

THE MARKETING TOOLS OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN TOURISM SERVICES

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Abstract

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The paper aims to show possible approaches towards managing the quality of services in tourism. With respect to the character of services it is necessary to pay regard to their specifications, such as especially their intangibility, perishability and heterogeneity. So it is rather difficult to measure the quality of a service, but it can be successfully evaluated according to the satisfaction of a customer. The example of a possible utilization of the ECSI model (ECSI: European Customer Satisfaction Index) concerning the analysis of customer satisfaction for the area of tourism is a part of this paper. In the phase of applying and verifying the suggested modification of the ECSI model the technique of electronic questioning have been used. The total satisfaction index measured by the ECSI method reached 54% for Czech Railways/České Dráhy, 79% for Student Agency and 72% for Tourbus. The results of the customer satisfaction analysis by the ECSI method can simplify decision-making not only from the position of a manager or a businessperson but they can also simplify the process of decision-making for a customer when selecting a destination, a firm, or possibly when purchasing a service or a product.

quality management, tourism, customer satisfaction, ECSI

According to the Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic tourism creates the volume of approximately 378 milliard Czech crowns and employs over 600,000 people. A remarkable feature of tourism is that it can create opportunities without large investments and bring a considerable added value in many directions. Its benefits prove in macroeconomic financial and currency relations, in economics of many business branches connected with tourism as well as in creating new jobs even in problematic regions from the point of view of employment. Tourism is so called sectional branch, so it influences a lot of other economic branches that work for it (transportation, building industry, food industry, furniture production, photographic industry, translation services, printing industry, software services and so on). In the area where it develops successfully tourism links with many other activities (crafts, handicrafts, various sports and cultural-art activities and so on), it is able to employ small local shops of all kinds. It revives cultural, historical,

technical or natural attractions (for instance castles, museums, galleries, open-air folk museums and others). From this point of view tourism provides significant opportunities for structural changes and economy development.

After 1989 The Czech Republic became a sought-after destination for tourists from all over the world – it was something new, not seen before and at the same time not very expensive. This specific competition advantage increased the tolerance towards quite a low level of services on our market. However, this trend has already stopped and the Czech Republic has become a common tourist destination that cannot draw from such a specific competitive advantage any longer. Tourism market is highly competitive and to perform successfully on this market it is inevitable to apply marketing management principles.

Due to a well elaborated system of marking the dense network of interconnected tourist hiking trails and pathways the Czech Republic is an ideal place for active tourism. At the same time the vari-

ety of cultural and architectonic attractions or sights registered on the UNESCO list creates a high potential for cultural, urban and sightseeing tourism and also for spa stays (the Czech Republic is on the second place – after Italy – in the number of these sights per the number of inhabitants). The combination of these factors gives our republic preconditions to become an attractive and frequented tourist destination.

The paper aims to show possible approaches towards managing the quality of services in tourism. With respect to the character of services it is necessary to pay regard to their specifications, such as especially their intangibility, perishability and heterogeneity. So it is rather difficult to measure the quality of a service, but it can be successfully evaluated according to the satisfaction of a customer. On competitive markets it is just customer satisfaction that is considered to be crucial in differentiation and it is becoming a key element in business strategies more and more. The possible utilization of the ECSI model concerning the analysis of customer satisfaction (ECSI: European Customer Satisfaction index) for the area of tourism is a partial objective of the paper.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The quality of a product (or a service) can be defined as a “total summary of entity features that influence the ability to satisfy given and presumed needs” (ISO 8402). Defining quality is a starting point for its measuring. It is necessary to be aware of the fact that quality is not a real characteristics but it concerns a user’s overall perception of satisfaction.

There are several studies that describe various factors reflecting customers’ perception. For example Berry, Parasuraman (1991) use five quality indicators in services: tangibility, reliability, the ability to react, trustworthiness and empathy. So the role of employees in services is irreplaceable as customers’ trust is more often linked with people rather than with companies and that is why the contact with customers is considered to be the main factor that

influences the competitiveness of an organization providing services.

