

## THE ROLE OF ACCOMMODATION'S QUALITY FOR EDUCATIONAL TOURISTS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CONSUMER SATISFACTION LEVEL

*Annotation. The article describes the importance of assessing the accommodation quality for educational tourists and their needs, approaches to identifying "the hotel services' quality" category; the factors influencing the level of customer satisfaction and methods of its assessment.*

*Анотація. Проаналізовано важливість оцінки якості послуг розміщення для туристів, основною метою подорожі яких є освітні програми та навчання; розглянуто підходи до визначення поняття "якість готельних послуг"; проаналізовано чинники, які впливають на рівень задоволеності споживачів; наведено методи оцінки задоволеності.*

*Аннотация. Проанализирована важность оценки качества услуг по размещению для туристов, основной целью путешествия которых являются образовательные программы и обучение; рассмотрены подходы к определению понятия "качество гостиничных услуг"; проанализированы факторы, влияющие на уровень удовлетворенности потребителей; приведены методы оценки удовлетворенности.*

*Key words: educational tourism, hotel service, quality, satisfaction, the service delivery process, gap model.*

Youth travel represents an important and booming component of the tourism market. It can take different forms. Among the best known the following ones may be listed: higher educational tourism, volunteer programs, "work and travel" programs, cultural exchanges, sports and adventure tourism.

Of course, the youth travel market should be regarded as a component of the tourism market as a whole; in this context, the action mechanisms are similar, with significant differences in terms of the customers' motivations and characteristics.

Educational tourists represent the major part of the youth travel demand.

The demand represented by educational tourists has certain common features that differentiate it from other types of tourism demand. It's about the high level of mobility possessed by youth, the complexity of their motivations, the budget allotted by young people to practice tourism, the duration of the stay, etc.

Educational tourists in terms of accommodation prefer cheaper types of rooms as a result of their limited income, except for those who are generously sponsored by their parents or specific foundations. Despite the fact that spending on accommodation highly varies, their demand for the hotel service quality doesn't differ from that of business or leisure tourists in terms of "service quality and price relationship". And that's why hotel businesses must take into consideration needs of this market segment when building their market strategy in highly competitive environment.

Keeping up with the general trends of increasing competitiveness within the hotel industry businesses and hotel managers are much concerned about hotel service improvement in order to obtain noticeable competitive advantages.

Quality service is considered to be a necessary factor for a company success on a global scale where the competition level is even higher. Thus no one can keep up with such competition without understanding the needs of consumers, assessing and controlling the factors influencing the level of consumer satisfaction with provided services, and most importantly – without providing high-quality services.

The purpose of this article is to assess the existing approaches to the determining of the category "hotel services' quality" and to develop practical recommendations for using the results of hotel services' quality assessment by hotel organizations.

In order to achieve this purpose the following tasks are to be solved:

the analysis of the definition of the concept "hotel services' quality" in Ukrainian and foreign practice;

the identification of the major factors influencing the hotel services' quality;

setting the correlation between the factors assessed and the level of satisfaction with provided services.

The object of research is the hotel services' quality.

The factors influencing the hotel services' quality and their relationship with the consumer satisfaction level define the subject of research.

As it was mentioned above the educational tourists represent a major part of the youth travel demand and have particular needs differentiating them from other tourists.

The flows of educational students with regard to the host countries are represented in fig. 1 [1].

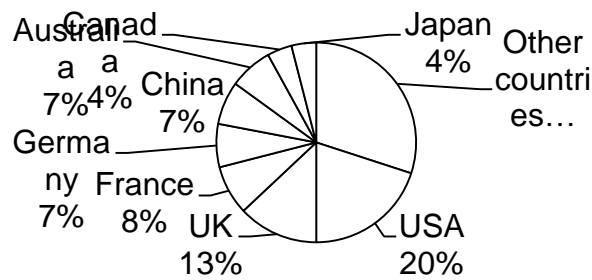


Fig. 1. Educational tourists by host countries, 2010

There is a wide range of accommodation options available for educational tourists: temporary accommodation (which can include hotels, Youth Hostels and Backpackers); homestay with local families; on-campus accommodation; share accommodation with other students.

The demand expressed by tourists is the starting point for allotting their limited income. On the average, about 40 % of their budget represent transport expenses, which, in most cases, mean the value of the airplane and train; less than 18 % of the budget is the accommodation (fig. 2) [1].

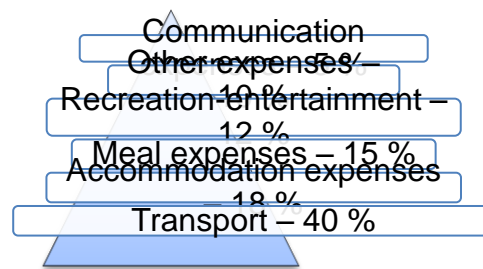


Fig. 2. The budget structure for educational tourists

As any other type of tourists they pay close attention to the accommodation's quality and hotel services' quality specifically.

