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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.

The factors that are evaluated in the questionnaire have been formulated on the basis of the original researches about the quality components of a destination (Buhalis, 2003; Middleton - Clarke, 2001) and on the basis of theoretical formulations for destination quality management presented by Woods and Deegan (2003) who analyzed the quality models as SERVQUAL, Gap model, Kano model, and EFQM model. The researched factors equally take into account the functional and technical quality of services (Grönroos, 2007) and are stipulated in order to suit all types of destinations.

Kruskal-Wallis test was used in order to find out whether the evaluation of significance of individual factors is dependent on sex and age. It is a non-parametric analogue of single factor analysis of variance that could not be used because of non-normal data. This test verifies null hypothesis that evaluation of examined factor has the same distribution for each groups (age groups or sex). Rejection of this hypothesis means that differences are statistically significant, i.e., dependence of examined factor on age or sex was proven.

3. Results

The following Table 1 states the order of the quality factors according to their significance perceived by the visitor of the destination when evaluating the overall destination tourism quality. Significance was set based on the average evaluation values of respondents of examined sample ($n = 1097$).

Table 1. The order of the quality factors according to their significance perceived by the visitor of the destination

Number of factor	Factor	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	KW-test sex	KW-test age
F14	Sense of security	4.32	5.00	0.97	yes	yes
F15	Destination cleanliness	4.28	5.00	0.91	yes	yes
F1	Natural attractions	4.04	4.00	1.09	no	no
F12	Level of prices of services and goods in the destination	3.97	4.00	0.99	yes	yes
F13	Level of personnel quality in tourism services	3.91	4.00	1.00	yes	yes
F3	Accommodation	3.85	4.00	1.04	yes	yes
F4	Food	3.83	4.00	1.04	no	yes
F6	Availability of transportation to the destination	3.79	4.00	1.12	yes	yes
F2	Cultural monument	3.71	4.00	1.13	yes	yes
F10	Friendly acceptance by the locals	3.65	4.00	1.12	yes	yes
F16	Overcrowding of the destination	3.60	4.00	1.10	no	yes
F9	Information and communication prior to arrival	3.59	4.00	1.11	yes	yes
F8	Availability and quality of information	3.47	4.00	1.14	no	yes
F17	Uniqueness of destination	3.41	3.00	1.05	no	yes
F11	Image of the place	3.35	3.00	1.09	yes	no
F5	Social and experiential events	3.21	3.00	1.19	no	yes
F19	Respecting sustainable development of the destination	3.17	3.00	1.11	no	no
F18	Additional infrastructure	3.04	3.00	1.16	no	yes
F7	Local transportation	2.98	3.00	1.23	yes	yes

Source: authors

The results of dependence analysis of the results on sex and age are stated in the fourth and fifth column of the Table 1. Dependence on sex was proven at a 5% significance level in 11 factors out of 19 (almost 60%). Dependence on age was proven at a 5% significance level in 16 factors out of 19 (almost 85%). The value YES means that dependence of the factor on sex or age was proven.

The most significant quality destination factors for the residents of the Czech Republic are *Sense of security*, *Destination cleanliness*, and on the other hand the least significant are *Additional infrastructure and Local transportation*. In addition to this, median and standard deviation of individual factors were also stated in the table. Their values show that all factors are relevant for the respondents. The factor *Sense of security* contains security issues of the destination, which includes not only local security situation but also security in form of health risks (e.g. infectious diseases, drinking water, and health system), safe natural conditions (e.g. earthquakes, floods), crime rate etc. The factor *Destination cleanliness* contains clean natural environment (water for swimming, air), way of dealing with local waste, cleanliness of public places, urban cleanliness etc.

The next two tables show mean values of the quality factors for individual age categories (Table 2) or sex (Table 3). There is a highlighted group that reached the highest mean value for the factors with statistically significant differences between the groups.

