

ACCOMMODATION SERVICE QUALITY VS. ECONOMICAL PERFORMANCE OF ACCOMMODATION STRUCTURES

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Abstract: *The paper aims to link the two important aspects of tourism activity, of great interest to any professional in this field: the quality of accommodation services and the economic performance of accommodation. To assess the perceived quality of accommodation services I used the content analysis of the feedbacks present on the Booking.com website for 11 accommodation structures in Bihor County, and to highlight the economic performance, we used the same documents study lodging structures in order to know the performance indicators. At the end of the work I correlated the data on the quality of accommodation services with the economic performance of accommodation and I formulated conclusions and recommendations for the structures analyzed.*

Keywords: accommodation services, objective quality, perceived quality, economic performance

JEL classification: L 83, Z32, D12

Introduction

The study of services involves some difficulties arising of their characteristics that differentiate them in relation to the goods (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Berry, 1985, p.42): intangibility (most of them cannot be counted, measured, checked), heterogeneity (different from one producer to another, from one client to another, from one day to another) and entanglement (production and consumption of services are inseparable, consumers and producers interact directly).

Many specialized studies reveal a direct relationship between the quality of products and services and economic performance of producers of goods and services. Kimes (2001) demonstrates that hotels with at least one quality defect obtain an income per available room per day with approximately \$ 2.80 less than hotels that do not record any quality defect. Ivanov (2007) sees quality as a competitive advantage, and Meng, F., Tepanon, Y., Uysal, M. (2008) believes that on an increasingly competitive accommodation services' market, the satisfaction of the beneficiaries of these services is an objective which suppliers must stand out.

Sergeant and Frenkel (2000) examine the ability of employees to satisfy customers and conclude that the employee satisfaction and organizational commitment influence the employee behavior in customer contact and customer satisfaction. In turn, the staff satisfaction and the organizational commitment are influenced by a number of factors such as: the support of other departments, the technology teams' work, labor supervision, etc.

Research Methodology

The objectives of the paper were:

1. Highlighting the objective quality of accommodation services through the conditions and criteria for the legal classification.
2. Knowledge of the subjective/perceived quality of accommodation services through the prism of the customer reviews

3. Identifying relevant indicators of efficiency of accommodation units
4. Linking the quality of accommodation services with the economic performance of the accommodation

These objectives were followed for 11 randomly selected accommodation units in Bihor County, but taking into account criteria such as: types of structures, grading, attendance on the Booking.com website, and access to the economic efficiency indicators.

Linking the quality of accommodation with the economic performance of the accommodation structures was performed using several methods: content analysis, document analysis (of accommodation units) and statistics data and law studies (concerning the classification of accommodation units).

Thus, to analyze the quality of accommodation we used the study for classifying documents of accommodation structures (for highlighting quality objectives) and content analysis of comments and scores recorded on the website Booking.com (for highlighting the perceived quality). To analyze the performance of accommodation structures we used the statistical study of documents and structures from which we analyzed the relevant efficiency indicators. Linking the service quality with the economic performance was achieved by associating quality indicators with indicators of economic efficiency.

The quality of accommodation services

When we talk about the quality of accommodation services, we have in mind: the access infrastructure, facilities, cleanliness/hygiene, location/site, view (overlooking the sea, the lake, a stream, panorama of a city, etc.), the staff's courtesy, integrated services (accommodation, meals, conference...), leisure possibilities (bar, casino, trails, bicycle trails/bikes, shopping malls, spas), organizing or facilitating the participation in cultural events and sporting events, healthcare.

There are authors (Parasurman, Zeithaml, Berry, 1985) that define quality as the difference between customer expectations and the perceptions of the services received, actually.

To evaluate the quality defined so, it is necessary to distinguish between the objective and the perceived quality.

a) Objective quality, according to the classification standards of the accommodation structures.

The classification standards impose uniform conditions for the same type of accommodation structure, they being reflected in the prices charged, even if they are influenced by the relationship between the supply and demand in the tourist accommodation market.

These standards allow potential beneficiaries to choose tourist structures depending on the degree of comfort and financial possibilities, having prior information regarding the access of services.

