

THE QUALITY OF HOTEL SERVICES. CASE STUDY: THE COUNTY SEAT MUNICIPALITIES OF THE NORTH-WEST DEVELOPMENT REGION

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Abstract: The demand of hotel services accedes the requirements of some extremely different, and, in the same time, complex motivations. Many of them are customized according to the client and gradually dosed, in a natural order, carefully conditioned by the following parameters: nature of hotel services, place and time when the demand of these services becomes necessary, type of tourism, etc. On the basis of some quantifiable indicators, expressed in 19.137 questionnaires (with 114.822 answers), the hotel services from the county seat municipalities of the North-West Development Region, respectively: Oradea (BH), Bistriţa (BN), Cluj-Napoca (CJ), Baia Mare (MM), Satu-Mare (SM) and Zalău (SJ), have been submitted to a qualitative analysis.

Key words: cleanliness, comfort, location, facilities, hotel staff, quality/price report

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INTRODUCTION

At present, the quality of hotel services has become the determinant factor according to which the touristic reception structures with a touristic lodging function are evaluated, standing out those that manage to best accomplish the clients' needs. The quality of services in the hotel industry represents the best insurance policy as regards customers' fidelity and attracting new ones, the most efficient defense against competition and the only way of having larger and constant earnings (Ekinci, 2008; Kotler, 2008; Zeglat, Ekinci, Lockwood, 2008; Hoque, 2013).

The quality of services in the hotel industry can be conceptualized around two critical dimensions: technical dimension and relational dimension. If the relational dimension cannot be measured, alluding to the relationship establish between the hotel staff and the customer, the technical dimension can be measured. In other words, the hotel services offered to a client are a combination of two different proportioned components: technical equipments services (the quantitative component, with a regnant

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material character) and skilled labor services (the qualitative component, with a regnant behavioral character). Even if the technical equipments are essential in the fulfillment of hotel services, the involvement of the hotel staff (the employees from the reception desk are permanently interacting with the guest) as well as their attitude towards the guests are very important. Once the technical dimension is enclosed in certain quality standards, the relational dimension is the one that gives quality to the hotel service (Kotler, Bowen, Makens 2006; Page, Connel, 2006; Peptenatu, Pintilii, Drăghici, Stoian, 2009; Kordel, 2010; Rahovan, 2013).

DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY

In the Romanian language the word “quality” comes from the French word *qualité* which originates in the Latin language, where “*qualitas*, -atis” derives from “*qualis*” which means “to be” and/or “to exist”.

In a closed sense, quality is defined across time as “the totality of essential characteristics that determine a phenomenon and that, changing through leaps as a result of the quantitative cumulation, give birth to another phenomenon with essential characteristics, but superior to the first” (Dicționarul limbii române moderne, 1958), “a philosophic category by which the system of the essential characteristics of an object or a phenomenon is marked, and in the virtue of which it is the given object, phenomenon and not another one” (Marcu & Maneca, 1986), “the synthesis of the essential sides and characteristics of objects, phenomena or processes” (Marcu, 2007) or “the totality of essential characteristics and sides in the virtue of which a thing is what it is, differing itself from the other things” (Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române, 2009).

Joseph M. Juran said about quality that it is the aptitude or fitness for purpose, and Philip Crosby said that a product is of quality if it corresponds to the requirements (Juran, 1951; Crosby, 1979). Both definitions foreshadow the client’s presence. A quality product is apt or adequate to the purpose that the customer is giving to it, respectively, it is fit for the client’s assigned needs.

The ISO 8402/1994 standard, which refers to quality management and quality assurance, defines quality as, “the totality of characteristics of an entity that bear on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs”, and according to ISO 9000/2005 standard, which refers to quality management systems, quality is defined as “the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements” (ISO 8402/1994; ISO 9000/2005).

