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Quality management of the tourist destination in the context of visitors' satisfaction

Ida Vajčnerová^{a,*}, Pavel Žiaran^a, Kateřina Ryglová^b, Ivan Andráško^c

^a Department of Management, Faculty of Business and Economics, Mendel University in Brno, Zemědělská 1, 613 00 Brno, Czech Republic

^b Department of Marketing and Trade, Faculty of Business and Economics, Mendel University, Zemědělská 1, 613 00 Brno, Czech Republic

^c Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, Masaryk University in Brno, Czech republic; Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia

Abstract

The specificity of a tourist destination brings the necessity to apply integrated quality management that also includes evaluating the satisfaction of visitors to a destination with the key quality factors. The article deals with the determination of the most important factors which have the highest impact on the total satisfaction of visitors and the relations between the evaluation of particular factors, the overall visitors' satisfaction and their expectations. The data was obtained by means of a primary research enacted in the Czech Republic in the tourist destination of Brno and its surroundings. The method of regression analysis was used. As a result, the factors most influencing the overall visitors' satisfaction were identified; at the same time it was confirmed that the overall satisfaction of visitors is higher than the evaluation of individual quality factors which are influenced by expectations.

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1. Introduction

Several research works in the field of tourism have recently focused on the study of overall satisfaction in particular tourist destinations (Kim, 2012). The research of satisfaction on the basis of quality and its individual

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: ida.vajcnerova@mendelu.cz

factors is important for destination managers as it helps them improve the core product and the promotion of the region within the target groups (Yoon and Uysal, 2005).

In the frame of the satisfaction research various definition concepts are used. Foremost, it is important to emphasize the difference between the terms of quality and satisfaction (Oh, 2001). Although the relationship between quality and satisfaction is undoubted, Tse and Wilton (1988) emphasize that the overall satisfaction and the specific aspects of the service quality must be assessed independently, as different concepts. A general consensus prevails that the satisfaction is a subjective evaluation following the purchase or use (de Rojas, C. and Camarero, C., 2008).

Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2006) in their publication state that although in practice the terms of satisfaction and quality are mutually interchangeable, experts claim that satisfaction is generally perceived as a broad concept while the quality of services concentrates especially on the dimensions of services. According to Zeithaml, Bitner, Gremler (2006) customer satisfaction is an outcome of product quality. However, mutual relations between satisfaction and perceived quality induce more controversies. Admittedly, Petrick (2004), who verified models of relations between perceived quality, customer value, satisfaction, and market behavior of customers, does not assume such a possibility that satisfaction has influence on quality, in all analyzed variants assuming the opposite relation. However, Lee et al. (2004) on the basis of broad studies of the literature notice that research cannot agree on which of the two terms has a wider scope and which of them is the prerequisite of the other. Getz et al. (2001) notice that defining relations between quality and satisfaction properly depends mainly on the way quality is defined.

Some authors perceive satisfaction as a multidimensional variable, integrating practical functional aspects as well as different dimensions of consumer value (Williams–Soutar, 2009). Several authors understand satisfaction as an emotional state, others as a result of cognitive processes, or a combination of both. Other authors work with satisfaction as with a one-dimensional value, representing overall mental state of a person who has passed a tourist activity (Baker and Crompton, 2000); this is frequently used approach in the tourist destination research.

Another commonly used approach to measure satisfaction stems from the service marketing concepts and is based on the creation of the customer value and the concept of a perceived value (Petrick and Backman, 2002). When measuring satisfaction with specific service providers or products, some authors frequently use an approach based on the difference between expectations and actual performance evaluation – particularly known is the Servqual model (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

In our research, we will understand the satisfaction as a manifestation of emotions in the form of subjective assessment of the destination and its particular components. The satisfaction is influenced firstly by the individual expectations of the visitors and secondly by the destination and its characteristics itself.

As regards destination management, it is noticeable that in each research work regarding destinations authors usually developed specific measures that correspond to the given destination. The rationale of this rather heterogeneous approach is to bring adequate outcomes and relevant implications for management of each given destination. For example, Fang et al. (2008) found that in the case of a natural valley, offering sporting facilities for families, a key aspect of customer satisfaction was friendly atmosphere, service and accommodation. Other aspects, such as the food quality, location, or outdoor activities were less important.