Table 2. Mean value of quality factors for individual age groups

Number of factor	Factor	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Symbol of dependence
		18 - 23 years	24 - 30 years	31 - 40 years	41 - 50 years	51 - 60 years	61 - 70 years	71 and over	
F14	Sense of security	4.14	4.18	4.29	4.39	4.46	4.38	4.69	↗
F15	Destination cleanliness	4.11	4.15	4.29	4.38	4.32	4.36	4.59	↗
F1	Natural attractions	4.02	4.14	4.02	4.09	4.10	3.84	3.96	—
F12	Level of prices of services and goods in the destination	3.87	3.86	3.92	4.04	4.02	4.09	4.24	↗
F13	Level of personnel quality in tourism services	3.76	3.76	4.06	4.02	4.01	3.93	3.73	↘
F3	Accommodation	3.53	3.86	3.87	3.95	4.04	3.90	3.71	↘
F4	Food	3.60	3.82	3.90	3.84	3.95	3.89	3.94	↘
F6	Availability of transportation to the destination	3.44	3.74	3.69	3.83	3.84	4.13	4.37	↗
F2	Cultural monument	3.52	3.61	3.46	3.81	3.87	3.97	4.10	↗
F10	Friendly acceptance by the locals	3.69	3.58	3.59	3.61	3.83	3.75	3.20	↘
F16	Overcrowding of the destination	3.67	3.38	3.41	3.71	3.73	3.72	3.65	↘
F9	Information and communication prior to arrival	3.43	3.58	3.66	3.74	3.53	3.70	3.37	↘
F8	Availability and quality of information	3.12	3.14	3.37	3.77	3.58	3.83	3.88	↗
F17	Uniqueness of destination	3.50	3.66	3.46	3.39	3.35	3.22	2.78	↘
F11	Image of the place	3.37	3.31	3.44	3.30	3.40	3.36	3.02	—
F5	Social and experiential events	3.45	3.37	3.41	3.10	2.91	2.99	2.92	↘
F19	Respecting sustainable development of the destination	3.11	3.16	3.22	3.21	3.25	3.10	3.12	—
F18	Additional infrastructure	3.18	3.29	3.32	3.22	2.70	2.64	2.20	↘
F7	Local transportation	2.87	2.83	2.75	2.89	3.02	3.62	3.31	↘

Source: authors

- ↗ significance of the factor increases with age
 ↘ significance of the factor decreases with age

- ∕ significance of the factor becomes more evident at a higher age
- ∧ significance of the factor becomes more evident at middle age
- ∖ significance of the factor becomes more evident at a younger age

The form of dependence on age is not the same for all quality factors. It can be characterized by the symbols shown in the last column of the table.

Dependence on age (significance increases with age of respondents) was proven for the first two most significant factors F14, F15 (Table 2). Both of these factors are identically used in the study (Yoon, Uysal 2005) that examines pull motivations having regard to the satisfaction and loyalty of the visitors of the destination. It can be concluded that the sense of security is gaining its significance, which has to do with the current political situation and an increased media attention on security problems. People are more worried about their safety and the problems related to terrorist attacks, military conflict and subsequent migration have a significant influence on requirements connected to safety in the destination.

When evaluating the third most significant factor F1 *Natural attractions*, dependence on age was not proven just as in case of F11 *Image of the place* and F19 *Respecting sustainable development of the destination* (tab.2.). Significance of these factors does not change in connection to age of respondents. Division of respondents into seven categories according to age shows interesting differences in their preferences for all other factors. Categories, which are above 50 years consider factors F14,15,12,3,4,6,2,10,16,8,7 as more significant ones. In general, these are level of prices, services, information, cleanliness, security, friendly environment and overcrowding of the destination.

Contrarily, respondents in categories up to 50 years show a higher interest in factors F13,9,17,5,18, which are the *Level of personnel quality in tourism service, Information and communication prior to arrival, Additional infrastructure, Social and experiential events and Uniqueness of the destination*. *Social and experiential events* are the most important for the category 18-23, *Uniqueness of the destination* for the category 24-30; similarly, it is possible to find and assign each factor to the age category, for which it has a greater significance. Such a detailed division of respondents enables the orientation in the priorities of individual age categories, what can be used by both destination management and individual service providers, who may better select their target group of visitors based on their web pages design.