In its program, World Tourism Organization understands by quality “the result of a process which implies the satisfaction of all the legitimate product and service needs, requirements and expectations of the consumer, at an acceptable price, in conformity with mutually accepted contractual conditions and the underlying quality determinants such as safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmony of the tourism activity concerned with its human and natural environment” (<http://www2.unwto.org/>). The analysis of each of the terms used in this definition suggests complete measurements that can be evaluated in relation to quality criterion.

QUALITY IN THE HOTEL SERVICES

Because of the high level of variability, the quality of hotel services is primary appreciated in terms of the essential characteristics apprehended by the customer. Thus, in order to offer great hotel services as regards quality, the following characteristics must be pursued: competence, communication, credibility, knowledge, trust, understanding, politeness, safety, tenderness (Rosander, 1985; Brown, Gummesson, Edvardsson, Gustavsson, 1991; Rahovan, 2013).

After the analyses of the surveys, it turned out that the gaps found in the quality of hotel services were identified between: consumers’ expectations of hotel services,

consumers' expectations of hotel services' as they were sensed by the hotel managerial team, quality characteristics of hotel service, hotel service delivery, hotel service presentation to hotel services' consumer, consumer's perception regarding the quality of hotel service (Figure 1).

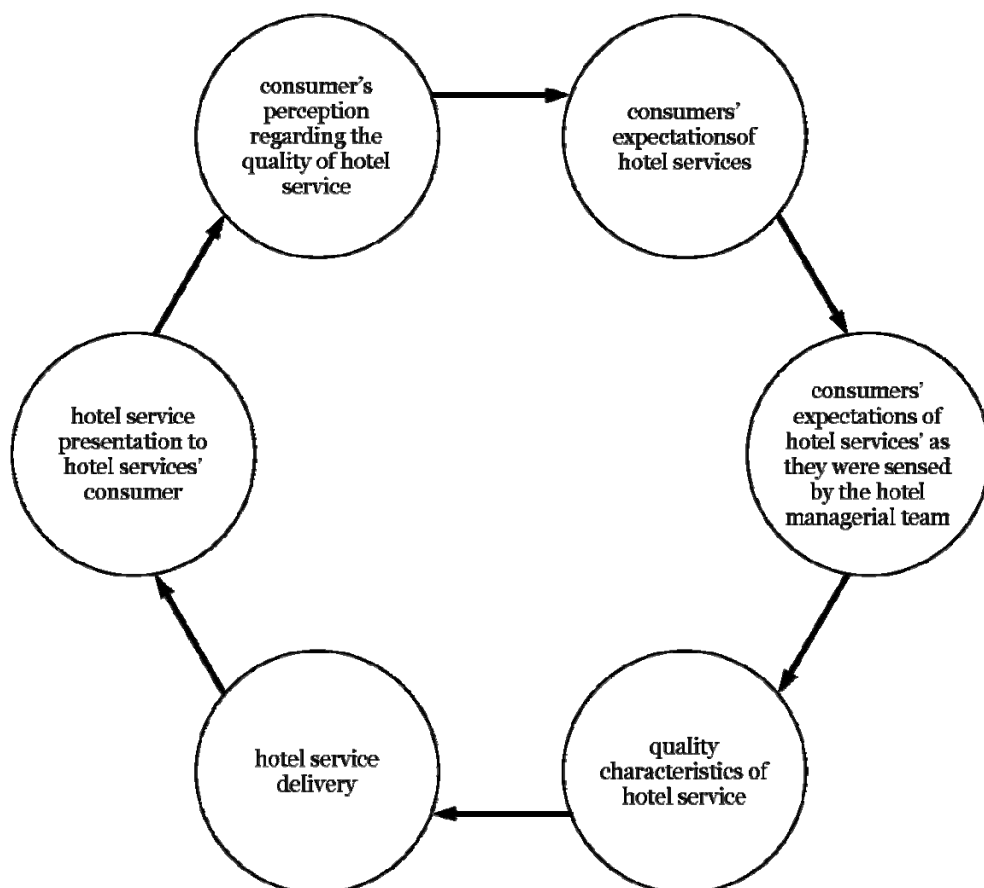


Figure 1. Gaps found in the quality of hotel services

CASE STUDY: HOTEL SERVICES IN THE COUNTY SEAT MUNICIPALITIES OF THE NORTH-WEST DEVELOPMENT REGION

This study banks upon 19.137 questionnaires applied in collaboration with the website <http://www.booking.com/> to a total number of 195 hotels, situated in the county seat municipalities of Romania's North-West Development Region, respectively 37 hotels in Oradea (the county seat municipality of Bihor county), whereof 28 hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 9 hotels rated 4 and 5 stars; 11 hotels in Bistrița (the count seat municipality of Bistrița-Năsăud county), whereof 9 hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 2 hotels rated 4 and 5 stars; 101 hotels in Cluj-Napoca (the county seat municipality of Cluj county), whereof 68 hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 33 hotels rated 4 and 5 stars; 18 hotels in Baia Mare (the county seat municipality of Maramureș county), whereof 15 hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 3 hotels rated 4 and 5 stars; 20 hotels in Satu-Mare (the county seat municipality of Satu-Mare county), whereof 15 hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 5 hotels rated 4 and 5 stars; and 8 hotels in Zalău (the county seat municipality of Sălaj), whereof 4 hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 4 hotels rated 4 and 5 stars (Figure 2, Table 1).

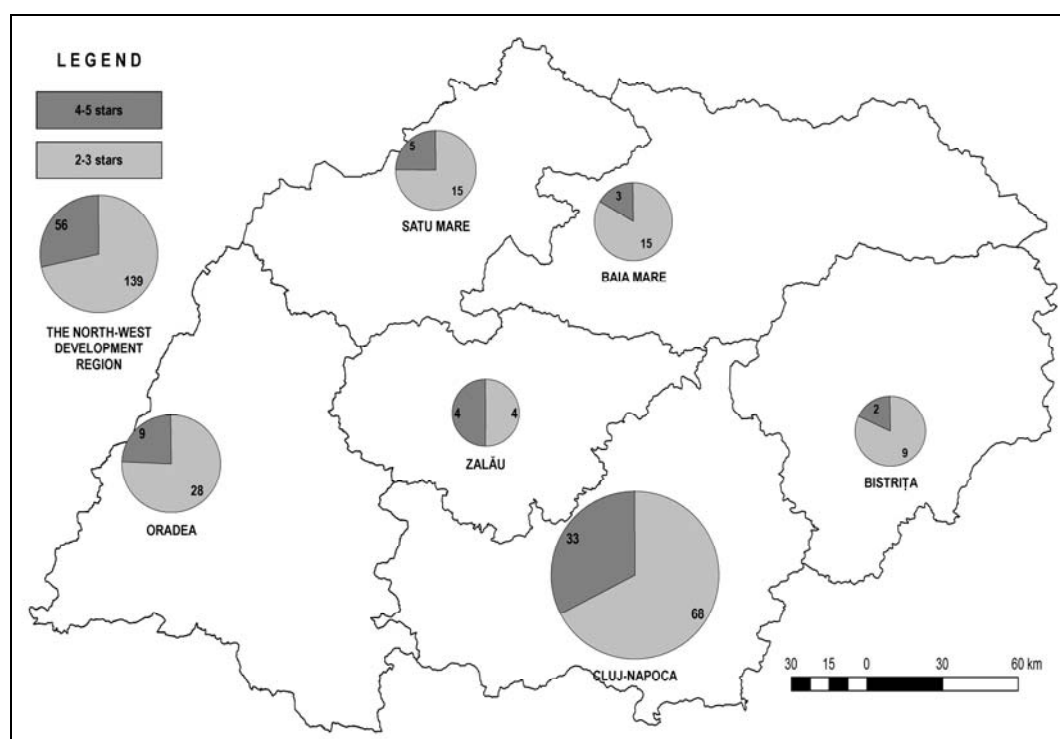


Figure 2. Number of hotels and their territorial distribution
(Data source: own calculations based on data from <http://www.booking.com/>)

