

The role of consumer protection in ensuring quality in the hotel services market

Nicoleta Andreea NEACŞU¹

Abstract: *In Romania, tourism is an attractive sector with high potential, but unfortunately not exploited enough, so it is not yet a source of attraction for investors and foreign tourists. Most tourists are not satisfied with the quality of the hotel services in Romania and complain about it. The existence of adequate legislation on the protection of the consumer of tourist services could lead to the provision of quality services on this market and to a higher degree of tourists' satisfaction.*

In the first part, this paper presents the public organizations dealing with the protection of the consumer on the hotel services market in Romania. The second part of the paper analyzes the quality of hotel services in Romania from the tourists' point of view. In this respect, the author made a quantitative marketing research. The results featured the opinions and attitudes of tourists regarding the quality of hotel services in Romania.

Key-words: *quality of services, accommodation services, consumer protection, tourist's safety, tourist satisfaction*

1. Introduction

For Romania, tourism is the economic sector that has a valuable development potential that is still untapped and that can become a source of attraction for both foreign investors and tourists. Romania has a rich touristic potential and natural resources for practicing various forms of tourism.

In any industry, customer satisfaction is directly proportional to the quality of the services and products it receives. The importance of customer satisfaction lies in acknowledging the manner and the way in which the organizations generate or create “pleasures” among the consumers of services, after having identified these consumers' needs (Bărbulescu, 2015). Quality is an important factor in achieving market advantage for firms, alongside technology or brand strength (Boşcor, 2016).

It seems obvious that in any commercial activity the ultimate metric is profit. Many definitions, approaches and statements that elude this simple truth were put up front over time – such as society benefit and welfare, environmental care, social

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, andreea.neacsu@unitbv.ro

responsibility and so on, but the ultimate expression of a company's success is profit, as a simple equation that involves Revenue and Expenditures (Drumea, 2015).

Since tourism services are based on the interaction between customers and providers, it is crucial to underline the importance of human resources in this industry. For tourism services marked by spontaneity of interaction between customers and employees, empowerment of the first line personnel can lead to more flexible and faster processes (Madar, 2014).

A strategy is successful only if all the involved employees know and understand the strategy. The service offered by the company and the people who provide the service are the key elements that should be considered (Bălăşescu, 2017). It has been assumed that the existence of adequate legislation on the protection of the consumer of tourist services leads to the provision of quality services on this market.

Respecting the rights and interests of tourists leads to a high degree of satisfaction, which determines the preservation of the hotel's competitive position on the market. Therefore, for accommodation units, the assessment of the satisfaction of tourists should be a permanent medium- and long-term objective. Information obtained by monitoring and quantifying customer satisfaction can help to identify opportunities to improve the services and products offered. Such improvements can increase the trust of the tourist.

2. Consumer protection in Romania

In the European Union, consumer protection is receiving special attention and there is concern about creating the necessary and appropriate framework to ensure genuine consumer protection. Thus, we are to consider aspects such as: providing a system of consumer assistance and counseling; facilitating complaints, arbitration and amicable litigation; implementing comprehensive legislation (on consumer defense and on improving existing access and recourse to justice and on existing procedures, and giving consumers associations the opportunity to defend their rights).

Consumer protection can be achieved principally in two ways: through the public authority embodied in different laws and legal regulations, the organization of specialized institutions and the self-organization of consumers (Bălăşescu, 2009).

The main public consumer protection structures in Romania are:

- The National Authority for Consumer Protection (NACP) - is a public institution and acts as a specialized body of the central public administration, together with other central and local public administration bodies with attributions in the field and non-governmental consumer bodies, at elaborating the strategy in the

field of consumer protection, ensuring its correlation with the existing one in the European Union (www.anpc.gov.ro). Thus, the National Authority for Consumer Protection has the role to permanently inform consumers about products and services that pose risks to their health and safety or that may affect their economic interests;

- The Consumer Protection Association (CPA) - is a non-governmental, apolitical and non-profit organization, established since 1990, whose main objective is to defend, promote, and represent through all legal means the rights and interests of consumers in relation to economic agents and state institutions. A lasting concern of the association in recent years was the use of comparative tests on products and services as a means of informing, educating and improving the economic and social situation of consumers (www.apc-romania.ro);

- The European Consumer Center in Romania - supports EU citizens in cross-border procurement. The aim of the European Consumer Centers is to provide consumers with a wide range of services free of charge, from information on their rights, to providing advice and support to solve problems they face on the European market.

3. The research methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of the article, a quantitative market research was conducted. This is done from the point of view of public institutions and those who provide accommodation and who want to know the perception of tourists about the quality of services. This information helps them improve their services and provide a higher quality which will increase the confidence, protection and safety of the tourist.

The quantitative research methodology was based on interviewing 200 people, Romanian tourists who have used the hotel services in Romania over the past 5 years, of which 46% are men and 54% are women.

The research focused on issues related to opinions and attitudes of tourists regarding the consumer protection and the quality of hotel services in Romania.