In the case of a larger city, Thompson and Schofield (2007) found that the visitors' satisfaction with the public transport depends more on the ease-to-use aspect than on its speed or security. Interestingly, according to the research, the quality of public transport affects the visitors' overall satisfaction with the destination only marginally. Based on a comparison of four destinations in Portugal, do Valle et al. (2011) showed that positive attitude and acceptance by local residents impact overall satisfaction of tourists significantly. The research was enacted by questioning the local residents on their receptiveness and attitude towards tourists on one hand and by measuring the satisfaction level of visitors on the other hand.

2. Methodology and research questions

The main purpose of the research is to analyze the relationship between overall satisfaction and subjective and objective evaluation of individual quality factors. The results of the primary research will also be evaluated in the context of secondary data.

The prerequisite is that the evaluation of individual factors depends on the type of a destination and on visitors' expectations that is to certain extent influenced by available information on the destination.

Partial research questions are defined as follows:

1. Does the overall satisfaction differ from the average satisfaction with individual quality factors?
2. What is the relationship between satisfaction and expectation?
3. How to determine the most important factors influencing the overall satisfaction?

In our research we will use the following destination quality factors used in the original research work (Vajčnerová, Šácha, Ryglová, 2012) and based on the concepts of destination components proposed by Buhalis (2003) and Middleton-Clarke (2001). The decisive factors to evaluate the quality of the destination (quality components) are as follows:

- 1 – Natural attractions
- 2 – Cultural and social attractiveness
- 3 – Quality of accommodation in the destination
- 4 – Quality of dining and food facilities in the destination
- 5 – Extent and quality of experiences and activities
- 6 – Transport accessibility of the destination
- 7 – Local transportation in the destination
- 8 – Availability and quality of tourist information in the destination
- 9 – Quality of roads leading to the destination
- 10 – Welcome and acceptance by the local residents
- 11 – Offer of the product packages
- 12 – Image of the destination
- 13 – Value of money in the destination (price level)
- 14 – Protection and perceived safety in the destination
- 15 – Uniqueness of the destination

The data was collected by means of a primary research (September – December 2012). Respondents were asked to rate satisfaction with each component on the 10-grade scale (1 – the least satisfied, 10 – the most satisfied). The question concerning the overall satisfaction was also examined. There were 380 domestic visitors taking part in the survey. The sample of respondents was determined by quota sampling, according to the characteristics as sex, education and economic activity. The method used for primary data processing was the method of regression analysis that allows describing the dependence of one variable (overall satisfaction with the destination) on the group of other variables (particular quality factors of the destination). The requirement of variables independence was assured by means of principal component analysis. Previous articles by Vajčnerová, Šácha, Ryglová (2012, 2013) and Vajčnerová, Andráško (2012) served as another source of data. The main objective of the quantitative analysis mentioned above is to identify the quality factors of the destination that influence the overall satisfaction of the visitor as the most.

3. Results

The results consist in the outcomes of partial analysis of the secondary data and the statistical analysis of primary data from the questionnaire survey.

The initial analysis of the Brno area and its surroundings was made by means of secondary data (Braunerová, 2013; Brno and Surroundings, 2007; Tourism Development Program for Brno 2010 – 2015, 2010; Strategy for Brno – update 2012, 2013; Crime rate in the South Moravian Region, 2013; Information Centers, 2013; Tourist Offers, 2013; Infocenters – South Moravian Region, 2013; Marketing Study of Tourism in the City of Brno, 2013), focusing mainly on the above-defined quality factors of the destination. Based on the analysis, we can conclude that the area of Brno and its surroundings is significantly rich in cultural and social attractions and events; on the other hand it has fewer natural attractions. In the field of tourist services, it offers an extensive range of accommodation and

dining facilities and it is quite rich in experiential and adventure activities. In terms of transport accessibility, Brno is a gateway to the destination with a very good strategic location and a functioning system of local transport.

Shortcomings consist in the traffic overload in the city center, the lack of parking places, a limited number of air connections, especially in the international context. Safety in the area is primarily affected by higher crime rates in the city center; but generally Brno and its surroundings are considered to be safe for tourism development. The quality and availability of information is adversely affected by missing tourist information at the entry gates to the destination (airport, railway stations), the lack of labeling in case of information centres and missing information centres in larger villages. A significant shortcoming consists in the missing information platform and fragmented information about events related to tourism.