The main aspects considered in setting these standards, aim the following:

- Environment (buildings and furniture, the surface of the rooms, design, the functionality of the organizational conditions)
- Equipment (devices and material)
- Personnel (staff)
- Additional services

Regarding the environment, the higher the classification level is higher, the overall look of the building must be better, the number of parking spaces and the surface of the rooms must be larger, the decor more sophisticated and the functional character stronger

The equipment, such the equipment and the materials, in turn, must be more and more diversified and the categories of staff, also, must be numerous, as the accommodation facilities are better classified, and those which are on higher levels of classification should offer a number of complementary services.

It can be seen that the differences between the types of accommodation units are some predominantly quantitative classifications. Undoubtedly, the quantitative aspects are

reflected in the quality of accommodations. For example, the number and diversity of equipments, materials, or categories of services and staff ensures a higher degree of comfort and respond in greater to the expectations. On the other hand, however, these quantitative aspects not guarantee a high quality of the accommodation services. For example, the daily cleaning or daily change of towels is not necessarily a perfect state of cleanliness; ensuring all staff categories required by standards do not ensure good staff relations and communication with customers.

Therefore, for a correct assessment of the quality of accommodation services is necessary to supplement the objective dimension with the subjective one, perceived by it.

b) Perceived quality, subjective, according to the appreciation of the beneficiaries of these services

The consumers of the accommodation services appreciate the quality in terms of cleanliness, staff courtesy, hygiene, leisure opportunities, environment, etc. It is important that the beneficiaries have a holistic perspective on the service they receive, sometimes deficient, even minor, which could influence radical attitude of a beneficiary (either leaving the accommodation or the decision not to return in the unit or influence other potential beneficiaries)

On the tourism services' market there are different categories of beneficiaries, regarded by tourists as marketing target groups, each group expressing specific requirements in relation to tourism and requiring a personalized offer from suppliers. So:

- The businessmen appreciate the location, comfort, amenities, especially if the business meetings are held in the premises of the accommodation and less the scenery and the friendliness of the staff.

- Leisure tourism has, in turn, several segments: nature lovers, who are interested in landscapes, trails, etc.; gamers/entertainment lovers, whose demands aimed at the multiplicity and diversity of participating in games, entertainment programs; the seniors are in search of peace and some easy ways of leisure.

- Cultural tourism followers want a broad and faster access to sights, information, guidance, etc.

- Sports tourism aims sporting activities in certain parts of the country and abroad, where they can follow or practice different sports.

- Health tourism in addition to spa cures, aims lately aims the quiet places away from the noise of large cities, which are increasingly sought and valued lately.

- Those with modest financial means will appreciate the lower prices, but also the transport infrastructure enabling them to arrive to the desired destination by public transport

- Families with children who want all-inclusive hotels in different areas, specially arranged for children and parents or adults, amenities, healthy food, staff courtesy, or the accommodation near amusement parks .

There is no doubt, what we might call the "medium" tourist, whose demands, although moderate in intensity, are targeting almost all the issues raised above.

Each of these categories will appreciate the quality of accommodations through the desires and expectations, which result from the feedback provided by Booking.com, a website for accommodation booking, quite appreciated if we consider the number of people who resort to this site for a reservation.

The presentation of the website Booking.com

Booking.com – is a website that allows tourists interested in any form of tourism to choose the desired accommodation structure and to find new deals every day during certain periods in different countries.

The Booking.com company was established in 1996, is headquartered in Amsterdam, The Netherlands and is supported by 173 offices in 69 countries. It aims to guarantee the lowest prices for any type of property ranging from small family guest houses, exclusive apartments and suites to luxurious 5-star hotels; it is available in over 40 languages [1].

The site promotes tourism accommodation facilities worldwide. More and more owners are choosing the tourist accommodation website booking.com to promote their accommodation structure, and their number is growing. Today (15.11.2015) is provided on site a total of 828.666 accommodation establishments in 220 countries and territories worldwide.

The website includes, besides the promotion of the accommodation structures all over the world, a non-stop service in 40 languages, free mobile applications, verified reviews of tourists which are numbered around 67.150 million (on 15.11.2015).

The website's customers receive discounts, and these are reaching to - 50% on some travels, and they benefit from the secure booking and the exemption of the booking fee. Tourists who choose this site to make a booking at some hotel in a certain period of time have the opportunity in the event of certain changes in the selected booking, to change it.

