
CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING TOURISTS' SATISFACTION IN AGRO-TOURISM ACCOMMODATION UNITS IN THE NORTH-WEST AREA OF ROMANIA

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The main problem of Romanian tourism in the next period, including rural tourism, is the quality of the tourist product, viewed mainly from the aspect of tourist services, without which no tourist heritage, no matter how valuable, cannot be effectively exploited.

Raising the quality of the Romanian tourist product, regardless of its concrete form, requires the application of strategies of flexibility, diversification of the types of tourist services and differentiation of the tourist product offered, compared to the offers of competitors.

Thus, some authors see satisfaction as the antecedent of quality, while others consider quality to be the essential determinant of satisfaction. By and large, the most pertinent conclusion seems to be the concept explained by Rust and Oliver (Rust, 2000) who considers satisfaction to be superior to quality - in other words, quality is only one of the potential dimensions of service that influence consumer satisfaction, although, according to the same authors, satisfaction in turn can indirectly strengthen perceptions of service quality.

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INTRODUCTION

The future of Romanian tourism at the beginning of the 3rd millennium depends decisively on the ability of economic agents and the space to capitalize on the special potential at our disposal, to adapt to the growing demands of tourist demand and to raise the quality of tourist activity in all aspects, that is, to organize and realize a modern and competitive tourism. At the same time, overcoming shortcomings and the difficulties with which Romanian tourism is currently faced require a coherent and effective national policy. The example of countries that have achieved developed tourism is edifying in this sense.

Considering that the tourist potential at our disposal is superior to that of other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, in the next period it is necessary to reconsider the place and role of tourism, including rural tourism, within our national economy.

Through tourism development guidelines, Romania can transform from a country with a rich and varied tourist potential into a country

with a developed, modern and competitive tourism.

The role of the human factor increases as consumers' demands increase with regard to the quality of services and the participation in the tourist movement of wider and more diverse segments of the population. Through these actions of direct involvement of the population, it is very easy to educate the consumer of tourist products and therefore increase the level of acceptance of the various services and, implicitly, his satisfaction.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methods used in this study were different: the historical method, the comparative method, the sociological method, the logical method and the analytical one, their aim was the systematic analysis of the information selected from the sources studied in order to develop personal points of view and conclusions about the stated objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Northwest Region of Romania was created based on Law no. 151/1998 (amended by Law no. 315/2004) through the voluntary association of the counties of Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Satu-Mare and Sălaj.

The region covers 14% of Romania's territory and ranks fourth nationally in terms of surface area and population.

The North-West region has a strategic geographical position, being the gateway to Romania from the European Union and Ukraine. From a geographical and scientific point of view, it corresponds to the area known as "Northern Transylvania", a name that wants to be promoted as a regional brand for tourism and investment purposes.

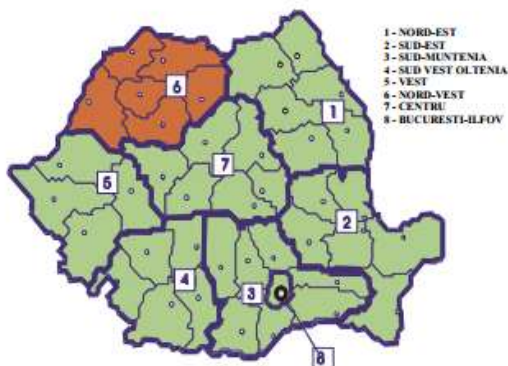


Fig. 1. 1 . North West Region

The varied natural landscape, full of picturesqueness, has special tourist values, linked to attractive landforms and valuable natural monuments. This rich tourist potential is doubled by favorable conditions for accommodation, rest and balneoclimatic treatment. The range of possibilities is multiple: mountaineering, cultural tourism, practicing summer and winter sports, recreation and rest, youth camps, spa treatment.

