INTRODUCTION

Throughout the course of time, the concept of quality has known a continuous development, always adapting to the existing market conditions, and positively influencing that market.

Starting from the antiquity, with the Code of HAMMURABI, and continuing up to JURAN’s modern concepts (Juran, 1995), the models had a continuous evolution, developing together with the development of human society.

In time, the concept of quality gained different orientations and, according to GARVIN D., it went through four main periods (Garvin, 1988):
- The inspection
- The scientific quality control
- The quality insurance
- The strategic management of quality

If the first three periods are rather reagent and view quality as a problem that has to be solved, back in the eighties a new perception of quality was developed. Quality was regarded as a competitive and strategic advantage that placed strategic management at the top of the entire management of quality. (Kaye et al., 1999)

Starting with the fifties, quality has become a notion more and more frequently employed within the business environment. In their turn, managers of the enterprises from the travel and tourism industry, the employees and the consumers, desire this quality, but they recognize its impact on the trajectory of the business, and, at the same time, each of them finds it difficult to correctly evaluate the multiple dimensions of quality. (Brown et al., 1991)

According to SR EN ISO 9000/2008, quality is defined as “the extent to which the ensemble of intrinsic characteristics of a product / service satisfies the customer needs”.

The result from the analysis of this definition is that in order to improve the quality of the products / services, we also need to improve the satisfaction of the customers regarding the product or the service that we, as providers, are offering.

At the 6th meeting in Vandro, Cuba, of the World Tourism Organization, the quality of tourism was defined as: “the result of a process which implies the satisfaction of all the legitimate product and service needs, requirements and expectations of the consumer, at an acceptable price, in conformity with mutually
accepted contractual conditions and the underlying quality determinants such as safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmony of the tourism activity concerned with its human and natural environment.” (Conformable to the definition coined by the Quality Support Committee of the OMT, modified on its 6th reunion in Varadero, Cuba, may 2003)

Going by this definition we can identify elements which determine the attractivity degree of a tourist destination, namely: (Cojocariu, 2010)

- natural and anthropic resources – they ensure the initial motivation for a tourist to visit the destination;
- tourist infrastructure – it includes utilities, public transportation, roads and direct services for tourists, accommodation, tourist information, leisure facilities, guiding and catering services and shopping facilities;
- Accessibility – the destination should be accessible to a a big number of persons, either by car, plane, train or cruises. The tourists should be able to travel relatively easy to the destination. Visa demands, access points and specific entrance conditions should be taken into account as part of the accessibility to the destination;
- Human resources – tourism is an intensive work and the interaction with the local communities is an important aspect of the tourist experience. The well prepared work force and citizens that are informed and aware of the benefits and responsibilities associated with tourist development are indispensable elements for the tourist destination and must be employed in accordance with the strategy of the destination;
- Promotion – the unique character of the image is crucial for attracting tourists to the destination. The existence of a big number of tourist attractions is not enough if the tourists do not have information on them. The promotion of the destination’s image can be achieved through numerous methods (for example: marketing and branding, e-marketing). The image of the destination includes uniqueness, landscapes, quality of the environment, safety, level of services and people’s amiability.
- Price – it is an important aspect of the destination’s competitiveness in rapport with other destinations. The price factors refer to the cost of transportation to and from the destination, and also to the costs for accommodation, leisure, food and services. The tourist decision can also be based on other economic aspects such as the currency exchange rate.

THE METHOD OF ORGANIZATION FOR THE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Destination management is the coordinated management of all elements creating the destination, through the strategic approach of these entities, sometimes very different, in order to obtain the best possible result. (Cojocariu, 2010)

To be able to organize as efficiently as possible the destination management, certain aspects should be taken into account, namely: (adapted from Cojocariu, 2010)

- political limitations
- legal aspects
- duties, terms of office, tasks
- geography
- marketing;
- financial aspects
- economic development
- political climate
- tourism market
- tourist expectations
- human resources development.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE QUALITEST MODEL

The Qualitest represents a process on whose basis the performances of the quality for tourist destinations (QPE) can be evaluated, with the help of certain indicators, of the monitoring of the results in time, respectively of the realization of a benchmarking with similar destinations.