On the website are presented the first 103 countries that are considered most important among the 220 countries. The number of accommodation structures on the site is changing daily, given the growing trend in most countries. In the table we can see that the country with most of accommodation is Italy with a total of 88438, representing 10.62% and with the fewest number of 22 accommodation structures is the country Monaco (0.003%). Our country, with a total of 5803 accommodation units, ranks 28 out of 103 countries listed. The percentage of accommodation in Romania, on the site, is representing 0.91% of the total 636369 accommodation units present among the 103 countries in the above table and the total of 832890 accommodation units worldwide advertised on booking.com is a percentage 0.70%. [1]

<http://www.booking.com/content/about.ro>

Accommodation structures in Bihor County, present on the Booking.com website

On the Booking.com website there are presented 174 properties, in Bihor County of which 53 hotels, 86 B&B and inns, 24 vacation homes and the rest are other accommodation units.

We aimed to analyze the feedback provided by customers who traveled to 11 units in Bihor County for which there are reservations on booking.com (accommodation in Bihor). Such an analysis, of even a small number of units is not easy, given that the number of comments is variable from one unit to another and they come from different clients. Therefore, we tried to systematize the information on the website and to correlate the type of accommodation, its classification, the number of comments and the issues for which they were given scores.

We followed the customers' reviews for 11 accommodation units in Bihor County, of which 6 benefits of a number of sub 250 comments, and 5 by more than 250 comments so as to capture and make a relevance of the number of reviews for the total score. We also took into account the accommodation units classified differently: 6 4-star hotels, 4 3-star hotels and one 4-star guesthouse.

On the site, only the real visitors can comment, those who had booked on booking.com and were staying at the property. In addition to impressions and scores, there are requested and information on the type of trip, type of tourist, room type and number of nights spent on the property, so comments are very relevant in terms of perceived quality of accommodation services.

Table no. 1 The assessment by the tourists of 11 accommodation units in Bihor County

Crt no.	Accommodation Structure type / name	Classification	Aspects from beneficiaries which have given feed-back							Total comments	Score
			Clean	Comfort	Location	Facilities	Staff	Quality/price	Free WiFi		
1.	Hotel President	4*	7,8	8,3	8,3	7,7	7,7	7	7,5	87	7,8
2.	Hotel Ami	3*	8,5	8,7	8,9	8,3	8,5	8,5	7,8	110	8,6
3.	Empire Guesthouse	4*	8,9	8,6	8,6	8,4	9,3	8,2	8,6	55	8,7
4	Hotel Atrium	3*	7,6	7,3	8,4	7,3	8	8	8	482	7,8
5	Hotel Ramada	4*	9,3	9,4	8,5	9	8,9	8,7	8,8	473	9
6	Hotel Nevis	4*	8,6	8,3	7,8	8,3	8,4	8,5	8,4	421	8,3
7	Hotel Maxim	4*	8,8	8,8	8,6	8,3	8,6	8,3	8,2	102	8,6
8	Hotel Perla	3*	7,9	7,5	7,8	8,2	8,4	7	7,4	36	7,8
9	Hotel Slavia	4*	9,6	8,9	8,9	9,2	9,1	9,1	8	42	9,1
10	Hotel Continental	4*	7,6	7,8	8,6	7,6	8	7,8	7,9	555	7,9
11	Hotel Impero	3*	8,4	8,3	8,1	8,1	8,6	8,4	8,4	389	8,3
	Score average		8,45	8,35	8,41	8,22	8,5	8,14	8,09		8,35

Source: www.booking.com (accessed on 19.11.2015)

The table shows the scores received by 11 units of existing accommodation on booking.com, from Bihor County, rated by their customers. Scores are from 1 to 10. On site, there are 7 categories of aspects for beneficiaries of accommodation which offered feedback: cleanliness, comfort, location, facilities, staff, and value for money, free wifi.

Note that the highest score of the comments, of 9 and over 9, have the 4 star hotels, score recorded at the aspect of the facility, which is natural given that hotels classified with 4 stars are required to have certain facilities in addition to the hotels categorized with 3 or fewer stars. Lowest score of 7.8 comments were received by two 3-star hotels and one 4-star hotel.