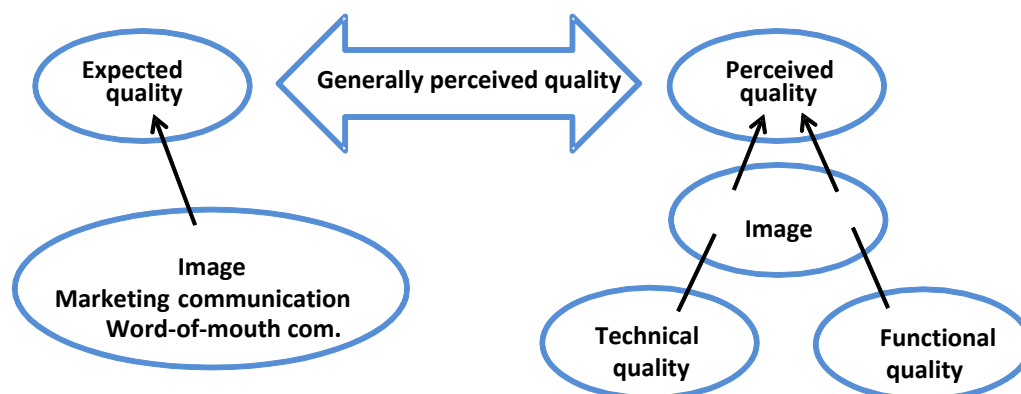
Zeithaml, Parasuraman a Berry (1990) identified five crucial criteria for evaluating the quality of services:

- Availability: the ability to provide an expected service reliably and exactly.
- Willingness: the effort to help a customer and providing the service without waiting.
- Trustworthiness: the abilities and behaviour of employees which will persuade a customer that he/she will be served properly.
- Sensitive approach: ensuring such care that evokes the feeling of a personal interest in a customer.
- Materialization of a service: the image of business premises, facilities, staff and promotion materials that evoke trust.

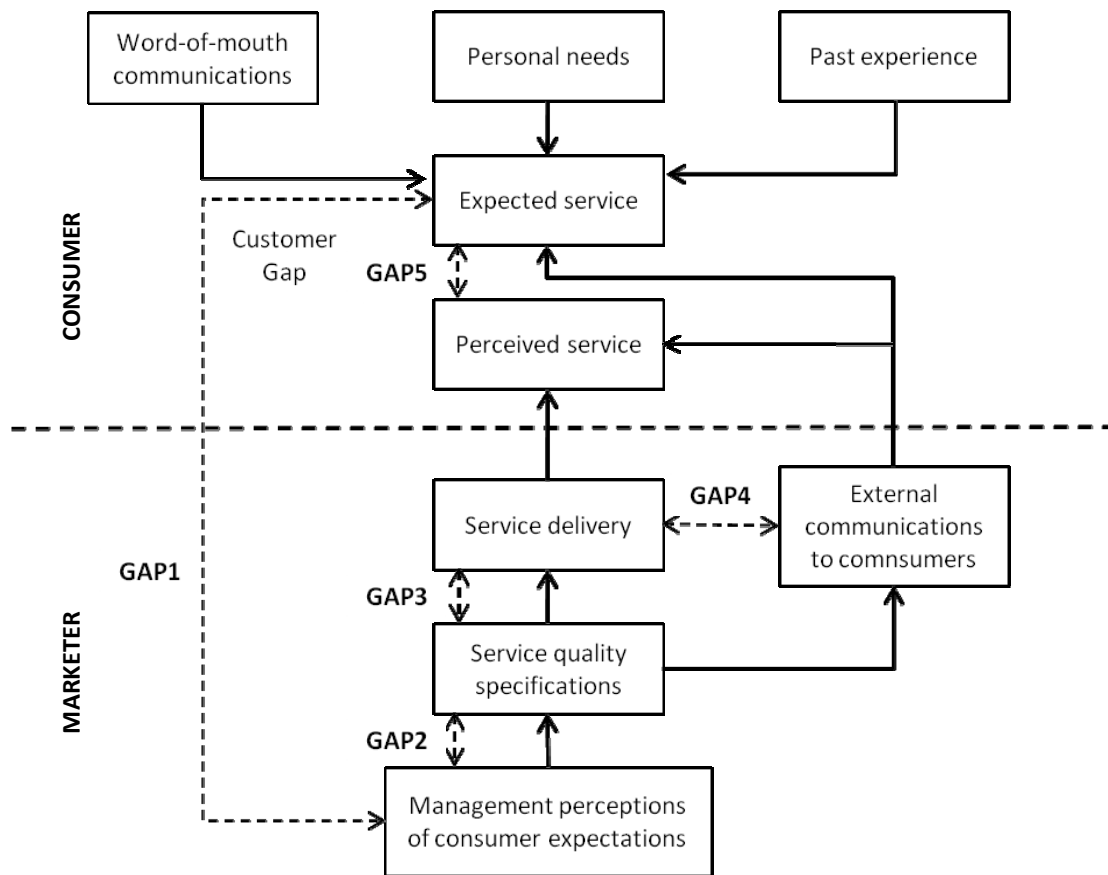
One of the models used for analysing quality is for instance: *The model of customer-perceived quality* (see picture 1).