The indicators that are measured within the Qualitest model are the following:

- The control indicator for the perception of quality (QPCI) – indicates the satisfaction degree of the tourists and of the employees from the local tourist industry
- The quality management indicator (QMD) – is not based on figures, but is an auto-evaluation indicator that determines the importance and success of managerial activities within the destination, respectively ensures the communication between the destination
manager and the other factors of responsibility of the destination.

- The performance of quality indicator (QPI) – is a quantitative indicator directly linked with the QPCI and QMI. Most indicators of quality performance within the Qualitest refer to those aspects of the quality which are measured by other parameters, such as time or region.

THE TIME MONITORING OF THE RESULTS

All tourist destinations implementing the Qualitest model must monitor their results with the help of the three indicators described above (QPCI, QMI, QPI), in time, in order to be able to identify in due time the possible problematic areas, and to prepare future actions. The frequency with which this monitoring is done is of at least once a year for a tourist destination.

BENCHMARKING WITH SIMILAR DESTINATIONS

The final evaluation of the quality of the tourist destination, for the results obtained by QPCI as well as by QPI, can be realized through an external benchmarking, where the representatives of the destinations can compare the results obtained by the two indicators with those of other destinations.

The process of evaluating the performance of the tourist destination quality, by using the Qualitest model is based on a set of 16 indicators, which were elaborated so that they could be applied to any type of tourist destinations: urban, rural or coast line.

The indicators which make up the Qualitest system can be synthesized in a chart (see Table 1) as follows:

Table 1 Indicators of the tourism destination evaluation (adapted from Cojocariu, 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Quality Indicators</th>
<th>QPCI</th>
<th>QMI</th>
<th>QPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The viability of the local tourist industry</td>
<td>The percent of employees of the tourism agency who are satisfied above their expectations by the last season of activity, in comparison with the previous season</td>
<td>The relation and communication between the destination manager and the representatives of tourism within the destination is facilitated and works efficiently (yes/no)?</td>
<td>The percent of the growth of the tourist industry within the destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The supporting of the local tourist sector</td>
<td>The percent of employees of the tourism agency who are satisfied above their expectations with the opportunities offered by the destination</td>
<td>A program for the coordination of the commercial support offered to the tourist and transportation services is used within the destination and its success is evaluated at regular intervals (yes/no)?</td>
<td>The rate of the solicitations for assistance finalized successfully from the part of the representatives of the local tourist sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Marketing and promotion</td>
<td>The percent of employees of the tourism agency who are satisfied above their expectations with the quality of the marketing and promotion</td>
<td>The destination has officially approved a tourism strategy which encompasses clear cut directions regarding the way of implementing the marketing, and this is verified at regular intervals (yes/no)?</td>
<td>The number of nights accommodated for every euro invested in the marketing and promotion of the destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The quality of the welcoming</td>
<td>The percent of tourists for whom the warm welcoming of the local population exceeds expectations</td>
<td>A procedure of regularly receiving the answers from the part of the residents, regarding their opinion on the tourism within the destination</td>
<td>The pressure of the tourist season on the destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
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<td>QPCI</td>
<td>QMI</td>
<td>QPI</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Safety and trust</td>
<td>The percent of the tourists for whom the feeling of safety and trust exceeds expectations</td>
<td>It is implemented an initiative for the prevention of the criminality within the destination, which implies tourist and transportation services, and its functioning is evaluated (yes/no)?</td>
<td>The rate of the criminality which implies the criminal deeds against the persons in rapport with the number of locals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Quality of the air</td>
<td>The percent of the tourists for whom the quality of the air exceeds expectations</td>
<td>Information regarding the concentrations of the polluted substances from the air are always at the disposal of the public (yes/no)?</td>
<td>The number of days with an increased level of the air pollution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The quality of the local environment</td>
<td>The percent of the tourists for whom the quality of the local environment exceeds expectations</td>
<td>The responsibilities for the management of the cleaning of the destination had been clearly identified, and the efficiency of their functioning is regularly evaluated (yes/no)?</td>
<td>Volume of the collected waste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Preliminary communication</td>
<td>The percent of the tourists for whom the quality of the communication before reaching the destination exceeds expectations</td>
<td>The significant market segments are known, and these are regularly evaluated through studies of the market</td>
<td>The number of complaints from the part of the tourists, recorded for every stay overnight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>The percent of the tourists with disabilities or limited mobility for whom the accessibility of the services within the destination exceeds expectations</td>
<td>The representatives of the destination are aware of the needs of the tourists with disabilities and regularly analyze why and how can these tourist services can become more accessible (yes/no)?</td>
<td>The percent of tourist services accessible to the persons with disabilities and those with limited mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>The percent of the tourists for whom the transportation services within the destination exceed expectations</td>
<td>All providers of transportation services within the destination know the importance of the quality management and the critical aspects of the activities and always know their evolution (yes/no)?</td>
<td>The rate of the complaints regarding the viability of the means of public transportation within the destination, reported to the number of travelers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>The percent of the tourists for whom the quality of the accommodation exceeds expectations</td>
<td>All the suppliers of accommodation services within the destination are aware of the necessity of the quality management regarding the critical aspects</td>
<td>The percent of accommodation units certified by the Quality Management System (QMS), by the Environmental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Improving Competitiveness of Tourist Destinations by Implementing the Qualitest Model