Analyzing the average scores in each dimension, we see that a far higher average has: the "personal" appearance, the "cleanliness" and "location" with a value close to 8.5. The "personal" appearance has analyzed in the 11 structures a score higher than 9 in two of them: the Empire Guesthouse with 4 stars with a score of 9.3, and the 4-star hotel Slavia with a score of 9.1, the lowest score of 7.7 has the 4-star Hotel President. The other analyzed accommodation structures have scores of "personal" appearance between 8 and 8.9. It is possible that these scores are due to training courses in the field, held recently in Bihor County, by European programs, given that high scores are recorded at relatively new accommodation establishments, and lower scores on older hotels.

The appearance of "cleaning" has the highest score of 9 to two of them: the 4 star hotel Slavia with a score of 9.6 and the 4 star hotel Ramada with a score of 9.3. Lowest score with values above 7 we can find in three of the accommodations analyzed: Hotel Continental with 4 stars, hotel Atrium with 3 stars with a score of 7.6, and Perla, a 3 stars hotel with a score of 7.9. Other analyzed accommodation structures, have values between 8.4 and 8.9, scores from the aspect of "cleaning". And in this aspect, the scores appear to correlate with the age of the unit, with higher scores in newer units, which can be explained if we consider that the old units' cleanliness is more difficult at higher rates.

The appearance of the "location" has a score between the values of 8.1 and 8.9 at 9 of the analyzed structures, the highest score of 8.9 being at the 3 stars hotel Arminda and at the 4 stars hotel Slavia due to the undoubtedly awareness by investors of the importance given by the clients of accommodation establishments surroundings.

The aspects "comfort" and "facilities" have a medium score slightly lower: 8.35, respectively 8.22, these aspects being directly related to the classification of accommodation establishments.

Regarding the "Price-quality ratio", the average score is 8.14%, which is among the lowest, which confirms that the opinions of specialists stating that Romanian hotel owners are not willing to improve the housing conditions, but in turn they align the prices according to the international ones (Coros, 2014).

Although all 11 accommodation units offer free WiFi, this aspect has the lowest score of 8.09, any of the hotels analyzed had not achieved a score of over 9, which can mean poor quality of this service.

By analyzing these aspects we can say that there are considerable differences between objective quality of accommodation services, reflected in their classification and subjective quality perceived, given the comments of the beneficiaries of these services. Of all the aspects evaluated by tourists, most relevant from this point of view seems to be the value for money, because tourists can accept the price increase if it is accompanied by increasing quality. Moreover, a study on consumer reaction to price increases show that this reaction is determined by two factors: "the magnitude of price increases" and "Perceived Fairness" (Homburg, Hoyer, KOSCH, 2005).

A conclusion that is released in this study is targeting the hoteliers who should know and value the feedback provided by tourists as comments on booking.com, especially since more and more tourists are opting for an accommodation unit after the consultation of such comments.

The economic performance of accommodation structures

Numerous studies capture a new strategic approach to reporting services companies to their customers, respectively the shift from orientation to transaction, and the orientation to relationships (Kumar, 1999). It shows that although long-term customer relationships companies improve their productivity services, these relationships bring, in time, more value to the services, enabling companies to resist the price pressure in relation to customers.

Staff behavior towards clients was analyzed in works such as: Murphy (1993), Harper (1990), Sergeant and Frenkel (2000), Harris and Ogbonna (2006), the findings released from these studies highlighting the serious impact of undesirable behavior on cost and performance of accommodation and even on economic growth.

Given that any tour operator in the accommodation aims, as well as any economic agent, obtaining satisfactory profit margins, the economic performance of such a structure will be evaluated primarily in terms of the profit. Of course, the profit is not the only indicator of profitability, by adding to it the productivity, profitability, employment (Abdullah, AA, Hamdan, MH, 2012), and the degree of recovery (customer loyalty).