The essence of category "hotel services' quality" was reviewed by Ukrainian (Doroshenko T. T, Lukyanov L. G., M. Malskaya, Nechayuk L. I., Rogleva H. J., Fedorchenko V. K., Chudnovsky A. D. etc.) and foreign (R. Braymer, J. Walker, etc.) authors.

They explained the concept of the category "hotel services' quality" and related terms "hotel", "hotel service" in details, but did not sufficiently described the mechanisms of hotel services' management; issues concerning the level of consumer satisfaction with provided services and factors influencing this level.

There are a few approaches to the definition of the category "quality" from a "subject" point of view: a service manufacturer – quality covers the production process (different types of costs and production management) and providing services, and a consumer – quality is considered to be a set of features, that can satisfy a consumer.

A. Parasuraman (1985) defined service quality as a gap between customers' expectations and the performance they actually receive whilst Asher (1996) suggests that quality is the degree to which a customer's perceived expectations are met based on a personal judgment of the service transaction.

The service quality is a complex category, a significant hotel organizations' performance efficiency index, an object of analysis, planning and management [2].

R. Braymer suggests that hotel services' quality is a set of homogeneous services, which are subject to particular standardization.

Delivering excellent service is a winning strategy. Quality service sustains customers' confidence and is essential for a competitive advantage. To achieve this permanent process control and service quality improvement is necessary.

Monitoring and analysis of consumer demand focus primarily on these questions:

What is service quality?

How can service quality be best measured?

What is the nature of customer's expectations for service and what are the sources of these expectations?

What are the principal causes of service-quality deficiencies?

What can organizations do to improve service quality?

In the scientific literature the assessment of the level of consumer satisfaction is made with the help of a number of empirical and theoretical methods, and SERVQUAL models, that cover 5 characteristics: "perception", "reliability", "responsibility", "security" and "understanding".

Despite the fact that these models are widely spread and intensely used when assessing service quality, they are often criticized due to the lack of reasoned methodology and inadequate categorical apparatus.

Besides, when analyzing the service quality so called GAP-model is used developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1985.

This model measures "gaps" between expected and perceived quality service at the stage of consuming or after it.

The essence of the method is that the service quality is defined as a difference between perception of the service at the stage of consuming and consumer's expectations before consuming. The main elements are as follows [3]:

Gap 1. Consumer's expectation – management perception gap. The gap between consumer's expectations and management perceptions of those expectations will have an impact on the consumer's evaluation of service quality.

Gap 2 is that of standard. It is the result of differences in managing knowledge of the client's expectations and the process of service provision (delivery).

Gap 3. The difference between specifications or standards of service quality and the actual service delivered to customers.

Gap 4. The difference between the service delivered to customers and the promise of the firm to customers about its service quality.

Gap 5. The discrepancy between customers' expectations and their perceptions of the service delivered.

Should any of the mentioned gaps arise, the "service gap" will also appear because the real service will not satisfy the client's expectations.

According to a model description, it is a function, that analyses the expectations and perceptions, and can be modeled as [3]:

$$SQ = \sum_{j=1}^k (P_{ij} - E_{ij}),$$

(1)

where SQ is overall service quality;

k is number of attributes;

P<sub>ij</sub> is performance perception of stimulus i with respect to attribute j;

E<sub>ij</sub> is service quality expectation for attribute j that is the relevant norm for stimulus i.

Data gathering is made by means of resolving customers' complaints, questionnaires, special interviews, involving "secret shoppers" and benchmarking.

An inadequate level of service quality can be caused by a number of factors:

lack of information about any feedback between the company and the consumers directed to the management;

bad management planning;

lack of budget;

underdeveloped material and technical base;

staff incompetence;

lack of motivation;

high staff turnover.

When assessing the level of service satisfaction it is important to keep in mind that one person's perception can differ depending on the period of time, emotional and psychological condition, a country of stay.

To summarize, educational tourists represent the major part of the youth travel demand and have their particular needs determined by motivation, restricted budget and time available. Despite the fact that spending on accommodation by educational tourists highly varies, their demand for the hotel service quality doesn't differ from that of business or leisure tourists in terms of "service quality and price relationship". And when building their market strategy and drawing plans hotel organizations must regard the level of consumer satisfaction as a key factor to their success.

Reasonable "quality – price" ratio remains the most important factor for Ukrainians regardless of numerous different methods of assessing the level of satisfaction. Besides, the role of strategic planning in the process of the service improvement cannot be overestimated when it comes to an organizational performance.

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