

## Quality Management in Tourism Services

Tünde Dzurov VARGOVÁ<sup>1\*</sup>, Anna ŠENKOVÁ<sup>2</sup>, Daniela MATUŠÍKOVÁ<sup>3</sup>, Milena ŠVEDOVÁ<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Prešov in Prešov, Faculty of Management, Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, Konštantínova 16, Prešov, Slovakia; E-mail: tunde.dzurov.vargova@smail.unipo.sk

<sup>2</sup>University of Prešov in Prešov, Faculty of Management, Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, Konštantínova 16, Prešov, Slovakia; E-mail: anna.senkova@unipo.sk

<sup>3</sup>University of Prešov in Prešov, Faculty of Management, Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, Konštantínova 16, Prešov, Slovakia; E-mail: daniela.matusikova@unipo.sk

<sup>4</sup>University of Prešov in Prešov, Faculty of Management, Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, Konštantínova 16, Prešov, Slovakia; E-mail: milena.svedova@unipo.sk

\*Corresponding author

### Abstract

*The quality of services in tourism is one of the most important factors of the competitiveness of tourism companies. Customer satisfaction is closely related to quality, which is the main criterion for success in the market. The level of quality of tourism services in Slovakia is often a criticized weakness. Tourism companies have a lack of a comprehensive quality management system. The aim of paper is to present the results of research aimed at identifying, evaluating and processing the opinions of experts in the field of tourism practice, tourism theory and quality management on quality management in the field of tourism services in Slovakia. For the purpose of this research we chose the Delphi method as the main scientific method, in order to forecast the development of quality management in the environment of tourism in Slovakia. We worked with a group of 15 experts- respecting their anonymity. We surveyed their views in two stages by responding to statements related to seven areas of quality management of tourism services. The results were processed by mathematical-statistical methods. We have come to the conclusion that the specifics of tourism services also predetermine a specific approach in the field of quality management. Public-private partnerships should play a more important role in implementing quality systems in tourism. The basis for increasing quality should continue to be quality standards oriented more towards changes in the requirements of selected customer groups. Voluntary standardization systems are more encouraged, as mandatory standards in the form of legislative standards are often inflexible.*

**Keywords:** quality management system; tourism; quality of tourism services; Delphi method.

### 1. Introduction

Organizations in a competitive environment place are increasing emphasis on the intangible value of reputation in order to achieve their goals (Stefko et al., 2016a). The rapid change in socio-economic conditions and technological progress in a globalized world lead to increased customer demands and expectations (Tuzunkan, 2018). Like any other economic sector, tourism is facing, among other things, increasing competition, which is growing significantly in today's global society. Entrepreneurs must respond to the constantly changing situation on the market and must be able to adapt professionally to these changes (Dobrovic et al., 2018, Gavurová et al., 2018). Existing studies present various and contradictory factors that need to be taken into account in managers' strategic decisions to increase competitiveness. Their meaning and need differ for individual business entities (Belás et al., 2018). Management standards serve as an effective channel for disseminating knowledge because they believe they offer comprehensive scientific and practical knowledge to many different stakeholders (Pohle et al., 2018; Stefko et al., 2016b). Strategy developers in a managerial environment need quantitative knowledge in order to be able to design effective and targeted solutions in their area of responsibility (Stefko & Steffek, 2018). The services sector has had a dominant position in the economy of the Slovak Republic

in the last ten years, in which tourism plays a significant role (Balcerzak & Pietrzak, 2016). Innovations in tourism are needed for Slovakia to become the world's leading destination able to utilize the richness and diversity of its offer. Today, it is necessary to differentiate your business activities from the competition, which is constantly growing in this sector. Thanks to different approaches, models and standards, a tourism facility can successfully produce a profit, take care of its loyal customers, but also acquire new ones (Fabricio & Manca, 2017). Tourism quality management systems help organizations active in tourism to systematically increase the quality of services, acquire expertise and increase the competitiveness of these organizations.