The destination image is derived primarily from the image of Brno itself that is classified as a city without a specific profiling; on the other hand a uniform visual style that forms the perception of the whole destination significantly could be seen as a positive aspect. A major deficiency is a missing offer of product packages for different target groups of visitors. The administrative bodies responsible for the destination management are: Agency of Tourism of South Moravia and Office for Strategic Development of the City of Brno. The cooperation between public and private sectors exists at some levels, however the concept of Public – Private Partnership is still not fully realized.

Primary data were processed according to the methodology described in Vajčnerová, Andráško (2013). From the input data set (visitors' satisfaction with the destination and its aspects) 15 components were extracted (by the varimax rotation method). The interpretation is enabled by the original variables that saturate values with the component weights higher than 0.5 or lower than -0.5 , respectively. All the factors listed below enter the further regression analysis.

Quality components of the destination Brno:

1. Prices of services
2. Nature attractions
3. Information provided
4. Uniqueness of the destinations
5. Welcome and acceptance by the local residents
6. Cultural and social attractions
7. Product packages
8. Local transport
9. Transport accessibility
10. Perceived safety
11. Quality of dining facilities
12. Image of the destinations
13. Experiential activities
14. Roads to the destination
15. Quality of accommodation

The order of components identified by the principal component analysis (PCA) is determined by their share on the variance. For assessing the dependence of one variable on the group of other variables that are mutually statistically independent we chose the method of stepwise regression.

The order of components entering the regression model is shown in Table 1. Based on the increase of square-values of regression coefficients, the model 10 could be perceived as the most appropriate. Nevertheless, from the point of view of our study the order of components entry into the model is essential. This indicates the influence of particular components (quality factors) on the overall satisfaction with the destination.

Table 1. Regression Model Summary, source: authors' own processing by means of SPSS for Windows

Model	R	R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.284	0.081	0.960
2	0.401	0.161	0.919
3	0.479	0.230	0.881
4	0.536	0.288	0.849
5	0.582	0.339	0.819
6	0.619	0.383	0.792
7	0.644	0.415	0.772
8	0.668	0.446	0.752
9	0.688	0.473	0.734
10	0.708	0.501	0.716
11	0.726	0.527	0.697
12	0.738	0.545	0.685
13	0.750	0.563	0.673
14	0.754	0.569	0.669
15	0.755	0.570	0.669

Fig. 1. displays satisfaction with the particular quality factors of the Brno destination and its surroundings. The items are ordered according to their impact on the overall satisfaction from 1 to 15. Axis X shows the average satisfaction with each quality factor.

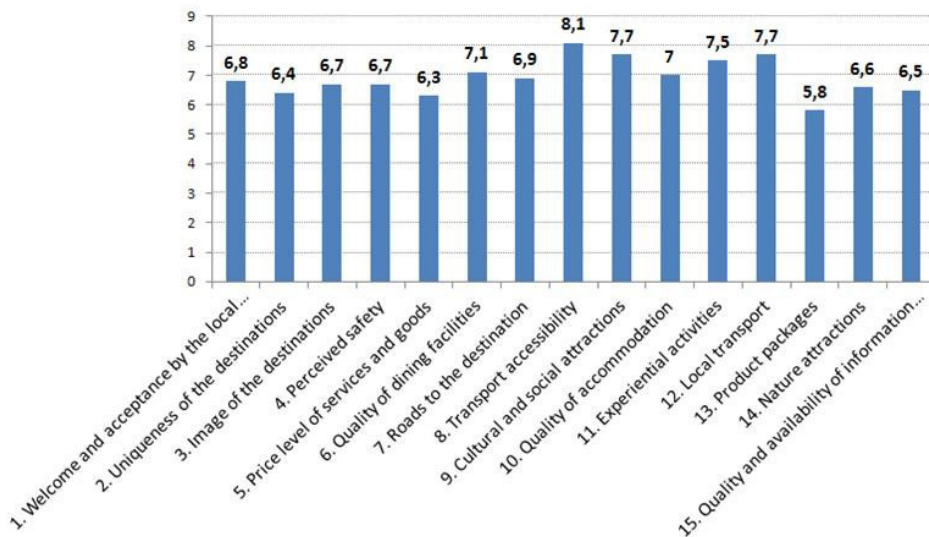


Fig. 1. Average values of satisfaction with quality factors of the destination

The impact of particular factors and the overall evaluation of the destination is quite complex. The overall satisfaction with the Brno destination and its surroundings is influenced significantly by 10 quality factors out of 15 factors we monitored (see Table 1., model 10). These factors are: *warm welcome by the local residents, uniqueness*