The fame of the Apuseni Mountains lies especially in the special plasticity of the landscape that harmoniously combines the gentle lines of the plains with the verticals of the steep slopes. Expansive pastures and volcanic domes, narrow and deep gorges are unique phenomena in Romania and even in Europe (Cheile Turzii and Cheile Turenilor). Grottoes with fantastic shapes of stalactites and stalagmites, harboring special speleological

values are: Peștera Mare, Peștera Piatra Ponorului, Peștera Vîrfuraș and others. Bears, wild boars, deer can be hunted in the mountain forests, and the rapid waters of the mountain streams and dam lakes abound in fish.

According to the aggregate Regional Attractiveness Index (IAR), the Northwest Region is the most attractive of Romania's development regions, after Bucharest-Ilfov, a fact that is due to the labor market and wages, foreign investments, but also the private environment and market competition .

Although in terms of demographic profile or dynamism of the business environment, the North-West Region is out of step with Bucharest-Ilfov and the Centre, respectively the West, we still rank second in the country in terms of social indicators and standard of living (telecommunications, health, education, bank accounts, internet users, spending on holidays and leisure, household endowments, average prices for basic products). Regarding the standard of living and social life, the North-West registers an attractiveness index of 18.3, compared to Bucharest (32.6), followed by the Center (with 15.8).

The region registers the lowest unemployment rate at the national level, below 3.5%, surpassing even Bucharest in terms of job offer. The turnover of private companies is the second highest in the country. This is also where the most bank branches in the country can be found, after the capital (15% of those at the national level, of which 50% are in Cluj).

The endowments of the households place the inhabitants of the region in the first place after the citizens of Bucharest, the population being the most active in terms of spending holidays and recreational activities.

The counties with high tourist potential are Cluj, Maramureș and Bihor, which concentrate over 80% of the number of tourist structures.

In the segment of rural tourism and agrotourism there are 196 rural guesthouses and 53 tourist cabins. The imbalance is manifested here especially between the "mountainous" counties, which concentrate a large part of them, and the rest of the counties. Thus, only Maramureș alone has more than half of the total number of these structures - 118, followed by Cluj with 68 rural

guesthouses. Although rural, the rest of the counties have only 2 or 3 rural guesthouses (2005). Hence the chronic lack of tourist infrastructure in the countryside.

The accommodation infrastructures in the leisure accommodation segment are undersized.

There is not a single holiday village in the region, not a single campsite and not a tourist lodge .

The areas with significant rural tourism are: Beiuşului County, Chioarului County, Lăpuşului County, Maramureşului County, Năsăudului County, Oaşului County and Sylvania County.

The main forms of tourism practiced in the North West region are: tourism handcrafts , tourism spa , tourism mountain , cultural tourism and tourism religious and monachal

There are, in our opinion, ten components that must be taken into account when we refer to meeting the expectations of a tourist. Each of these elements is presented separately for information and the means specific to each one can be assimilated by those who use the manual. The elements we will discuss in detail are:

1. Customer satisfaction and visit cycle stages
2. Design and management of facilities
3. Elaboration of a menu, safety measures and food hygiene
4. Marketing concepts
5. Improvement fiscal performance and financial management
6. Communication during the stages of the visiting cycle
7. Gathering information in the stages of the visiting cycle
8. The sale
9. Customer satisfaction and the environment: communicating the image of the place
10. The tourist package focused on the specific market niche

A customer is satisfied when the product and services offered in all these stages of the tourist experience were of quality and met expectations and his needs. Throughout the tourist experience , the owner or the tourism promoter must take into account the quality of the services offered. (greenagenda.org)

Satisfaction is defined as "The buyer's cognitive state of being adequately or inadequately rewarded for the sacrifices he has made." (Howard, 1969), while the last analyzed definition is from 2011: " Consumer satisfaction

is a complex human process that involves extensive cognitive, affective, psychological and physiological (Sanchez-Gutierrez, 2011)interactions ."