Table 1. Number of hotels, number of applied questionnaires, and quality indicators for hotel services
(Data source: own calculations based on data from <http://www.booking.com/>)

Municipiul	Hotels rated	Number of hotels	Number of applied questionnaires	Quality indicators for hotel services (/10)						
				Cl	Co	Lo	Fa	St	Vfm	T
Oradea (BH)	2-3 stars	28	2,307	8.41	8.17	7.98	7.92	8.38	8.42	8.21
	4-5 stars	9	2,065	8.91	8.81	8.82	8.61	8.65	8.64	8.74
	Total	37	4,372	8.67	8.51	8.42	8.29	8.53	8.54	8.49
Bistrița (BN)	2-3 stars	9	206	8.06	7.71	8.03	7.52	8.06	8.02	7.90
	4-5 stars	2	324	9.48	9.11	8.25	8.81	8.84	8.68	8.86
	Total	11	530	8.61	8.25	8.12	8.02	8.37	8.28	8.27
Cluj-Napoca (CJ)	2-3 stars	68	7,666	8.57	8.21	8.38	7.93	8.50	8.39	8.33
	4-5 stars	33	4,458	8.99	8.83	8.40	8.45	8.73	8.51	8.65
	Total	101	12,124	8.73	8.43	8.38	8.12	8.58	8.43	8.45
Baia Mare (MM)	2-3 stars	15	711	8.41	7.93	8.29	7.76	8.24	8.14	8.13
	4-5 stars	3	227	8.90	8.52	8.80	8.19	8.67	8.60	8.61
	Total	18	938	8.53	8.07	8.41	7.86	8.34	8.25	8.25
Satu Mare (SM)	2-3 stars	15	630	8.12	7.58	8.05	7.43	7.99	8.00	7.86
	4-5 stars	5	301	8.90	8.52	8.80	8.19	8.67	8.60	8.61
	Total	20	931	8.33	7.90	8.18	7.71	8.09	8.05	8.04
Zalău (SJ)	2-3 stars	4	78	7.61	7.64	7.90	7.14	7.51	7.84	7.61
	4-5 stars	4	164	8.56	8.37	8.09	8.05	8.55	8.32	8.32
	Total	8	242	8.25	8.14	8.03	7.76	8.21	8.17	8.09
TOTAL	2-3 stars	139	11,598	8.49	8.13	8.27	7.87	8.42	8.35	8.25
	4-5 stars	56	7,539	8.96	8.80	8.53	8.49	8.69	8.54	8.67
	TOTAL	195	19,137	8.68	8.40	8.37	8.12	8.52	8.42	8.42

Note: Cl - Cleanliness, Co - Comfort, Lo - Location, Fa - Facilities, St - Staff, Vfm - Value for money, T - Total

For the analysis of hotel services the following aspects regarding consumers' perceptions were taken into account: cleanliness, comfort, location according to clients' needs, staff behavior and quality/price report. Each of these services were assigned full grades, from 1 to 10, by each client of the hotel who completed the questionnaire. When the term for applying the questionnaires ended, an average of all grades assigned by each client was calculated. Thus have resulted the data from table 1.

By hotel customer we understand that person who has spent at least one night in at least one of the analyzed hotels.

Dependent on the number of customers and, implicitly, on the number of hotels, the number of questionnaires ranges from municipality to municipality. Thus, from 19.137 completed questionnaires (whereof 11.598 questionnaires were completed by the clients of the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 7.539 by the clients of the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars), 4.372 questionnaires were carried out in Oradea (whereof 2.307 by the clients of the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 2.065 by the clients of the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars); 530 questionnaires were carried out in Bistrița (whereof 206 by the clients of the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 324 by the clients of the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars); 12.124 questionnaires were carried out in Cluj-Napoca (whereof 7.666 by the clients of the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 4.458 by the clients of the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars); 938 questionnaires were carried out in Baia Mare (whereof 711 by the clients of the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 227 by the clients of the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars); 931 questionnaires were carried out in Satu-Mare (whereof 630 by the clients of the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 301 by the clients of the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars); and 242 questionnaires were carried out in Zalău (whereof 78 by the clients of the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars, and 164 by the clients of the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars) (Figure 2, Table 1).