of the destinations, image of the destination, perceived safety, price level of goods and services, quality of dining facilities, roads leading to the destinations, cultural and social attractions, quality of accommodation. On the other hand, availability and quality of information has virtually no impact on the overall satisfaction.

Within the first 10 factors there are eight factors that have the lower average values of satisfaction than the value of the average overall satisfaction; and there are only two factors with higher average satisfaction than the overall satisfaction. The average value of satisfaction with the fifteen individual quality factors is 6, 95.

The most important factor is *friendly welcome and acceptance by the local residents* (see Fig. 1.). However the value of average satisfaction of 6, 8 indicates that its effect on the overall satisfaction is not strong. Factors with the lowest evaluation among the first ten are: *price level of goods and services*, *uniqueness of the destinations*, *perceived safety*, *image of the destination* and *friendly welcome and acceptance by the local residents*. These are mainly the factors where the visitors probably did not have strong expectations, as these aspects are not typical for the destination or possibly they are not promoted in the currently available information materials.

4. Conclusion and discussion

On the basis of comparison between the results of primary research and secondary analysis, following conclusions can be drawn. The authors also use their own experience and knowledge of the studied area.

- Aspect of transport accessibility and cultural and social attractions are the factors which visitors were strongly satisfied with. And according to the analysis of the secondary data based on the information about the destinations visitors have strong expectations concerning these two factors. These two factors are ranked as 8th and 9th, as regards their influence on the overall satisfaction. This suggests an interesting fact: if the visitors' expectation is fulfilled, the given factors might not have strong influence on the overall satisfaction.
- On the other hand, if the visitors have no expectations about particular factors or if the expectations factors were not fulfilled, these factors will influence the overall satisfaction significantly.

The following results might be important for destination managers; there is a low evaluation of the following factors: price level of goods and services, uniqueness of the destination, perceived safety, image of the destination, friendly welcome and acceptance by the local residents. These factors were not parts of visitors' expectations and the evaluations of these factors have first five positions as regards the impact on the overall satisfaction.

These findings are essential for destination managers who should possibly analyze the causes of visitors' dissatisfaction with the components and focus on increasing their quality. Repeated monitoring of the visitors' satisfaction and improving the problem areas gradually can increase the quality of the destination.

The given destination was evaluated by the whole range of values of particular factors, between 5, 8 and 8, 1 (max.10). The average value of all fifteen monitored factors equals to 6, 9. The average overall satisfaction was 7, 2. The fact that the average value of particular factors is lower than the average overall satisfaction confirms the assumption that the quality of particular factors is a subset to the overall satisfaction. This corresponds to the findings of those authors who understand the satisfaction as a final result of interactions of quality factors, for example Zeithaml, Bitner, Gemler (2006). However, this might also suggest that the overall satisfaction is influenced by other factors that are unknown and hence were not included in the research. On the other hand, the difference between these values is relatively small, which confirms the appropriateness of the quality factors selection.

Visitors' perception and expectations play an important role in the overall satisfaction. At the beginning of a purchase process a visitor has certain expectations or believes representing certain standards which he or she compares the actually provided services with. (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry, 1990).

The results of this study provided the answers to the given research questions:

1. The overall satisfaction is higher than average satisfaction with particular quality factors.
2. The overall satisfaction is most influenced by the factors where the expectations are strong but these are not fulfilled or where the visitors have no prior expectations as there is no information available.
3. For a specific destination the most significant factors influencing the overall satisfaction can be determined by means of regression analysis.

In the article we used quality factors that are assembled universally and can be used for any destination (rural, seaside, urban etc.). However, from the theoretical point of view it is evident that some additional factors could be

used in order to correspond to the given destination better. Then, by means of the same methodology as was proposed in the article, it would be possible to identify the influence of particular factors on the overall satisfaction.

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