### 2. Theoretical basis

Tourism enables travel and gaining new experiences, traveling without barriers, escaping from everyday stereotypes and independently increasing knowledge (Sambronska et al., 2016). The tourism sector, as one strategic sector in national development, has continued to make a significant contribution to supporting national economies over the last decade (Sugandini et al., 2019). It is an important sustainable sector of the economy that optimizes the industrial structure and can become an

important element of sustainable economic development policy (Błazejowski et al., 2019). Tourism is an industry focused on providing alternatives to customers for spending their free time. Its expansion is of great importance and plays an important role in the development not only of the national economy but also in social aspects in general (Draskovic et al., 2018). Therefore, every country's effort is to help develop this industry effectively (Bing et al., 2018). Tourism as a third millennium phenomenon is attributed to many components, which only emphasize its broad nature. Bacik et al. (2016) emphasize the need to monitor ever-changing trends in travel. They point out that the preferences of the current generation of tourists differ significantly from the preferences of the past. In the context of modern organizations, it is common practice to place increasing emphasis on customer opinion, on issues related to the quality of services, as well as on the level of satisfaction that results from them. Canalejo & Del Rio (2017) emphasized the importance of expected and perceived quality as well as satisfaction and loyalty among visitors, on the basis of which managers can set goals for improvement and competitiveness. Measuring service quality and customer satisfaction can help service providers to support their long-term market prospects, identify areas for improvement and, last but not least, put in place appropriate procedures to improve the quality of offering and adapt it to passengers' needs according to their motivation to travel. Tourism enterprises play a key role in the efficient functioning of tourism (Bing et al., 2018).

The services sector, as in any other economic sector, also faces competitive pressures in tourism, which in today's globalized society are growing significantly and therefore it is necessary to differentiate their business activities from the competition (Ceptureanu et al., 2017). Thanks to different approaches, models and standards, a tourism facility can successfully produce a profit, take care of its loyal customers, but also acquire new ones. The intangible aspect of services in tourism is especially important, namely satisfaction and individual perception of quality by visitors (Bacik et al., 2014). It is therefore necessary for business entities to actively determine the satisfaction of their visitors, analyse their needs and, based on the information obtained, adapt the final product to the "desire" of the customer (Balogova et al., 2018). One of the tools through which the quality of products and services on the supply side can be continuously improved is the introduction of a service quality system, which not only helps to increase quality, but also contributes to more efficient use of internal processes and skills and awareness of individual employees (Tari et al., 2018). Process management can be defined as a methodology for evaluating, analyzing and improving key business processes based on customer needs and desires (Tucek, 2015; Popescu et al., 2018). Quality is a key element of the current business development strategy in today's globalized marketplace. It has become one of the most important factors for economic success in international competition (Simonova & Fomenko, 2017; Edgeman, 2018). Properly functioning quality management system guarantee services with high quality parameters, which is also part of the company's continuous development (Borkowski et al., 2016). The quality management philosophy emphasizes the importance of continuously improving the quality of services and ensuring the value of product use in relation to the desires of customers and employees. Tourism quality management systems help organizations operating in tourism to systematically increase the quality of services / products, gain expertise and increase competitiveness (Zhezhnyh & Markiv, 2017). We agree with the authors as business competition in a modern organization intensifies and therefore tourism companies must not only increase their market share, but also improve the quality of services provided, and last but not least, improve the performance of their employees.

The quality of services in tourism is considered a significant advantage, which in turn translates into better prosperity of the organization. For the development of tourism, the quality of

products and services provided by business entities is essential. It is considered one of the decisive factors in customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers return, spreading a good reputation, and thus represents an opportunity for tourism organizations to ensure a stable position in the market (Yang et al., 2016; Kasiri et al., 2017). The quality of services provided in tourism in Slovakia is very uneven. Together with the insufficient pace of innovation, this is one of the barriers to the competitiveness of tourism on the international market (Gúčík et al., 2016). In 2016, the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic was the implementer and manager of the Slovak system of quality services in tourism. The aim of the system was "to increase the competitiveness of tourism while making better use of its potential, with the aim of balancing regional disparities and creating new job opportunities". The main impetus for Slovak standards was the high quality and rank of German tourism. This led to the fact that Slovak specialists from various fields, such as representatives of the Association of Hotels and Restaurants, made a lot of effort to create a similar system as in the mentioned Germany and adapt it to Slovak conditions. According to our findings, the attempt to introduce a unified system failed, as a small number of entrepreneurs joined the system due to the high costs for the system, weak and insufficient promotion as well as the insufficient education on benefits for organizations.