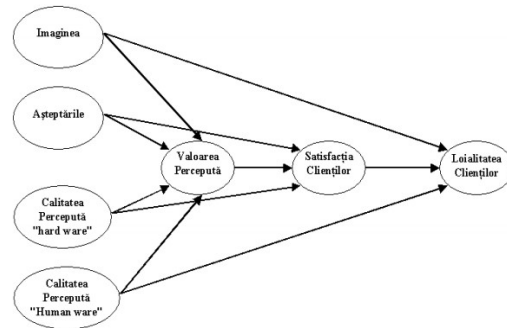


Fig. 1 . 2 . The model of the European index of satisfaction

satisfaction can be described (Giese, 2000):

1. Satisfaction is a global affective response, based on a cognitive evaluation, which varies in intensity - the holistic nature of satisfaction ;
2. The central point of satisfaction is the choice, the purchase and consumption of the product and /or service;
3. The determining moment of satisfaction varies depending on the situation , but its duration is generally limited - the temporary existence of satisfaction .

Therefore , if satisfaction is measured as a global feeling of fulfillment, consumer dissatisfaction is seen as its opposite within the same continuum. It is important to note that while products are consumed, services are experienced, felt. The entrepreneur-provider is (or should be) a manager of customer experiences as adept as they are at executing technical tasks. In short, the customer has a certain perception of service quality, which can lead to the "first law in the field of services":

SATISFACTION=PERCEPTION-EXPECTATION

If a customer perceives the service at a certain level but expects something more (or different), then he will be dissatisfied.

In order to succeed in "amazing" our client, the accommodation must offer exceptional services and quality products. And this is not impossible. There are methods by which we can impose and maintain certain quality standards of our services in order to manage to amaze each and every one of the customers who step on our threshold. If we do not try this, the danger of being quickly " ranked " and put on the list of "places I will never set foot on again" is a very big one. Statistics and conducted studies clearly show us that:

- 1 in 4 customers are dissatisfied with the tourist experience ,
- 96% of those who are dissatisfied never complain on the spot ,
- the average customer relates the unpleasant experience to at least 10 other people they know,
- 67% of customers dissatisfied, they never return to that place. (greenagenda.org)

Statistics also tell us very bluntly that no customer is actually "only" a customer. Neglecting one can actually mean losing 10 potential others customers . In addition, a satisfied customer will return to our accommodation unit spending other money, or recommend our place to other people. And when we reach this stage we begin to reach our financial goals.

satisfaction , the perceived quality of the service, the value of the service, the sacrifices that consumers are going to make and their behavioral intentions are in a close and complex relationship , although it is not always clear what the concept is in the middle. As Cronin argues , Brady and Hult (Cronin, 2000), throughout the period dedicated to the study of satisfaction , quality and value, researches were often developed models that put in the center that concept that was the main objective of the analysis.

Also here, the temporal dimension in defining the relationship between the two concepts, as presented by Lovelock, must be mentioned and Wright (Lovelock, 1999)who define perceived quality as the long-term cognitive evaluation of the service provided by a provider, and consumer satisfaction as a short-term emotional evaluation of a specific service delivery, an argument that emphasizes that satisfaction is reevaluated with each provision of a certain service, and the positive or negative emotional result changes the consumer's perception of quality . In the context of this hypothesis, Oliver (Oliver, 1997)believes that the causal relationship between the perceived quality of the service and consumer satisfaction depends on the level at which the measurement is made:

1. At the level of a single transaction there is a strong relationship : **perceived quality affects satisfaction** ;
2. At the level of several transactions , the relationship is reversed: **satisfaction affects the perceived quality** by the fact that the grade given to the service comes from an overall impression of it

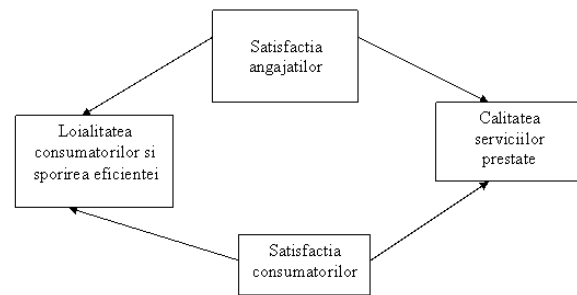


Fig. 1. 3 . Satisfaction in tourism

Improving the quality of tourist services is closely related to an improvement in the management of organizations active in Romanian tourism. This is achievable by applying a service quality management that has among its main concerns the following aspects:

- knowing the expectations of tourists;
- maintenance of buildings and facilities as well as related utilities;
- knowing tourist satisfaction;
- teamwork;
- cooperation with partner organizations;
- promoting a fair motivation of employees.