Performance indicators presentation

The efficiency of accommodation structures can be highlighted by indicators on income or operating costs. The revenue derived from cash from tourists, is proportional to their number, the nights spent there, the tariff charged and the extra services offered. The costs include several categories: wage bill (about 40% of total expenditure), lease costs (10-15%), general expenses (10%), maintenance costs (5%), depreciation (5%) and sundries. It is estimated that "proper hotel activity (accommodation only) expenses represent 60-69% of the revenues, which translates into an interest rate (36-40%)" (Turcu, Weisz, 2008 p 103).

Getting profit or its growth thereof may be obtained traditionally either by reducing costs or increasing the price or the price increase due to increased quality of products or services, in the latter case the cost increase involved in increasing the quality should be less than the price increase. It seems that many Romanian tourism operators do not understand these goals. Perceiving Romanian tourists' expectations as modest, they are not concerned with increasing the quality of services, but increasing simultaneously and continuously the tariffs, a practice that causes "the Romanians' decreased interest for domestic destinations" (Coros, 2014, p.1100)

The literature shows that in order to survive, the units must achieve a minimum grade of 50% employment, for getting profit from the accommodation activity with occupancy rate that must exceed this level (Negrușă 2006, p.108). Kainthola (2009) believes that breakeven is achieved only at an occupancy rate of 60%.

For the accommodation structures in Bihor county, I have chosen to present and analyze several indicators that we consider most relevant in terms of efficiency of accommodation: the level of profit, the average occupancy degree (occupancy / total rooms), total costs, RevPAR (revenue per available room, calculated as: Total revenues of available rooms / Number of rooms available x number of days in the period measured or income of a room per night / occupancy degree), rate of return (profit / total costs), productivity (volume receipts / staff number or annual overnights number / staff number) and utilization rate of the accommodation capacity ($CUC = \text{number of overnights} / (\text{number of tourist days} / \text{number of vacancies} \times \text{number unit operation days per year})$).

Table no. 2 Performance ratios of accommodation structures in Bihor County

Crt No	Accommodation structures /indicators	Absolute average profit Pr=V-CT			RevPAR (revenue per available room)			Fiscal value (without VAT)CA=CT+Pr			Return rate Rr=Pr/CT *100			Productivity W=V/L		
		2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014
1	den	0	10148	49871	0	28860.22	32101.54	284482	2503673	2734249	0			-	204241.5	184583.9
2	Hotel Prezident											0,38%	1,72%			
3	Hotel Ami	551175	445411	448600	1670.227	1855.879	14953.33	477791	415618	435745	2,70%	0,66%	0	50106.82	55676.38	44860
4	Empire Guesthouse	22526	34907	28579	12613.05	12599.63	14339.68	226403	235957	272218	10,73%	17,70%	12,05%	59912	47878.6	68113.5
5	Hotel Atrium	520	16874	0	7192.318	13144.05	7316.682	158208	289134	160938	0,33%	6,30%	0	17581.22	41309.86	40241.75
6	Hotel Ramada	0	0	0	1121.587	1268.104	68656.34	8484162	7347134	7199910	0%	0%	0%	1357126	153440.6	125870
7	Hotel Nevis	0	252275	322137	86769.38	81681.57	91822.63	5209584	4888368	5513638	0	5,21%	5,97%	121477.1	109488.1	123081.4
8	Hotel Maxim	0	0	0	75636.49	61008.21	54258.92	2678536	2230952	1975492	0	0	0	62762.19	66092.22	62238.18
9	Hotel Perla	203394	147596	148169	12077.89	12565.13	12852.21	671890	698234	716946	46,89%	27,92%	25,92%	-	1142.284	55363.38
10	Hotel Slavia	22137	5395	8817	113156.8	81532.67	84247.83	1205935	974516	1002376	1,66%	0,56%	0,82%	75437.89	46590.16	53209.16
11	Hotel Continental	0	0	0	-	-	-	87092733	89851815	93265197	0%	0%	0%	126565	129220.5	125452.6
	Hotel Impero	137448	33447	0	15823.8	16411.08	19979.91	1263868	1311759	1596339	10,86%	2,10%	0	15823.8	16411.08	19979.91

Sorce: data collected from www.booking.com; www.mfinante.ro; www.mdrt.ro; and processed by the authors (accesed on 19.11.2015 – 04.12.2015)

Analyzing the evolution of each indicator in the 11 accommodation units analyzed in 2014 compared to 2013, can be seen:

- In terms of profits, although small, in case of most units it increased, mainly due to revenue growth and, possibly, due to increase of employment; a higher profit is recorded by structures with larger accommodation capacity or newer units, in their case we could involve less expenditure (mainly maintenance and repair)
- As RevPAR, with few exceptions, it has increased; This is due to increased occupancy of the accommodation units particularly in the case of Felix resort, or in the Oradea, with a more popular and accessible location
- The turnover increased for structures that have expanded or diversified their offer (swimming pool, massage, transport, etc.) and decreased in those units that have maintained the same offer
- The rate of profit based on the turnover increased which is due to the profit increase, or the decrease in the turnover on account
- The productivity declined for most of the units surveyed, either as a result of low occupancy, either on account of the increase in number of employees.

As can be seen from the table, the efficiency indicators change from period to period for the same accommodation structures, but there are obvious relations between the different indicators that change the direction.

Thus, the RevPAR growth is associated naturally with an increase in turnover and profitability rate. Not always, however, the increase of the the indicators listed above is accompanied by increased productivity, which could be explained by hiring additional staff in the context of tourism recovery after the crisis of 2008-2012. The RevPAR decrease is in turn accompanied by subtracting all other indicators.

Conclusions and recommendations

The relationship between service quality and the economic performance of the accommodation

Service providers are interested in the economic performance of the company, while customers, service users are interested in the quality. Between the providers and recipients of services in general, so in the case of accommodations, there are gaps in knowledge of the subject transaction, knowing very well the characteristics of the provided services, while recipients face a "black box" (van't Haaff, 1989) when accessing the services. The orientation towards long-term relationships with customers, reduce their vulnerability, increases the ability of suppliers of identification of the customers' needs and enhances confidence in service providers, making the latter a competitive advantage through customer loyalty and attracting new customers (Kumar, 1999 p.7). If we consider the fact that establishing long-term relationships with clients means no extra costs for accommodation providers, means that it is a desirable method to increase the performance of these companies.

The accommodation facilities in Romania, Coros (2014) notes that "the accommodation offer continues to be dominated by establishments and places of lower classification or unclassified" and believes that "if this was acceptable at a time the social programs were at the forefront, today ... from the observed decline both in demand for accommodation and the occupancy of the accommodation establishments, results that the tourists reject the offer because of poor quality level "(p.1094).

Under these conditions, the company's investments in tourism infrastructure able to improve quality of the service provided, it would be not only necessary but also appropriate to at least as much as banks have cash for financing for profitable business for companies that are able to reduce risks and to generate growth. (Badulescu D., Giurgiu A., Istudor N, Badulescu A. 2015, p 79).

Correlating the results obtained by analyzing the perceived quality targets and performance indicators from the analyzed accommodation structures, we found that:

- The relationship between the quality - subjective or perceived – of the accommodation services and the performance of accommodation is not obvious, there are situations where quality, especially perceived one is lacking, while performance indicators, particularly gross rate of return are the desirable
 - There cannot be found within the accommodation structures analyzed the relationship between employment and the level of profit
 - The first two conclusions substantiate the idea that performance is not the result of concerns for quality accommodation services; the same idea is also supported by the disinterest of the hoteliers to the feed-back offered by tourists over time, so some aspects valued by tourists remain constantly at low levels of assessment, a possible explanation for this lack of interest is that hoteliers do not follow the loyalty of the tourists, considering that they are generally experimenters, the degree of return to the same hotel is being relatively low; what is overlooked, however, it is that the views of service users influence the choice of other tourist accommodation for an accommodation or another
 - The accommodation structures of high quality (both objective and perceived) of services offered (Slavia and Ramada) register growths in most indicators
 - The accommodation structures of weaker perceived quality, but classified differently (Prezident Pearl and Atrium) register growths in almost all economic indicators (except productivity), the explanation may consist of relatively low prices, perceived, and the location in the stations for the first two of them.
- Entrepreneurs in the area of accommodation must understand the need to correlate the objective and perceived quality of accommodation services with desirable economic outcomes. Our analysis reveals that the concerns to improve the quality of accommodation, especially the perceived one, lead to an increase in efficiency of the accommodation structures.

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