### 3. Data and methodology

The aim of the research, the results of which are summarized in the presented paper, was to obtain, evaluate and process the opinions of experts in the field of tourism practice, tourism theory and quality management on quality management in the field of tourism services in Slovakia.

In order to create a realistic forecast of quality management systems in the tourism environment in Slovakia based on the opinions of experts working in the field of quality, we chose the Delphi (expert) method as the main scientific method in our research. Its advantage is based on the fact that experts are independent of each other. They cannot influence each other and the form in which they are addressed allows to address geographically distant experts (in our case from the Czech Republic).

The Delphi technique uses the subjective opinions of the members of the expert group in order to obtain an overall consensus of opinions. This process has a predictive structure and helps in decision-making in the survey. The Delphi method seeks summary opinions from various experts or identified effective factors (Farokhian et al., 2019). The method of expressing the opinion was based on a questionnaire form and we implemented it in two rounds while guaranteeing the anonymity of the experts. The basic idea of this procedure was to obtain a consensus- majority opinion. The process of implementing the Delphi method consisted of five steps:

- Step 1: Problem defining.
- Step 2: Provision of the first topic within the first round of data collection (research team).
- Step 3: Summary and creation of conclusions from the first round.
- Step 4: Repetition of steps 2 and 3 until conclusions are obtained.
- Step 5: Finalisation.

Due to the implementation of the more demanding Delphic method, we chose a sample size of 15 experts. The age and gender of individual respondents, nor the education and length of practice or pedagogical activities were not significant in this survey. We managed to maintain a uniform ratio of respondents, namely: experts in the field of tourism practice (5), experts in the field of tourism theory (5), experts in the field of quality management (5).

The sample is representative, because it consists of: known, but also unknown, but interested and important experts, whose work is important for tourism in Slovakia. We selected respondents by deliberate selection, in which we determined the traits relevant to our research. These are: the field of tourism theory (academics teaching at various universities in Slovakia and the Czech Republic subjects focused on tourism and management), the field of tourism practice (middle-level managers working in hospitality and gastronomy or in a professional association), quality management (quality managers working in practice or at universities).

We considered the process of finding, contacting experts and obtaining their consent to participate in research to be the most challenging stage of the research. In the first stage of the research, a questionnaire was used for data collection, the structure of which was carefully thought out and created from several areas needed to analyse the addressed issues. The questionnaire was divided into seven sections. The questions took the form of statements. Identification questions were included in the introduction. The first section covered questions about the perception of the quality concept.

In the second section, respondents commented on the issue of overall quality verification, in the third section on the role of employees in the quality process and in the fourth section on the issue of financing quality systems and the role of the public and private sectors. The issue of implementing quality management systems in tourism was the subject of the fifth section of the questionnaire, the quality control of the sixth section and we found out our views on innovations in this area through questions in the seventh section.

After the survey steps finalization, we analysed the opinions of experts by comparing the results in the first and second rounds, comparing the agreement of experts with the statements in the group of statements to determine priorities, comparing the opinions of expert groups (tourism theory experts, quality management experts and experts in areas of tourism practice). We evaluated the obtained results by the mean and standard deviation, which shows the extent to which the individual measured values are around the mean value. The smaller the standard deviation, the closer the measured values are around the mean, which means that the experts evaluated the statement similarly, the smaller the variance. On the contrary, a larger standard deviation indicates that there were more significant deviations from the mean and greater variance in the evaluation of the statement.