Technical quality represents what customers receive and functional quality expresses the way in which customers receive the service. By force of both the image of a company is created, how it is perceived in reality. A customer compares this perceived quality to his or her expectations of a quality level and this level is influenced by various factors. With the help of this model a company realizes how it can influence various factors which create customers’ expectations.

The Gap or Servqual Model ranks among methods based on formulating the attributes of “a perfect service”; it understands quality as a reflection of a customer’s satisfaction and comes out of a precondition that customer satisfaction is a reflection of the difference between his or her expectations and the perception of the received service level. As basic characteristics of service quality from a customer’s point of view it evaluates reliability, readiness, trustworthiness, empathy and also material elements of a service. Individual characteristics are attributed of a various importance (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry, 1990).



1: *The model of customer-perceived quality* (Gronroos, 2007)



2: The Gap model (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry; 1990)

The basis of the model (see picture 2) is a precondition that the basic gap (gap 5) between perceived and expected quality is a function of partial gaps that arise during the process of service creation. This model is directed at a service as well as a customer. The first gap (gap 1) emerges between customers' expectations and the management's vision of these expectations. The second gap (gap 2) appears among the management's opinions on what customers expect from a service and the standards defined for service provision. The third gap (gap 3) can arise as a difference between defined standards and real service provision. The fourth gap (gap 4) appears in case that a company does not provide the level of a service which has been promised.

The model of contradicting circles (Normann, 1991): this model describes a state when an organization is in a problematic situation and tries to decrease its expenses at the cost of decreasing the quality of its services, so it gets into "a vicious circle". It sees the way towards a virtuous circle mainly in so called marginal secondary services for customers.

Within the frame of service quality management it is suitable to use two or three models that together cover all aspects mentioned above and they are adapted to the needs of customers, employees and owners. Of course, models in the area of improv-

ing quality in services have to include all three basic characteristics of services: the service itself, providing clients with this service and regulating the attributes of the service quality.

Nowadays three basic concepts of quality management are applied in tourism: *the concept of company standards, the concept of ISO standards and the concept of total quality management*. In tourism especially big companies are holders of certificates according to ISO standards, for instance international hotel chains or airline companies. Nevertheless, on tourism market there are many medium and especially small companies for whom such a kind of management is unsuitable, not only from financial reasons. These companies often use various certification programmes. Certification in general is defined as "a voluntary tool that evaluates, checks and provides a written pledge that a facility, a product, a process or a services meets specific standards. The label is awarded to those who meet or exceed basic standards." In the area of tourism certification has a long tradition, for example "Michelin" guides for Europe have existed since the 20th century. These systems traditionally measure the quality of tourist products (usually accommodation and boarding), as well as some aspects of health, hygiene and security. Labels, guarantees and certificates then draw the attention

to the exceptionality of such offers. Some labels and schemes are of a government character, some are purely private, but often there is certain coexistence and co-financing a state-a private sector.

Total quality management is based on the participation of all organization members with the aim to reach a long-term success by force of satisfying customers' needs and also to reach a benefit for all members of an enterprise and a company (Mateides, Ďaďo, 2002). It is a concept that lays more emphasis on the satisfaction of employees, partners and broader society rather than on ISO standards, and so it is applied mainly in final tourist destinations (Šípková, 2004).

One of the complex quality management methods suitable for tourist destinations is the *European system of integrated quality management* which is also based on the model of exceptionality EFQM. Integrated quality management (IQM) connects four key elements of a destination in its approach (tourists' satisfaction, service providers' satisfaction, the quality of local inhabitants' lives, the quality of environment) and any misbalance among them can have a crucial impact on the overall quality of a destination and a tourist product. The sense of IQM is monitoring quality, its comparisons in time and its improving. It is a cyclic process consisting of five steps during which results are analysed and individual key elements are adapted to the required level, which should ensure the quality of the whole.