The most important objectives of this research were:

- Determining the opinion of tourists regarding hotel services in Romania;
- Identifying the most important positive aspects regarding the quality of hotel services in Romania, from the perspective of the surveyed tourists;
- Identification of the most important negative aspects regarding the quality of hotel services in Romania, from the perspective of the surveyed tourists;
- Determining those attributes of the quality of hotel services that had the greatest impact on the surveyed tourists.

The survey and the questionnaire were used as data collection tools. The data collection technique called CAWI - Computer Assisted Web Interviewing was used, a method by which the questionnaire is displayed on a web page, the respondent filling in the responses directly in the browser. No additional configurations are required for this method and no program needs to be installed with the default browser provided by the operating system. The duration of this study is May 2017 - August 2017. The data collection was carried out on the basis of a questionnaire containing 22 questions.

The SPSS system (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) has been used in data processing to obtain useful information for decision-makers. The most common outputs are tables and graphs. The multiple processing possibilities (data grouping, data analysis, statistical tests, etc.) offered by this software made it very popular when analysing data for marketing or sociological research.

4. Results and discussions

The research has highlighted a wealth of information of which the most relevant to the issues under consideration will be further presented.

Which are the criteria used for choosing the accommodation unit?		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The hotel has a good reputation	84	42,0	42,0	42,0
	Location of the hotel	38	19,0	19,0	61,0
	The hotel has entertainment programs	14	7,0	7,0	68,0
	The hotel offers relaxation and beauty services	14	7,0	7,0	75,0
	Food services provided by the hotel	46	23,0	23,0	98,0
	Others	4	2,0	2,0	100,0
	Total	200	100,0	100,0	

Table 1. *Criteria according to which tourists choose the accommodation unit*

Source: *The author's own research*

When choosing the accommodation unit, the most important aspect considered by the surveyed tourists (Table 1) is the hotel's reputation (42%). Other relevant aspects of choosing the hotel are: hotel catering (23%) and hotel location (19%). For the surveyed tourists, the least relevant aspects considered when choosing the hotel are: entertainment programs (7%) and hotel relaxation and beauty services (7%).

What exactly defines the quality of accommodation services?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Entertainment programs are organized within the hotel	27	13,5	13,5	13,5
Within the hotel there should be facilities to improve the health and relaxation of tourists (beauty salons, spa programs).	28	14,0	14,0	27,5
The hotel has performing equipment	20	10,0	10,0	37,5
Hotel staff have a proper fit and are well-trained	41	20,5	20,5	58,0
Rooms, bathrooms, toilets are clean	44	22,0	22,0	80,0
The rooms should be equipped with Internet and satellite television	10	5,0	5,0	85,0
The hotel has a convenient and accessible location	22	11,0	11,0	96,0
Others	8	4,0	4,0	100,0
Total	200	100,0	100,0	

Table 2. *Tourists' opinions on the quality criteria of accommodation services*
 Source: *The author's own research*

From the point of view of the surveyed tourists (Table 2), the most important aspect regarding the quality of the hotel services is the cleanliness of the accommodation (rooms and toilets are clean) (22%), followed by the hotel's staff (20%). The most important thing for tourists is that the accommodation is clean and the employees are well trained. The least important aspect, with only 5%, is the endowment of the room with internet and satellite television. For the tourists interviewed, this aspect is not a defining element of the quality of accommodation services, cleanliness being much more important.

Other aspects of the quality of accommodation services, with average relevance for the surveyed tourists, are: the convenient and accessible location of the hotel (11%), the organization of entertainment programs within the hotel (13.5%), proper high performance equipment (10%) and the existence of spa and beauty salons within the hotel (14%).

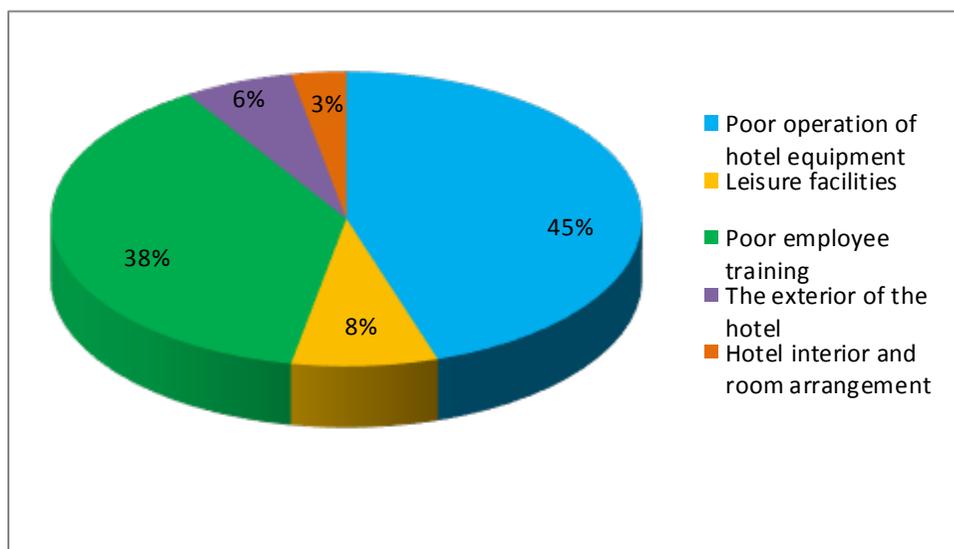


Fig. 1. The main negative aspects of the quality of hotel services in Romania

Source: The author's own research

The most important negative aspects regarding the quality of accommodation services in Romania (Figure 1), perceived by the surveyed tourists, are: hotels with poor quality equipment (45%) and poor training of the employees in this sector (38%). Other negative aspects reported by the interviewed tourists, but with a low score, are poor quality or even lack of entertainment offered by the hotel (8%), the exterior of the hotel (6%), the interior of the hotel and the design and arrangement of the rooms (%).