Statement	1. round					2. round				
	PS	ST DEV	AK	MK	PRX	PS	ST DEV	AK	MK	PRX
1.1	1.27	0.23	1.4	1.0	1.4	1.46	0.12	1.4	1.4	1.6
1.2	2.07	0.42	2.4	1.6	2.2	1.8	0	1.8	1.8	1.8
1.3	1.53	0.31	1.8	1.2	1.6	1.6	0.2	1.8	1.4	1.6
1.4	3.33	0.31	3.6	3.0	3.4	3.6	0.2	3.6	3.4	3.8

#### Explanatory Notes:

PS – total average; ST DEV – standard deviation;

AK – experts in the field of tourism theory;

MK – experts in the field of quality management;

PRX – experts in the field of tourism practice.

The results of the responses to the statements in this area show slight differences between the individual groups of experts. Experts in the field of quality management agreed more with the statement regarding the impact of employee satisfaction on the quality of services provided than the experts in the field of tourism theory and tourism practice. The second round did not very differ from the opinions of the first round. The statement regarding the impact of employee remuneration on quality in tourism (statement 1.2) slightly divided the opinions of experts. Experts in the field of quality management most identify with this statement, followed by experts from practice and academics. The second round brought an overall consensus of views within the expert groups, as evidenced by the value of the standard deviation 0.

## 4. Results and discussion

The first stage of the research was focused on finding and contacting experts through e-mail communication. A questionnaire was sent to them in order to find out their attitudes and opinions, especially on the following areas of quality of tourism services:

- the impact of employees' satisfaction with the work performed and their sense of belonging/fellowship to the company on the quality of provided services;
- the impact of employees' remuneration based on the results achieved on the quality of the provided services;
- the impact of company standards and regular employee training on the quality of provided services;
- the implementation of quality programs in tourism as an agenda and responsibility of the public sector organization;
- the implementation of quality programs in tourism as an agenda and responsibility of the private sector organization;
- quality in tourism as part of state policy;
- support for quality management systems building according to ISO 9000, EFQM standards in tourism;
- innovative thinking and implementation of various product, process and marketing innovations as an important factor in gaining a competitive advantage.

In the following text, we present an evaluation of the experts' opinions on the individual statements of the first and second rounds according to individual areas.

### I. Employees

Statements:

1.1 Quality in tourism is increasingly affected by employees' satisfaction and fellowship/belonging to the company in which they work.

1.2 The quality of tourism is increasingly influenced by the remuneration and motivation of employees on the basis of their achieved performances.

1.3 Regular training/education of employees in the field of quality contributes to raising the required standards.

1.4 Due to the leave of a skilled workforce abroad, the quality of services provided is declining in all areas of tourism.

Table 1.

Evaluation of expert opinions according to the area of employees

Source: own research

Statement 1.3 focusing on regular staff training, which contributes to raising standards, recorded the appropriate agreement of academics, practitioners and experts on quality management in both the first and second rounds of data collection. However, the experts could not react unequivocally to statement 1.4. The overall average response of experts in individual groups ranged from 3.0 to 3.6. Experts mostly marked the answer I don't know when claiming whether the leave of qualified workers abroad can mean a lower quality of services provided in the field of tourism. We recorded the same reactions in the second round. Based on this, we state that the leave of a qualified workforce does not have a decisive effect on the quality of services provided, as Slovak entrepreneurs are still able to replace these workers with others and train them according to their ideas.

## II. Standardization and financing of quality system implementation

Statements:

2.1 Quality improving in tourism should be based on general standards of equipment of the businesses and services they provide (for example categorization and classification of accommodation facilities).