The tool for measuring qualitative performances of a destination is called Qualitest. *Qualitest* consists of 16 quality themes divided into two main groups. The first group provides information on basic factors of a destination, the second one on the quality of a tourist product itself. Each quality theme is evaluated by three indicators which are interlinked and reflect the integrated approach to quality management that is essential in tourist destinations (Vajčnerová, 2009):

- Quality Perception Condition Indicators (QPCI, so called state indicators),
- Quality Management Indicators (QMI),
- Quality Performance Indicators (QPI).

On the basis of measuring, recording and comparing the three indicator values¹ for each quality theme² it is allowed to compare the ways of meeting similar partial objectives in various destinations, to use good experience and to reveal weaknesses in the process of benchmarking. With the help of keeping records of and comparing the results from previous years a destination can observe positive or negative development of individual indicators. Vajčnerová (2009) points out that the practical application of Qualitest is very demanding from the point of view of required range of information that a management

of a destination does not always have to dispose of. With respect to the present level of destination management in the Czech Republic, where in some areas there are not any destination management organizations performing yet, Qualitest can only be used in selected destinations, presuming its modification with respect to possibilities of individual destinations.

Firms/organizations that have launched complex quality management often set customer satisfaction as a target of their business activities. In their study authors Eklof and Westlund (1998) emphasize the importance and usefulness of the term of customer satisfaction for managing quality. Authors Denove and Power (2006) devote themselves the topic of satisfaction extensively in their book of the same name – Satisfaction. According to ISO 9000:2000 a customer's satisfaction is defined as "a customer's perception that concerns the level of satisfying his or her needs."

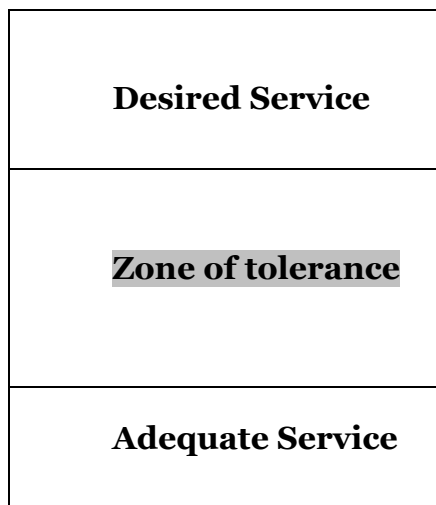
A very satisfied customer is not usually interested in changing a product or a service provided by a company for a better one from a different firm. The feeling of pleasure creates a customer's emotional relationship to a given product or a service and also to a given company. According to Kotler (2001) this understanding arises from the theory of C/D paradigm. Confirmation/Disconfirmation – C/D paradigm is the most widespread conception of explaining satisfaction that expresses the size and direction of a perceived disagreement determining satisfaction/dissatisfaction. In this case the whole range of experts speaks about so called "gap theory".

Woodruff, Gardial (1996) use a similar "expectancy-disconfirmation" model in which the disconfirmation of expectancy is compared to a perceived result on the basis of preset comparison standards.

Berry, Parasuraman (1991) divide a customer's expectation during purchasing a service into two levels (see picture 3). The first level, so called desired service, is understood as the level of a service at a customer's full satisfaction that a customer hopes to obtain. Then follows the zone of tolerance, which is the range of services that a customer still considers to be satisfactory. The level of so called adequate service is the level of an obtained service below the zone of a customer's tolerance that he or she is still willing to accept but it usually leads to a customer's dissatisfaction and then to the loss or decrease of his or her loyalty. The level of service above the zone of tolerance is a pleasant surprise for a customer, a service has been provided exceeding expectations and this causes reinforcing loyalty towards a firm – a customer will come again. The range of these levels is rather individual at various customers and various types of services.

1 QPCI, QMI, QPI.

2 Altogether 16 quality themes, e.g. the viability of tourism industry in a destination, marketing and promotion, accessibility, transportation and so on.