Overall, according to the grades assigned by clients, the final average of hotel services is 8.42. This average resulted from 114.822 answers. In this case, the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars obtained an average of 8.25 from 13.842 answers, and the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars obtained an average of 8.67 from 12.390 answers. Clients' perceptions as regards the hotel services from the county seat municipalities of the North-West Development Region have generated the following grades: for cleanliness, 8.68 (the most appreciated); for comfort, 8.40; for location, 8.37; for facilities, 8.12 (the most despised); for staff, 8.52; and for quality/price report, 8.42. If we look at comfort categories, the grades for the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars show the following: for cleanliness, 8.49; for comfort, 8.13; for location, 8.27; for facilities, 7.87; for staff, 8.42; and for quality/price report, 8.35. And the grades for the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars are: for cleanliness, 8.96; for comfort, 8.80; for location, 8.53; for facilities, 8.49; for staff, 8.69; and for quality/price report, 8.54 (Table 1, Figure 3).

In Oradea, according to the data of the questionnaires, the final average is 8.49. This average resulted from 26.232 answers. The hotels rated 2 and 3 stars obtained an average of 8.21 from 13.842 answers, and the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars obtained an average of 8.74 from 12.390 answers. Clients' perceptions as regards the hotel services of Oradea (the county seat municipality of Bihor county) have generated the following grades: for cleanliness, 8.67; for comfort, 8.51; for location, 8.42; for facilities 8.29; for staff, 8.53; and for quality/price report, 8.54. If we look at comfort categories, the grades for the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars show the following: for cleanliness, 8.41; for comfort, 8.17; for location, 7.98; for facilities, 7.92; for staff, 8.38; and for quality/price report, 8.42. And the grades for the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars are: for cleanliness, 8.91; for comfort, 8.81; for location, 8.82; for facilities, 8.61; for staff, 8.65; and for quality/price report, 8.64 (Table 1, Figure 3).

In Bistrița, according to the data of the questionnaires, the final average is 8.27. This average resulted from 3,180 answers. The hotels rated 2 and 3 stars obtained an

average of 7.90 from 1,944 answers, and the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars obtained an average of 8.86 from 1,236 answers. Clients' perceptions as regards the hotel services of Bistrița (the county seat municipality of Bitrița-Nășăud county) have generated the following grades: for cleanliness, 8.61; for comfort, 8.25; for location, 8.12; for facilities 8.02; for staff, 8.37; and for quality/price report, 8.28. If we look at comfort categories, the grades for the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars show the following: for cleanliness, 8.06; for comfort, 7.71; for location, 8.03; for facilities, 7.52; for staff, 8.06; and for quality/price report, 8.02. And the grades for the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars are: for cleanliness, 9.49; for comfort, 9.11; for location, 8.25; for facilities, 8.81; for staff, 8.84; and for quality/price report, 8.68 (Table 1, Figure 3).