2.2 Quality improving in tourism should be based on com-

Statement	1. round					2. round				
	PS	ST DEV	AK	MK	PRX	PS	ST DEV	AK	MK	PRX
2.1	1.93	0.42	1.8	1.6	2.4	2.13	0.42	2.6	1.8	2.0
2.2	2.20	0.2	2.2	2.0	2.4	1.87	0.12	1.8	1.8	2.0
2.3	2.67	0.23	2.8	2.4	2.8	1.93	0.23	1.8	1.8	2.2
2.4	3.47	0.76	2.6	4.0	3.8	3.73	0.5	3.8	4.2	3.2
2.5	3.00	0.53	3.2	3.4	2.4	2.53	0.23	2.8	2.4	2.4

Compared to other sectors, standards of equipment and services are of particular importance in tourism. These are industry standards in tourism, but they mostly only set requirements for the product (for example in accommodation facilities, room equipment and range of services). They usually exist in the form of various categorizations and classifications of accommodation facilities, catering facilities, tourist information centres and the so on.

Statement 2.1 was focused on finding opinions on the application of general standards of business facilities as tools for improving quality in tourism. Experts in the field of quality management agree the most, followed by academics and, surprisingly, experts from practice attach less importance to such standards compared to the opinions of others. In the second round, academics changed their minds in favour of promoting universal standards. Similarly, we evaluated statement 2.2 regarding corporate standards and internal guidelines. Opinions did not differ very much, as evidenced by the very low standard deviation in the first round (0.2). The second round brought an approach to overall agreement on this issue compared to the previous round. From the responses to the statements concerning the financing of the quality system, we found that the opinions differ between the groups of experts. According to experts, the idea of improving the quality of services in tourism by building quality management systems (statement 2.3) does not seem to be completely correct. For example, experts in the field of tourism practice and experts in the field of tourism theory are not sure about the importance of ISO standards in tourism. We agree with their opinion, stating that the majority of companies in the tourism in Slovakia are micro and small enterprises, whose operation is clearer and usually do not feel the need to

pany standards and internal guidelines.

2.3 Quality improving of services in tourism should be based on supporting the development of quality management systems according to ISO 9000 and EFQM standards.

2.4 Obtaining a quality certificate and implementing a quality management system in a company should not be free of charge for all tourism organizations.

2.5 The development and implementation of quality standards should be partially compensated by state resources.

Table 2. Evaluation of expert opinions according to the area of standardization and financing of quality system implementation

Source: own research

formalize its system. Managers consider building a quality management system to be too expensive. In the first round, academics came to the conclusion that obtaining certification and implementing quality management (statement 2.4) should be at least partially free of charge for tourism companies, but in the second round, they leaned towards the majority opinion. The opinion of experts from practice was surprising, because they exclude option free of charge, as well as experts in the field of quality management. What's concerning the financing of the implementation of the quality system, experts from practice and management have the same opinion as we have, and that such certifications should be paid, at least in part, by the company. Businesses should deserve certification for the quality of their products or services. On the question of the financing of quality standards from state resources (statement 2.5), the experts could not express whether they agreed or disagreed with this idea. In the second round, however, they accepted the possibility of partial compensation of costs by the state. However, we assume that they would be interested in self-financing the certification by the company itself and co-financing a certain amount from state resources.

## III. Responsibility for quality systems implementing

Statements:

3.1 The implementation of quality systems in tourism should be the responsibility of the public sector organization.

3.2 The implementation of quality systems in tourism should be the responsibility of the private sector organization.

3.3 Quality in tourism should be promoted through public policy.

Statement	1. round					2. round				
	PS	ST DEV	AK	MK	PRX	PS	ST DEV	AK	MK	PRX
3.1	3.47	0.64	3.2	3.0	4.2	-	-	-	-	-
3.2	2.87	0.95	3.6	3.2	1.8	3.4	0.53	3.8	3.6	2.8
3.3	2.00	0.72	2.2	1.2	2.6	1.73	0.61	2.4	1.2	1.6

Table 3. Evaluation of expert opinions according to the area of responsibility for quality systems implementing

Source: own research

Public, private or third sector organizations are responsible for the implementation of quality programs in tourism in European countries. However, the private and public sectors often cooperate. Experts from our three areas were unable to express a clear opinion on statement 3.1 as to whether the public sector should be responsible for developing such standards. Academics and experts in the field of quality management also did not know unequivocally whether the private sector should be responsible for the implementation of quality programs of tourism (statement 3.2). However, practitioners agree that the private sector should play an important role in CR quality systems.