Table 3. Mean values/significance of the quality factors depending on sex

Number of factor	Factor	Mean male	Mean female
F14	Sense of security	4.17	4.44
F15	Destination cleanliness	4.13	4.40
F1	Natural attractions	4.00	4.07
F12	Level of prices of services and goods in the destination	3.88	4.04
F13	Level of personnel quality in tourism services	3.76	4.03
F3	Accommodation	3.68	3.98
F4	Food	3.77	3.88
F6	Availability of transportation to the destination	3.66	3.89
F2	Cultural monument	3.51	3.87
F10	Friendly acceptance by the locals	3.55	3.73
F16	Overcrowding of the destination	3.56	3.64
F9	Information and communication prior to arrival	3.50	3.66
F8	Availability and quality of information	3.39	3.53
F17	Uniqueness of destination	3.38	3.43

F11	Image of the place	3.20	3.47
F5	Social and experiential events	3.17	3.23
F19	Respecting sustainable development of the destination	3.12	3.21
F18	Additional infrastructure	3.10	2.99
F7	Local transportation	2.84	3.10

Source: authors

Dependence on sex was proven at a 5% significance level in 11 factors out of 19. For all of these factors was the average rating of women higher than men. Although, the differences are not so big (rating of women is higher by an average of 0.24 points), but still, they are statistically significant with respect to the size of the sample of respondents. It might be assumed that women have higher requirements for ensuring a high-quality vacation, because according to a general claim it is women who mostly decide on the choice of vacation, and thus, the final destination.

4. Discussion

The authors of this paper paid attention to significance of destination quality factors also in the previous research. When comparing the research, which was conducted in 2011 among the experts of tourism (qualitative research; expert in-depth interviews, sample size: 130 service providers, employees in the destination management and public administration, academicians). (Vajčnerová, Andraško; 2013), there could be found many differences between the evaluation done by the experts and by the residents of the Czech Republic. Evaluated factors were similar.

The factor Uniqueness of destination, which took the first place in 2011, was now moved to the 15th place and it was replaced by the factor *Sense of security*, which was placed 9th place by the experts in 2011. This change may be explained by the current international situation in connection to the migration wave and terrorist attacks and also totally different point of view of the experts and potential visitors, which highlights the importance of the research of expectation on the demand side.

The analysis of factors affecting the development of tourism in the Czech Republic in the context of regional differentiation was more closely dealt with by Vystoupil et al. (2011), Kunc et al. (2013), for example.

The crucial result of the research is the confirmation of differences in significance of individual factors with respect to respondents' age category. Research has explicitly shown different priorities, what can be used by destination management when aiming the products at customers of different age categories.

Foreign researches dealing with understanding the visitors' motivation for choosing a destination and subsequently examining their satisfaction and loyalty (Yoon, Uysal 2005), or image of the destination (Veasna, Wu, Huang, 2013) work with evaluation of individual factors. Significance of quality factors can change with respect to environment and customers, and therefore, it is firstly necessary to identify these factors. The results of this research provide the information about significance of quality factors for the Czech population, which has its own specific priorities and customs. The results show the main differences between the evaluation done by tourism experts and average inhabitants in last five years and different priorities depending on age and sex of respondents.

5. Conclusion

The paper deals with the identification of the quality tourism destination factors. The destination or the destination tourism place is a unit of the competition and in the competitive environment it is fighting for the favour of visitors through the quality of its offerings. Tourism represents a significant part of the country's economy and therefore is needed to be more concerned with this issue, although, as stated in the introduction – there is missing a research in present literature that studies evaluation of the quality of the destination as a complex product of tourism. The contribution of this research is the establishment of a comprehensive approach – the identification and the significance of the most important factors in relation to different target groups, which can then be also used for setting business and marketing strategy by destination managers particularly in the field of promotion policy to

increase the quality of destination perception. The factors of the quality can be also used as a tool to measure the competitiveness of different types of destinations in the Czech Republic.

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