Otto Nagy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
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<th>QPCI</th>
<th>QMI</th>
<th>QPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The percent of the tourists for whom the quality of the information regarding the activities within the destination exceeds expectations</td>
<td>The tourists are offered information materials regarding the activities that take place within the destination, information that are regularly checked, together with their assurance method (yes/no)?</td>
<td>Management System (EMS), or the programme of the ecological label</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Restaurants and bars</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The percent of the tourists for whom the quality of the restaurants and bars exceeds expectations</td>
<td>The quality of the bars and restaurants within the destination is regularly evaluated and a procedure for registering all tourist complaints exists (yes/no)?</td>
<td>The number of stays overnight in rapport with the number of visitors of the sites within the destination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The percent of the tourists for whom the range and quality of the opportunities to spend their spare time within the destination exceeds expectations</td>
<td>All of the administrators of tourist attraction sites from within the destination, are aware of the importance of the quality management, of the critical aspects of their services, and are regularly informed on their evolution (yes/no)?</td>
<td>The number of possible and accessible activities for a half a day period, within the destination, for every stay overnight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Quality of the swimming water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The percent of the tourists for whom the quality of the sea water exceeds expectations</td>
<td>An integrated plan of management exists, and it covers the swimming areas within the destination, and their functioning is regularly checked (yes/no)?</td>
<td>The percent of the swimming areas which don’t respect the directives of the EU regarding the swimming water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Price / quality ratio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The percent of the tourists for whom the general ratio price / quality exceeds expectations</td>
<td>The destination has realized and officially approved the tourist strategy, which is regularly evaluated (yes/no)?</td>
<td>The percent of the tourists who return to the destination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSIONS

The improvement of the quality of tourist destinations should represent a constant priority for the managers which administrate those particular destinations.

The memories of the tourist product consumed from a tourist destination is formed of a complex mix of factors which, combined, offer the total satisfaction felt by the tourist at the end of the vacation.

Knowing the needs and the tourist’s expectations is an absolute must in the tourist industry. The measuring and quantification of these expectations must be a continuous preoccupation for every manager, in order to prevent, in the first place, the decline of the tourist destination and, in the second place, to increase every year the visiting degree of the destination.

In this sense the quality management in general and the Qualitest model in particular offers destination managers an useful instrument for the evaluation of the satisfaction degree, respectively of the expectations...
from the desired destination, of the tourists who want to spend their vacations in the destination in question.

The implementation of the Qualitest model, whose purpose is the constant bettering of the tourist destination’s quality, can be realized by following the next steps:

1. defining the destination
2. realizing an analysis of the tourist satisfaction;
3. developing the indicators for evaluating the perception of quality;
4. creating the indicators of quality management;
5. realizing the analysis of the tourism industry;
6. creating the indicators of the performance of quality;
7. internally monitoring the results;
8. benchmarking with similar destinations.

All these measures will lead to the improvement of the processes’ traceability from the area of the destination in question and will put in the hand of the managers a powerful instrument of the quality analysis, and an instrument for the time monitoring of the evolution of the studied phenomena, with beneficial consequences for the growth in the quality of those tourist destinations.

REFERENCES