3: The levels of a customer's expectations during purchasing a service (Berry, Parasuraman; 1991)

Recently in the world there has been a distinct trend to quantify the level of customer satisfaction. Models that enable quantification of satisfaction with the aid of indexes are usually used. The first experience with the Index of Satisfaction comes from Sweden where it is called The Barometer of Customer Satisfaction (the author of methodology is professor Fornell); its measuring began in 1989. In 1992 Germany started using a German customer barometer, in 1994 an American index of customer satisfaction was created on the basis of Swedish experience, and later other countries, such as Israel, Taiwan or New Zealand, joined. France began pilot studies of a national index in 1996. At that time European commission³ started a study for checking a possibility to create an index on the basis of national experiments that have already been conducted. Recommendations to use a Swedish-American model for European countries were the result (Ryglová, 2007).

The European model of customer satisfaction (ECSI) is understood as a system of hypothetical variables: customer satisfaction, perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction, image, loyalty and customer complaints (Mateides, Ďádo, 2002). Each hypothetical variable is determined by a certain number of measurable variables. The number and exact delimitation of measurable variables to individual hypothetical variables is not constant. The measurable variables of customer satisfaction index are selected and compiled for each branch, area or business sphere individually.

The ECSI model of calculating the customer satisfaction index is based on the presumption that for obtaining primary input data (point evaluation) we

use a questionnaire survey among the clients of observed firms, institutions or destinations, where the questions are constructed by the type of multistage Likert scale. For modelling each hypothetical variable 3–7 questions are usually used. It is also inevitable to determine the importance of each satisfaction feature. Hypothetical variables of the ECSI model are calculated as a weighted arithmetic average.

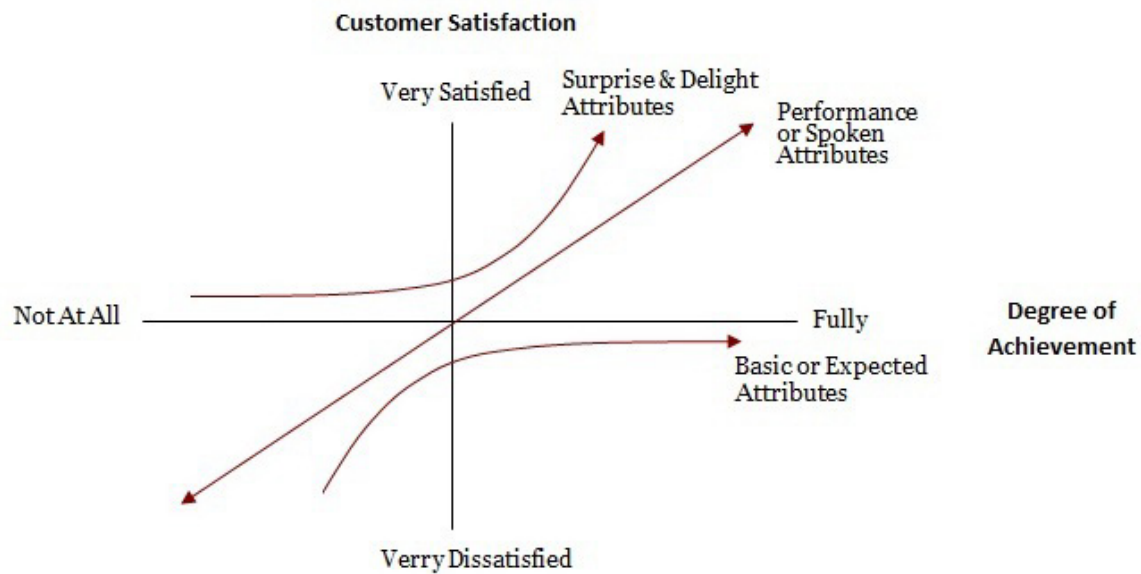
By force of the index various dimensions of perceived quality can be measured and the most of them are variable. Criteria can change very much during the application of the index itself and it is difficult to find a universal system for its complementation. The variables and measurements ought to respect cultural and social conditions of a specific country, or possibly the specifications of the researched branch. Hague (2003) points out that during each measurement it is very important to set factors that determine customer satisfaction best. Factors are of a different importance that is set especially according to the researched area. When creating questions it is necessary to put oneself into a customer's place, to try to think of what he or she is influenced by.

