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The Quality as a Competitive Factor of the Destination

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Abstract

The assessment of the significance of the individual factors making up the overall quality of the destination is a key objective of this article. Data were obtained by a primary research, asking residents of the Czech Republic, the sample of respondents was set as a quota sampling. Based on the obtained data authors evaluated the order of importance the most significant 19 factors influencing the perception of quality destinations. As the most significant factor determining quality destination has been found security issues, destination cleanliness, natural attractions etc. Using statistical methods were demonstrated differences in their perception based on gender and also the perception based on the age of the respondents. The rating of women is higher than men; rating of some factors varies significantly with age. Identified significant differences among different groups of respondents are described in the article in detail. The article also deals with the reasons for changes in the perception of the significance of these factors in recent years.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is considered to be one of the most dynamically developing sectors of the world economy what is connected with a highly competitive environment. A visitor/client is the key to prosperity in the market environment in tourism services. In comparison with the past, the client is becoming more demanding year by year, which is given by relatively fast changing environment, in particular, by the development of society, growing standard of living and fast growing pace of life, which causes changes in clients' preferences, namely fast growing requirements of quality of services.

The Czech Republic is part of a highly competitive environment of the European destinations and it definitely cannot continue to draw from the specific competitive advantages of the late 20th century, when low quality of local tourism services was tolerated and it was compensated by attractiveness of „the country behind the Iron Curtain“ and very low prices.

The specific character of services represented mostly by intangibility, evanescence and variability definitely evokes ambiguous attitudes towards the idea and evaluation of service quality, what is the cause of examination of quality factors in services sub-sectors.

The goal of this article is to identify the significance of individual factors determining the perception of quality destinations in relation to sex and to the individual age groups in the Czech Republic, as well as comparison of the major factors identified with the published results of similarly focused study. Identification and significance of quality factors related to competitiveness are the topics of scientific research, but this research is mostly focused on evaluation of service quality in sub-branches of tourism (e.g. Hsieh et al. 2008; Martin-Cejas, 2006; Zhu, Zhao; 2010; Truong, Foster; 2006, Chitty et al. 2007). However, there exists significantly less research that studies evaluation of the quality of the destination as a complex product of tourism (e. g. Krešić (2008), Xielong, 2011, Žabkar et al. 2010).

2. Material and Methods

There are difficulties to find definition of the term “destination quality” in the literature. The first reason is a high subjectivity of the destination visitors' perception and the complexity of destination as a social-economic system. The second reason is the respect towards residents whose quality perception does not have to be in compliance with the way how visitors or management of a destination perceive it.

The characteristic components of destinations (Attraction, Amenities, Ancillary services, Accessibility, Available packet, Activities by Buhalis (2003)) indicate that, although the service quality is primarily evaluated only in terms of functional quality, the destination assessment by technical quality aspects (the range of attractions and services) is necessary as well (Grönroos, 2007). Middleton and Clarke (2001) argue that destination is made up of five components, of which three of them are the same as components used by Buhalis (2003) (Attraction, Amenities, Accessibility) and the other two components are the image and perception of the destination and price.

Some authors have approached service quality and consumer satisfaction as being synonymous (Crompton and Love, 1995; Otto and Ritchie, 1995) or have narrowed the distinction (Spreng et al., 1996). Nica et al. (2013), in the frame of research focused on the competitiveness of tourism in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, use satisfaction indicator as a significant predictor of competitiveness. Zeithaml et al., (2006) in their publication state that experts claim that satisfaction is generally perceived as a broad concept while the quality of services concentrates especially on the dimensions of services, although in practice the terms of satisfaction and quality are mutually interchangeable.

In order to achieve the stated objectives, i.e., to identify the crucial quality factors of tourism destination and to reveal its significance for a visitor of the destination, there was used a primary questionnaire among the inhabitants of the Czech Republic. The sample of 1097 respondents was set as a quota sampling with quota characteristics of sex and age. Data gathering took place during the period of time between May and August 2015. The questions in the questionnaire, which were aimed to reveal the significance of individual factors perceived by the visitor, were formulated with five-point scaling, where number 5 represents high/extraordinary significance of an evaluated factor.

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