The second round of the survey showed that practice experts have changed their minds and are in favour of the majority opinion. Experts in the first round did not fully agree that the quality of tourism should be promoted within the framework

of state policy (statement 3.3). Some of them expressed the need to start from the state quality policy and at the same time create a separate quality strategy for tourism. In the second round, the most experts were in favor of promoting quality in tourism through state policy.

## IV. Quality control

Statements:

4.1 Active customer satisfaction surveys should be regularly monitored and published to the public.

4.2 The quality of products and services should be regularly monitored through control purchases (for example mystery shopping, mystery guest).

4.3 Working with customer complaints and comments moves the organization forward and shows it how to improve the quality

of provided services.

4.4 Innovative thinking (for example product, process and

marketing innovations) is one of the priorities for quality improvement in order to gain a competitive advantage.

Statement	1. round					2. round				
	PS	ST DEV	AK	MK	PRX	PS	ST DEV	AK	MK	PRX
4.1	2.33	0.61	1.8	3.0	2.2	1.6	0.4	2.0	1.2	1.6
4.2	2.27	0.81	3.0	1.4	2.4	1.6	0.2	1.6	1.4	1.8
4.3	1.27	0.12	1.4	1.2	1.2	-	-	-	-	-
4.4	1.27	0.23	1.4	1.0	1.4	-	-	-	-	-

Table 4. Evaluation of expert opinions according to the area of quality control

Source: own research

Quality management systems should be followed by monitoring customer satisfaction and publishing it to the public (statement 4.1). Academics strongly agree with this idea, experts in the field of practice agree and experts in the field of quality management could not clearly express their agreement or disagreement. We present the opinion that quality management systems should clearly be followed by monitoring and measuring quality in tourism. Businesses should listen to their clients, address their needs or dissatisfaction by regularly monitoring reviews on various Internet portals. Statement 4.2 examined the opinions of experts on the regular monitoring of the quality of products or services by control purchases. This idea is considered correct by quality management experts, practitioners have a similar opinion, but academics are unable to assess whether it is the right way to go. This is not because they find this quality control tool bad, they just can't imagine making control purchases in practice.

Within the second round, the opinion of academics was in favour of agreeing to regular monitoring of service quality. The experts' answers to statement 4.3 did not differ significantly. All of them considers active work with customer complaints and comments to be a successful way to work to improve the quality of services. Innovative thinking and the implementation of process and product innovations are considered by all participating experts to be an important factor in the company's competitiveness (statement 4.4).

## 5. Conclusion

In order to meet the research goal, we managed to obtain, evaluate and process the opinions of fifteen experts in the field of tourism practice, tourism theory and quality management on quality management in the field of tourism services. Their views on the individual areas examined differed slightly. The research revealed several starting points that can serve as certain alternative approaches to quality and quality management systems in tourism. Many of them are convinced that the provision of quality services in tourism is not only based on expensive certification systems, but that companies can offer quality services without obtaining a quality certificate. In their opinion, quality is associated mainly with the motivation of managers and executives and their involvement in the philosophy, strategy and goals of the company.

Important for increasing quality should be standards of facilities and services, which should, however, be more oriented to selected groups of customers and changes in their requirements. This can only be achieved on a voluntary basis, as mandatory standards in the form of legislative standards are often inflexible. For this reason, there is a need for public-private cooperation in implementing quality systems in tourism. Attention must also be paid to monitoring customer satisfaction and, on that basis, introducing process and product innovations as a tool for increasing competitiveness. In conclusion, we can state that there are differences of opinion on the implementation of quality systems in tourism between experts in the field of tourism theory, experts in tourism practice and experts in the field of quality management. These differences are mainly due to different experiences and views on the issue. However, the quality of services in tourism is a challenging topic providing space for our further analyses in the future.

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