Another possible tool for measuring quality by force of quantifying customer satisfaction is a model of customer satisfaction created by professor Kano. The model (see picture 4) offers a view of attributes (features) of products that are perceived as important by a customer, it concentrates on various features of a product that a customer primarily pays attention to. He also uses a questionnaire survey to obtain topical data. Kano (2001) differs six categories of quality features the first three of which (basic, satisfying, efficient factors) effect a customer's satisfaction. Meeting basic factors is also the minimum for entering the market. The other three attributes mentioned by Kano do not have any influence on satisfaction.

The categories of quality features according to Kano (2001):

- Basic factors – these are minimal requirements; not meeting them leads to a customer's dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, even fulfilling these factors does not guarantee a customer's satisfaction. A customer evaluates these factors as preconditions for satisfaction. Meeting basic factors is also the minimum for entering the market.
- Satisfying factors – these are factors increasing customer satisfaction. However, not meeting them does not cause dissatisfaction. Satisfying factors surprise a customer and create his "admiration". By using these factors a company differs from its competitors very positively.
- Efficient factors – they elicit a customer's satisfaction if they are high. Failing that (when efficient

3 The pilot European ECSI project on the break of year 2000 should have been joined by 15 countries of EU; telecommunications, banking sector, the branches of consumer electronics and supermarkets with grocery departments were selected among set sectors.



4: Customer satisfaction model (Kano, 2001)

factors are small) they cause a customer's dissatisfaction. In picture 4 the efficient attribute has a linear and symmetric characteristic. These factors are typically directly linked to a customer's unequivocal needs and requirements. A company should definitely devote itself to these aspects.

- Indifferent attributes (impartial) – a customer is unconcerned.
- Disputed attributes – it is not totally clear whether they are expected by a customer.
- Reverse attributes – opposite features of a product were expected by a customer.

The problems of analysing customer satisfaction also with using quantification with the help of indexes are rather extensively solved by authors Hill, Brierley, MacDougall (2003). When analysing satisfaction the authors come out from four basic consecutive steps:

- Identifying a customer's requirements and wishes (approximately 15–20 requirements).
- Analysing the importance of these requirements from the point of a customer's view (importance score).
- Analysing satisfaction concerning the same above mentioned requirements (satisfaction score).
- Gap analysis (importance score vs. satisfaction score); the larger the gap is the bigger problem occurs.

On the basis of these analyses we are able to identify whether a company has a problem, where its weaknesses are and which areas should be concentrated on as a priority within increasing satisfaction – so called PFI (Priorities for Improvement).

In foreign professional literature it is possible to meet a whole range of other approaches towards analysing customer satisfaction besides indexes, for

example Denove, Power (2006); Woodruff, Gardial (1996); Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry (1990).

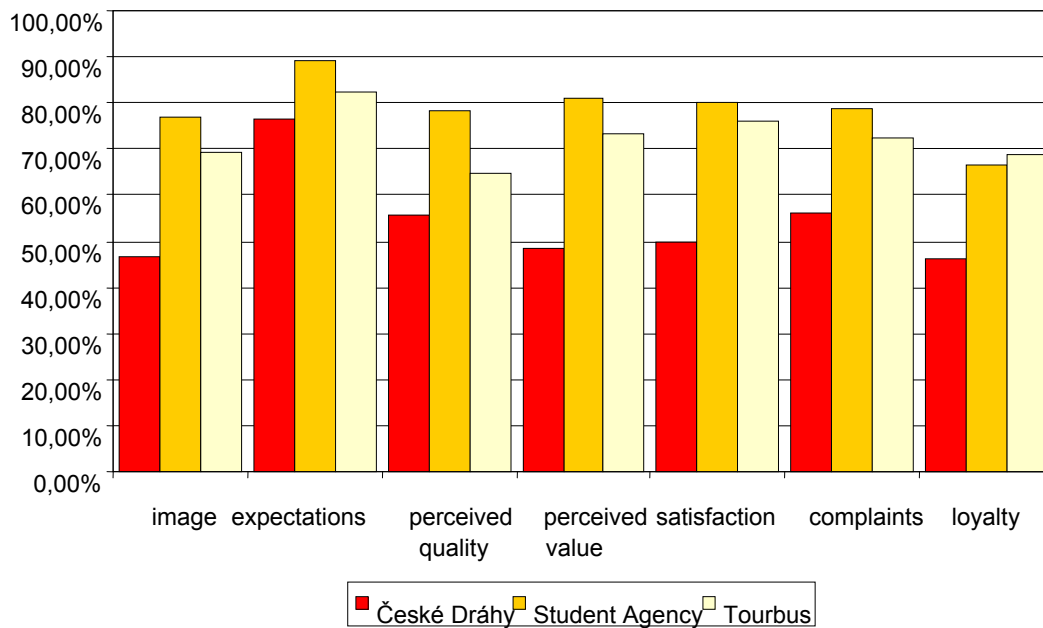
In Czech literature the problems of analysing customer satisfaction are discussed quite extensively by Nenadál (2004), in Slovakia by Mateides (2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using the ECSI model is one of the ways how to monitor and analyse customer satisfaction. Present Czech professional literature does not offer almost any complex publications about the principles of practical applying the utilization of the methodology concerning customer satisfaction indexes. Theoretical presumptions and the principles of index creation as well as practical examples of implementing these indexes do not occur in any of them together. In about year 2000 a pilot project concerning testing the European Customer Satisfaction Index in selected companies in the Czech Republic was planned. However, the sector of tourism was not considered within this project.

