourism industry in the destination
	Support to local tourism industry	Percentage of local tourism industry professionals more than satisfied with the business support opportunities offered in the destination	A programme is in place to coordinate business support to tourist services and transport services in destination, and its success is regularly evaluated (Yes/no)	Rate of successful business support applications made by the local tourism industry
	Marketing and promotion	Percentage of local tourism industry professionals more than satisfied with the quality of marketing and promotion of the destination	The destination has formally approved a tourism strategy, which contains clear directions on which to base marketing, and this is regularly checked (Yes/no)	Number of overnight stays per Euro invested in marketing and promotion of the destination
	Quality of welcome	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with the friendliness of the local population	A procedure is in place for regularly receiving feedback from local people on their opinion of tourism in the destination and this is taken into account (Yes/no)	Tourist season pressure on the destination
	Safety and security	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with the feeling of security and safety (including availability of health services)	A crime prevention initiative is in operation in the destination, involving the tourist services and transport services, and its operation is evaluated (Yes/no)	Ratio of criminal acts involving crime against the person to number of local inhabitants
	Ambient air quality	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with the quality of air in destination	Information on ambient concentrations of air pollutants is routinely made available to the public (Yes/no)	Number of days with high air pollution levels
	Local environmental quality	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with the cleanliness of the local environment	Responsibilities for managing the cleanliness of the destination have been clearly identified and the effectiveness of their operation is regularly evaluated (Yes/no)	Ratio of litter gathered to the area of the destination
Quality of the tourist product	Pre-arrival communication	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with the quality of communication about the destination received prior to arrival	Significant market segments are known and their expectations are regularly assessed via market surveys (Yes/no)	Tourist complaints registered per overnight stay
	Accessibility	Percentage of tourists with disabilities and limited mobility more than satisfied with accessibility to tourist services in the destination	The destination is aware of the needs of tourists with disabilities and limited mobility, and regularly raises awareness of why, and how, tourist services can be made more accessible (Yes/no)	Percentage of tourist services suitable for, and accessible by, disabled people and people of limited mobility
	Transport	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with the transport services in the destination	All transport services in the destination are aware of the need to manage the quality of the critical aspects of their service, and are kept informed of developments (Yes/no)	Ratio of complaints on the reliability of public passenger transport in the destination to number of passengers
	Accommodation	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with their accommodation	All accommodation providers in the destination are aware of the need to manage the quality of the critical aspects of their service, and are kept informed of developments (Yes/no)	Percentage of collective accommodation certified according to a Quality Management System (QMS), Environmental Management System (EMS), or ecolabelling programme
	Information	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with the quality of information on things to do in the destination	Information material provided to tourists on things to do in the destination is regularly checked, as well as the means of its provision (Yes/no)	Ratio of overnight stays per visit to the TICs in the destination
	Eating and drinking	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with the quality of places to eat and drink in the destination	The quality of the places to eat and drink in the destination is regularly evaluated, and there is a procedure in place to register complaints from tourists	Number of complaints on the quality of places to eat and drink in the destination per overnight stay
	Activities	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with the range and quality of things to do in the destination	All tourist attractions in the destination are aware of the need to manage the quality of the critical aspects of their service, and are kept informed of developments (Yes/no)	Number of things to do within a ½ day's travel of the destination per overnight stay
	Bathing water quality	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with the cleanliness of the bathing areas in the destination	There is a an integrated management plan in place that covers the bathing areas in the destination and its operation is regularly evaluated (Yes/no)	Percentage of bathing areas not complying with the mandatory values in the EU Bathing Water Directive
	Value for money	Percentage of tourists more than satisfied with value for money in general	The destination has developed and formally approved a tourism strategy and it is reviewed regularly (Yes/no)	Percentage of return tourists

1: Annexe 1. Qualitest
Source: A Manual for Evaluating the Quality Performance of Tourist Destinations and Services, 2003