What are the most important positive aspects regarding the quality of hotel services in Romania?	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Employee training	14	7,0	7,0	7,0
Location of the hotel	40	20,0	20,0	27,0
The exterior of the hotel	34	17,0	17,0	44,0
The hotel offers relaxation and beauty services	18	9,0	9,0	53,0
Variety of food and beverages	46	23,0	23,0	76,0
Hotel interior and room facilities	44	22,0	22,0	98,0
Others	4	2,0	2,0	100,0
Total	200	100,0	100,0	

Table 3. The main positive aspects of the quality of hotel services in Romania

Source: Author's own research

From the perspective of the interviewed tourists, the most important positive aspects regarding the quality of hotels in Romania are (Table 3): the variety of food and beverages in hotels (23%), the interior of the hotel and the room design (22%) and the location of the hotel (20%). The last places include training and professionalism of the employees (7%) and also relaxation, spa and beauty services offered by the hotel (9%).

5. Conclusions

Romania still has problems with the quality of the accommodation services offered and the need to implement legal norms for the protection of the consumer of tourist services is imperative both to protect the tourist and to offer him safety, but also to continue to develop the quality offered. The lack of immediate measures will undoubtedly generate deficiencies with medium and long-term effects (Băltescu, 2015).

Thus, certain consumer protection associations specialized in hotel services could be established in Romania.

An example of quality accommodation is Turkey. In order to increase the satisfaction of tourists and to reduce the risk of quality problems, most hotels in Antalya (Turkey) have implemented quality, food safety and environmental standards.

In Romania there are more high-rated accommodation units for the hotel facilities (swimming pool, conference room, etc.) and less for the comfort of the rooms. Thus, the various facilities are more important than the actual quality of the service, which could be an advantage, but not for Romanian tourists.

Based on the results of the research, it is recommended to develop effective strategies to protect the rights and interests of tourists, to permanently identify their needs, and to adapt the offer of tourist services and, implicitly, accommodation according to market demand.

6. Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge that this paper has been written with the support of documentation material and feedback from fellow teachers and students during the Erasmus+ teaching mobility at the Akdeniz University, Turkey, June 2016.

7. References

- Baba, C.M., 2009. Quality management of the accounting services. *Bulletin of the „Transilvania” University of Brasov*, Vol. 2 (51), Series V, pp. 59-66.
- Bălăşescu, M., 2009. *Bazele comerţului*. “Transilvania” University Press.
- Bălăşescu, S., 2017. Assessment methods regarding the service level of specialized retailers. *Bulletin of the “Transilvania” University of Braşov*, Vol.10 (59), Series V, No.1, pp. 15-20.
- Băltescu, C.A., 2015. Trends driving the hotel industry global evolution. Case of Romani. *Bulletin of the “Transilvania” University of Braşov*, Vol. 8(57), Series V, No. 1, pp. 81-86.
- Bărbulescu, O., 2015. Braşov customer satisfaction as regards the collaboration with leasing companies. *Bulletin of the “Transilvania” University of Braşov*, Vol. 8(57), Series V, No. 1, pp. 25-32.
- Bostan I., Burciua A. and Grosu V., 2010. Consumatorismul și politicile privind protecția consumatorului în spațiul comunitar. *Economie teoretică și aplicată*, 4(545), pp. 17-23.
- Boşcor, D., 2016. Marketing strategies adopted by Romanian smartphones producers. Case study: Visual Fan. *Bulletin of the “Transilvania” University of Braşov*, Vol. 9(58), Series V, No. 2, pp. 31-38.
- Consumer Protection Association Romania - Voice of Consumers Available at: <<http://www.apc-romania.ro>> [Accessed 07 August 2017].
- Drumea, C., 2015. Analysis of the cost impact of the new technologies in retail. *Bulletin of the “Transilvania” University of Brasov*, Vol. 8(57), Series V, No.1, pp. 159–168.
- Madar A., 2014. Hotel services quality assesment using Servqual method. Case study: Athenee Palace. *Bulletin of the “Transilvania” University of Braşov*, Vol. 7(56), Series V, No.1, pp. 72-76.
- National Authority for Consumer Protection. Available at: <www.anpc.ro> [Accessed 07 August 2017].
- Niță, V., 2006. Protecția Consumatorului în turism-considerații asupra reglementărilor europene și românești. *Revista de turism*, 2, p. 25.