This chapter shows the possibility to use ECSI as a tool for managing decision-making processes in the area of tourism services quality by force of a detailed analysis and the quantification of customer satisfaction.

The application of ECSI was realized among providers of transportation services in tourism. Firstly, it was inevitable to modify the model, which means to define measurable variables, according to a selected branch. On the basis of in-depth discussions with experts, studying professional literature and own primary survey among clients (Ryglová, Stojarová, 2007) a list of measurable variables for each hypothetical variable of the ECSI model was suggested. In this case an expert estimation was not used for determining weights of individual measurable variables but the weights were set by a statistical method



5: The ECSI values comparison (Rygllová, 2009)

of covariance. Then the transformation of measurable variables of the model into scale questions of the questionnaire was performed; these questions served as tools for gaining topical input data of the model. Now a list of all hypothetical ECSI variables follows, with a concrete specification of measurable variables for carriers in tourism:

- Image: the trustworthiness of a company, offer, the approach to a customer;
- Expectations: professionalism, the availability of services, reliability;
- Perceived quality: a professional approach to a customer, the level of accompanying services, the accuracy of service realization;
- Perceived value: the price level of services, the willingness of staff, the promotion of offered services, the time availability of services;
- Satisfaction: meeting expectations, the satisfaction with provided services, the trouble-free purchase of a product;
- Complaints: the number of complaints, helpfulness during settling claims, the trouble-free behaviour of a company;
- Loyalty: the number of service usages, spreading positive references, further using services of a company, the sensitivity towards changes in prices made by competitors.

The model was tested on three companies offering services in coach and rail transportation: Student Agency, Tourbus a České Dráhy (Czech Railways). The survey itself was conducted in spring 2009 by

force of electronic questioning in ReLa system⁴ that enables efficient surveying in the form of electronic data collecting. In total 198 questionnaires were obtained – 106 of them were from Czech Railways/ České Dráhy, 37 from Student Agency and 31 from Tourbus. The range of the selective set is not very wide, which definitely influences the information capability of the gained results, but for testing the functionality of the ECSI methodology this number was sufficient.

Picture 5 compares the obtained results of satisfaction indexes for all three transportation companies whose services are used on the frequented road section Brno – Prague (Prague – Brno). The results were processed by an algorithm created purposefully for the ECSI calculation by the Department of Informatics at the Faculty of Business and Economics, Mendel University in Brno. As it is apparent from the results, the most visible differences appear even only when comparing coach and railway transportation. The total satisfaction index measured by the ECSI method reached 54% for Czech Railways/ České Dráhy, 79% for Student Agency and 72% for Tourbus.

The competitive environment on the intercity transportation market is very strong in case of the frequented road section Brno – Prague. The companies compete not only in prices but also in the offer of services provided for their clients. The measured results show a favourable position of especially both coach companies. According to the obtained results

⁴ The information system of ReLa was created by the workers of The Faculty of Business and Economics at Mendel University in Brno to simplify work during obtaining and processing data of electronic questioning.

the company of Student Agency performs the best – their indexes reached the highest values.