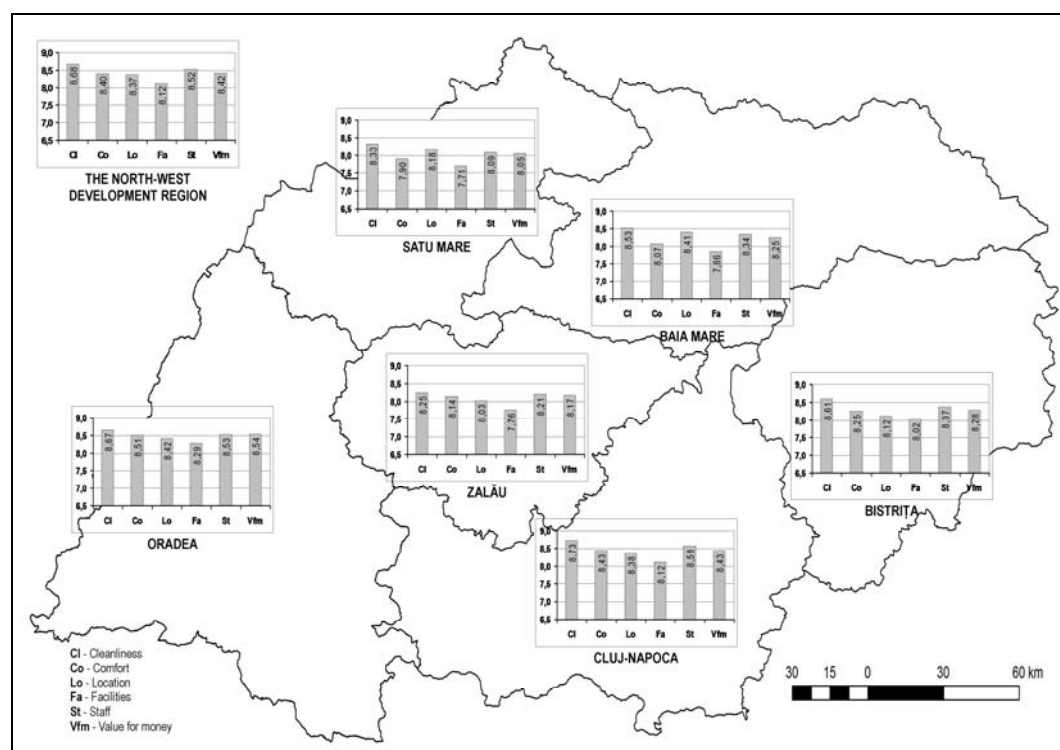


Figure 3. The quality of hotel services in the county seat municipalities of the North-West Development Region
(Data source: own calculations based on data from <http://www.booking.com/>)

In Cluj-Napoca, according to the data of the questionnaires, the final average is 8.45. This average resulted from 72,744 answers. The hotels rated 2 and 3 stars obtained an average of 8.33 from 45,996 answers, and the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars obtained an average of 8.65 from 26,749 answers. Clients' perceptions as regards the hotel services of Cluj-Napoca (the county seat municipality of Cluj county) have generated the following grades: for cleanliness, 8.73; for comfort, 8.43; for location, 8.38; for facilities 8.12; for staff, 8.58; and for quality/price report, 8.43. If we look at comfort categories, the grades for the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars show the following: for cleanliness, 8.57; for comfort, 8.21; for location, 8.38; for facilities, 7.93; for staff, 8.50; and for quality/price report, 8.38. And the grades for the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars are: for cleanliness, 8.99; for comfort, 8.83; for location, 8.40; for facilities, 8.45; for staff, 8.73; and for quality/price report, 8.51 (Table 1, Figure 3).

In Baia Mare, according to the data of the questionnaires, the final average is 8.25. This average resulted from 5,628 answers. The hotels rated 2 and 3 stars obtained an average of 8.13 from 4,266 answers, and the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars obtained an average of 8.61 from 1,362 answers. Clients' perceptions as regards the hotel services of Baia Mare (the county seat municipality of Maramureş county) have generated the following grades: for cleanliness, 8.53; for comfort, 8.07; for location, 8.41; for facilities 7.86; for staff, 8.34; and for quality/price report, 8.25. If we look at comfort categories, the grades for the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars show the following: for cleanliness, 8.41; for comfort, 7.93; for location, 8.29; for facilities, 7.76; for staff, 8.24; and for quality/price report, 8.14. And the grades for the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars are: for cleanliness, 8.90; for comfort, 8.52; for location, 8.80; for facilities, 8.19; for staff, 8.67; and for quality/price report, 8.60 (Table 1, Figure 3).