As a result, managers and employees of tourism companies (carriers, hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, leisure centers) must offer the market only the highest quality services at the lowest rates and prices. In this way, customers can be retained, new customers can be gained, turnover, profit and the market segment held can increase steadily and continuously.

Along with the increase in consumer demands and their selectivity regarding the choice of services, service providers are becoming more and more concerned with maintaining their clientele, through their long-term loyalty . In this sense, organizations direct their efforts towards satisfying the expectations and demands of customers as completely as possible, by identifying and continuously analyzing the wishes and requirements expressed by customers, transforming them into product/service ideas in order to develop and perpetuate sustainable relationships, economically advantageous with the clientele.

When the customer's belief in the company's ability to offer superior quality services turns into repeated purchases, customer loyalty occurs. A loyal customer is a stable source of long-term income for the service company because he recommends the company to other potential customers. However, consumer loyalty is not maintained by itself, it exists as long as the

consumer believes that he receives an additional value embodied in the quality-price ratio - compared to another company that offers similar services.

The approach of achieving the objective of customer loyalty is a particularly complex one and requires, on the part of the company:

- customer loyalty strategy , respectively establishing loyalty methods (for example, personalized service offers, additional services, direct mail, customer clubs, telephone marketing, online orders, etc.);
- building a customer database, which must be continuously updated, from which customer data can be extracted to be used in loyalty measures ;
- carrying out analyzes on customer satisfaction, which involves carrying out surveys on, above all, customer satisfaction, intentions to repeat the purchase, to recommend the service offer to other potential customers;
- the establishment of performance standards, refers to the setting of quality standards for customer satisfaction and the periodic verification of their compliance;
- the analysis of customer purchasing behavior considers the determination and interpretation of some indicators related to the actual and observable behavior, such as: the rate of return for purchase, the intensity of service consumption, the number of migrations to other service providers.

loyalty has positive effects on the cost reduction of the service provider. On this line is recorded:

- reducing costs related to customer relations, by focusing actions, mainly on loyal customers;
- reducing "non-quality" costs, by involving customers in the service improvement process;
- the possibility of reducing transaction costs through new communication solutions (for example, by making electronic orders for services, the Internet).

A systematic management of consumer loyalty also has a positive influence on the volume of services provided and, implicitly, on the turnover. Thus, the customers attached to the agro-tourism guesthouses have a certain predisposition to accept higher prices than the other customers, creating for the respective

guesthouses the opportunity to practice higher prices. Also, in the case of loyal customers, a higher frequency of service purchases can be observed, resulting in positive effects on the volume of services provided by boarding houses. (scritube.com)

CONCLUSIONS

From the point of view of natural resources and anthropogenic tourism resources, the North West region is very well represented, the main tourist attractions are the elements of ethnography, folklore, folk art, nature reserves, spa resorts . As far as the reception structures are concerned, the region has a pretty good image for the future, but still there would be room for better, so the construction of new structures is being considered, as well as the modernization of the existing ones. From the point of view of food and treatment, boarding houses are well represented compared to the leisure area and services, the latter are not sufficiently well equipped from the point of view of the technical and material base. They require massive modernization, but also the introduction of new forms of leisure and the expansion of the service network. Tourism is very closely related to civilization and culture, establishing a relationship of interdependence between them. By exploiting the natural, human and financial resources available to it, tourism generates economic and social effects that lead to increased economic efficiency, progress and civilization. The manifestation of tourist demand and its dynamics in the North West region are determined by a series of demographic, psychological and organizational factors, which play a decisive role in the various tourism segments. For a complex development of tourism, potential customers should be better informed through various channels such as mass media, internet, TV.

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