For better picture the indexes are quoted in percentages. The indexes of individual hypothetical variables can also be stated independently, for instance as loyalty indexes or expectation indexes; furthermore they can be compared from the point of view of age categories of inhabitants, according to the groups of households based on their monthly incomes, according to sex, regions and so on.

The obtained results can be analysed in more details, as it has already been mentioned, it is possible to examine concrete partial values of each measurable variable. For example, the result concerning the hypothetical variable of complaints can be rather misleading without knowing the results of partial variables as a Czech client is not yet used to claiming services in such an extent as it is usual in case of for example German or Austrian clients. Furthermore, we have to consider the fact that a client, even when being highly satisfied, hardly ever gives evaluations of the highest possible value, i.e. 100%.

If this ECSI methodology was used for a broader research, it would be possible to gain results with a higher information value that could become an important basis for strategic decisions. The obtained ECSI results can simplify decision-making not only from the position of a manager or a businessperson but they can also make the decision-making process easier for a customer when he or she considers the choice of a destination, a firm or possibly the purchase of a service or a product. However, *the objective of the paper was not to analyse obtained customer satisfaction indexes in detail and then to evaluate impacts, but to show the possibility of applying ECSI practically and the utilization of this tool in real business environment as any concrete application of ECSI referring to the area of tourism has not been performed yet.* The European customer satisfaction index was established for the possibility to compare customer satisfaction values in a given area among the states of European Union. Nevertheless, this methodology is hardly ever used in the Czech Republic and it is very demanding to get concrete results. In the Czech Republic the evaluation of customer satisfaction by customer satisfaction index is used for example in the area of banking for now.

In connection with the practical application of ECSI there are frequent reservations appearing that concern the complexity of the methodology, especially with respect to primary data collecting. The existence of seven hypothetical variables and later on the demanding and exact definition of concrete measurable variables linked to them often result in a too long and complicated questionnaire for a final customer, client or tourist, which in its consequence might contribute to distorting or complicated obtaining primary data. Such complexity of the methodology of the ECSI calculations could be overcome by the approach of Hill, Brierley and MacDougall (2003), which means by using GAP analysis and calculating a simplified customer satisfaction index based only on evaluating the maximum of twenty most important characteristics of satisfaction from the position of a customer. This methodology enables quite a fast and not very complicated analysis of customer satisfaction, reveals present weaknesses in satisfaction and provides instructions which problems should be solved preferentially within the frame of customer satisfaction management. A great advantage of customer satisfaction indexes obtained this way is their comparability not only in time but also among various segments, through branches or among individual firms. The satisfaction quantification in this analysis also answers the question: „How successful are we in satisfying 15–20 most important requirements of our customer?” In spite of the fact that these requirements develop and change in time or that various market segments have different requirements, we still get a reply to the ability to meet 15–20 most important requirement of a customer. Unfortunately it does not give answers (unlike ECSI) to the questions of loyalty, for instance, or claims that are closely linked to satisfaction.

The part of the author's following research is not only verifying the application of the ECSI model into other branches of tourism (for example travel agencies and touroperators, possibilities of using it for destination management needs), but also the modification and application of other methods of the customer satisfaction analysing (Kano, GAP, PFI) and subsequently comparison and evaluating the possibilities of the practical usage in tourism within the Czech Republic.

SUMMARY

The paper aims to show possible approaches towards managing the quality of services in tourism. With respect to the character of services it is necessary to pay regard to their specifications, such as especially their intangibility, perishability and heterogeneity. So it is rather difficult to measure the quality of a service, but it can be successfully evaluated according to the satisfaction of a customer. The example of a possible utilization of the ECSI model (ECSI: European Customer Satisfaction Index) concerning the analysis of customer satisfaction for the area of tourism is a part of this paper.

The application of ECSI was realized among three providers of transportation services in tourism. Firstly, it was inevitable to modify the model, which means to define measurable variables, according to a selected branch. On the basis of in-depth discussions with experts, studying professional literature and own primary survey among clients a list of measurable variables for each hypothetical variable of the ECSI model was suggested. In this case an expert estimation was not used for determining

weights of individual measurable variables but the weights were set by a statistical method of covariance. Then the transformation of measurable variables of the model into scale questions of the questionnaire was performed; these questions served as tools for gaining topical input data of the model. The total satisfaction index measured by the ECSI method reached 54% for Czech Railways/České Dráhy, 79% for Student Agency and 72% for Tourbus.

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