In Satu Mare, according to the data of the questionnaires, the final average is 8.04. This average resulted from 5,586 answers. The hotels rated 2 and 3 stars obtained an average of 7.86 from 3,780 answers, and the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars obtained an average of 8.43 from 1,806 answers. Clients' perceptions as regards the hotel services of Satu Mare (the county seat municipality of Satu Mare county) have generated the following grades: for cleanliness, 8.33; for comfort, 7.90; for location, 8.18; for facilities 7.71; for staff, 8.09; and for quality/price report, 8.05. If we look at comfort categories, the grades for the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars show the following: for cleanliness, 8.12; for comfort, 7.58; for location, 8.05; for facilities, 7.43; for staff, 7.99; and for quality/price report, 8.00. And the grades for the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars are: for cleanliness, 8.77; for comfort, 8.56; for location, 8.45; for facilities, 8.32; for staff, 8.31; and for quality/price report, 8.16 (Table 1, Figure 3).

In Zalău, according to the data of the questionnaires, the final average is 8.09. This average resulted from 26,232 answers. The hotels rated 2 and 3 stars obtained an average of 7.61 from 468 answers, and the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars obtained an average of 8.32 from 984 answers. Clients' perceptions as regards the hotel services of Zalău (the county seat municipality of Sălaj county) have generated the following grades: for cleanliness, 8.25; for comfort, 8.14; for location, 8.03; for facilities 7.76; for staff, 8.21; and for quality/price report, 8.17. If we look at comfort categories, the grades for the hotels rated 2 and 3 stars show the following: for cleanliness, 7.61; for comfort, 7.64; for location, 7.90; for facilities, 7.14; for staff, 7.51; and for quality/price report, 7.84. And the grades for the hotels rated 4 and 5 stars are: for cleanliness, 8.56; for comfort, 8.37; for location, 8.09; for facilities, 8.05; for staff, 8.55; and for quality/price report, 8.32 (Table 1, Figure 3).

CONCLUSIONS

After we analyzed the answers of the questionnaires as well as the discussions had with some clients, we ascertained that certain hotel activities regarding clients' comfort could improve. These are:

- the implementation of some systematic procedures along the course of activity, understanding by it their standardization in detail;
- communication deficiencies between the hotel departments;
- insufficient marketing and managerial techniques implementation in hotels;
- insufficient staff training and the lack of systematic programs for teaching and evaluating knowledge in service provider field;
- insufficient self-control from hotel staff;
- insufficient information for tourists as regards extra services and price lists;
- the lack of questionnaires for testing tourists' opinion on the services they have benefited from, and, respectively, for testing the programs that collect and evaluate the results;

- lack of cleanliness in rooms, bathrooms, kitchens, dinning rooms, common areas;
- errors in collecting and depositing domestic waste, in organizing outdoor space;
- lack of road indicators for hotel structures;
- old and defunct facilities in bathrooms, rooms, and common areas (lack of antiskid materials, insufficient lighting, illuminators fixed in wrong places, inadequate furniture);
- lack of commercial rules regarding hotel activity (a clear procedure for solving the loss of personal goods, for receiving and sending the mail, for visitors' access, and for offering information regarding the tourists accommodation);
- insufficient conformation to the modern systems of serving breakfast and dinner for the businessmen who dispose of a limited amount of time.

In the same time, the case study pointed out that the clients highly appreciated the cleanliness found in the hotels of Oradea (8.67), Bistrița (8.61), Cluj-Napoca (8.73) and Baia Mare (8.53); the hotel staff from Oradea (8.53) and Cluj-Napoca (8.58), and the quality/price report of the hotels of Oradea (8.54). At the antipole, clients highly despised the comfort found in the hotels from Satu-Mare (7.90), and the facilities offered by the hotels from Baia Mare (7.86), Satu-Mare (7.71) and Zalău (7.76).

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Submitted:
20.08.2014

Revised:
17.11.2014

Accepted and published online
19.11.2014