

SELECTED ASPECTS OF EVALUATION OF SERVICE STANDARDS IN HOTEL INDUSTRY

The expanding range of activities connected with broadly defined quality are reflected in latest trends of hotel services development. Thus, hotel industry consistently upgrades comfort level by using new channels of communication with its clients. In recent years, people's awareness of the need for conducting actions connected with corporate business responsibility, which clients highly value, has increased.

In the following paper, theoretical aspects of the importance of quality in the process of competition between hotels has been presented and the scheme of service quality management in hotel industry has been depicted. The research, which was conducted in several hotels in Lublin, characterised by having higher standard of services, has enabled to perform a multifaceted assessment of services provided by them. Respondents evaluated the level of accommodation services in Lublin, gave their opinions on the significance of categorisation, assessed particular elements of hotel services and shared their plans connected with revisiting selected hotels.

The article aims at evaluating the level of hotel services in high-standard hotels in Lublin, including one five-star hotel and several four-star hotels.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation of hotel services, which started when such accommodation concerns as Accor, Best Western Union, Hilton, Holiday Inn, Hyatt, Marriott, Sheraton and other entered the market, resulted in a constantly increasing level of competition within a dynamic and changeable environment. Taking this into consideration, owners of hotels search for more and more innovative and organisationally advanced methods and forms of interaction with the contemporary market of services [12, p. 115]. The question then arises of how to inform the clients about the latest offers in the most effective way by applying innovative opportunities of interaction with them. Moreover, it would be beneficial if the information passed to the clients appears to be useful and valuable, constitutes a reasonable backup for their choices, and at the same time contributes to lowering the costs of obtaining this information.

1. SIGNIFICANCE OF QUALITY IN THE PROCESS OF COMPETITION BETWEEN HOTELS ON THE MARKET

Latest trends which concern shaping the hotel services proclaim that significance of quality has increased considerably. Moreover, the importance of clients' opinions which are posted online, especially in social media, also has escalated. The significance of actions connected with corporate social responsibility (CSR) or corporate moral responsibility (CMR), which clients more and more appreciate, is increasing as well [8]. According to Paulina Kaczmarek, the manageress of Sustainability Consulting in Deloitte, "taking actions in the scope of corporate business responsibility, by applying innovative solutions owing to which conserving energy, saving water and utilising rubbish effectively are possible, is an inseparable element of every respected hotel. While observing the hospitality market, considerable attention is paid to actions of hotel owners conducted in the scope of corporate business responsibility. The hotels of good quality take as a standard such aspects as saving

environment, supporting local communities, creating satisfactory conditions for the staff, all of which results in providing national and international guests with extraordinary and unforgettable experiences. On the basis of our experience we can say that hotel guests more and more often pay attention to the abovementioned actions the moment they choose the hotel, instead of considering it later, when they actually arrive at the hotel" [8].

The fourth edition of Hotel Sales & Marketing Trends 2016 report, which was made by Profitroom and Deloitte companies, shows that Polish hotel industry will be characterised by a notable development owing to raising the level of comfort of the services offered and improving the quality of communication with clients considerably [8].

Intentions of potential clients or customers are usually shaped in accordance with the so called *ladder of effects*, known also as the Hierarchy of Effects Model, which the diagram aptly illustrates (Fig. 1).

The model shows how a potential client can come closer to one's decision about making a purchase by passing through subsequent stages of awareness and knowledge acquired, or one can obtain a product or a service with omitting single stages, being led by other factors. The Hierarchy of Effects Model may enable many companies to successfully plan advertising campaigns and effectively build rules of functioning of the marketing communications system. By doing it, a clear message must be formulated which will constitute a source of information appropriate for the line of thought of a potential client, so that the client may identify with the message. The client should have a direct contact with the message, be aware of its existence and the information contained, and have a possibility of understanding and interpreting the content of the message, which is likely to stay in client's memory for good.

Each company strives to strengthen its position and win support of the biggest number of clients or customers possible. One of many aspects of this approach is focusing on a client, expressed by satisfying one's needs in the best possible way. Therefore, hotel owners

concentrate on development of quality-oriented actions, which results in growth of importance of service brands. The fundamental factor of long-lasting relations with clients is company's reputation, thus, while constructing a Customer Relationship Management system, a proper understanding of quality and its significance for clients is essential.

Defining quality is a highly complex process. Quality aims at satisfying clients by fulfilling their needs and expectations, which is claimed to be a key factor of success. According to the definition formulated by I. Dębińska-Cyran, J. Holub-Iwan and J. Perenc, quality should be understood as providing clients or consumers with what they want to receive at the right time for an acceptable price. However, clients' needs and expectations are becoming more and more complex, changeable and difficult to predict [4, p. 49].

According to M. Bednarska, G. Golebski, E. Markiewicz and M. Olszewski [...] "quality of tourist services is defined by how material and non-material elements of a travel agency's offer fulfil client's expectations. Quality of this offer depends not only on all elements included in the offer itself, but also on factors which the company cannot control, such as the weather. Quality of hotel services, however, depends on the level of fulfilment of hotel guests' needs by providing them with all elements included in hotel's offer. Quality of both, a travel agent's and an accommodation facility, is also influenced by the way in which the particular region is assessed, namely, its attractiveness, availability, reputation, infrastructure and other" [1, p. 159].

As A. Panasiuk aptly puts it, "in tourism, quality constitutes an inseparable element of forming a tourist product, which conditions the level of fulfilment of clients' needs and expectations. Quality is not merely the complex of features a tourist product is characterised by, but also ability of this product to fulfilling clients needs and expectations" [10, p. 142]. According to A. Panasiuk, quality of services provided for clients has become one of the most important factors owing to which tourist companies can stand out from other competitors. Providing a tourist with services on the expected level of satisfaction requires not only applying production factors of good quality, conducting adequate procedures, and using suitable techniques and technologies, but also having professional qualifications by the working staff. Clients are more and more demanding and they expect to be provided with services of the highest quality [10, p. 143]. Clients of travel agencies tend to value the quality of life, which means that they pay attention to original non-price elements of the product that cannot be found in other agencies' offers, namely

the non-material part, which in similar extent to the material elements (meals, room decor, etc.), influence the abovementioned process in a significant way [9, p.17]. According to A. Soboń, "setting precise measures of quality is an extremely difficult task, however, when quality lowers, it is noticed immediately. Any negligence in this matter is hard to conceal. Lack of reaction to needs and problems reported by tourists results in their resignation from services of a particular hotel. Hotel guests react in a negative way when quality of services deteriorates. Hotel staff constantly needs to care for maintaining satisfying level of hotel services and for increasing them as effectively as it is possible. There cannot be a situation observed that the level of services lowers, as this may lead to losing regular customers and lack of interest from potential customers" [12, p. 143].

Aiming at limiting or even minimising or eliminating the possibility of undesired happenings is the basis of shaping good quality of services. This should be born in mind that it is clients' needs which are the basis of shaping the quality.

2. SERVICE QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HOTEL INDUSTRY

Dynamic growth in sector of hotel services generated a necessity of inventing new methods of service quality management. In order to face up national and international competition, Polish hotels have to adjust to international standards by, among other changes, improving quality of their services [6, p. 361 - 364]. With the aim of focusing their strategy on clients, owners of hotels concentrate their attention on development of quality-oriented mechanisms, which results in growth of the level of service quality. Therefore, this requires an effective management strategy to be planned [12, p. 141].

Service quality should be constantly measured and patiently monitored, as effects of the changes may only be assessed when this variable can be measured. There are many differences in the way the processes of shaping the quality are monitored, which is presented in Table 1.

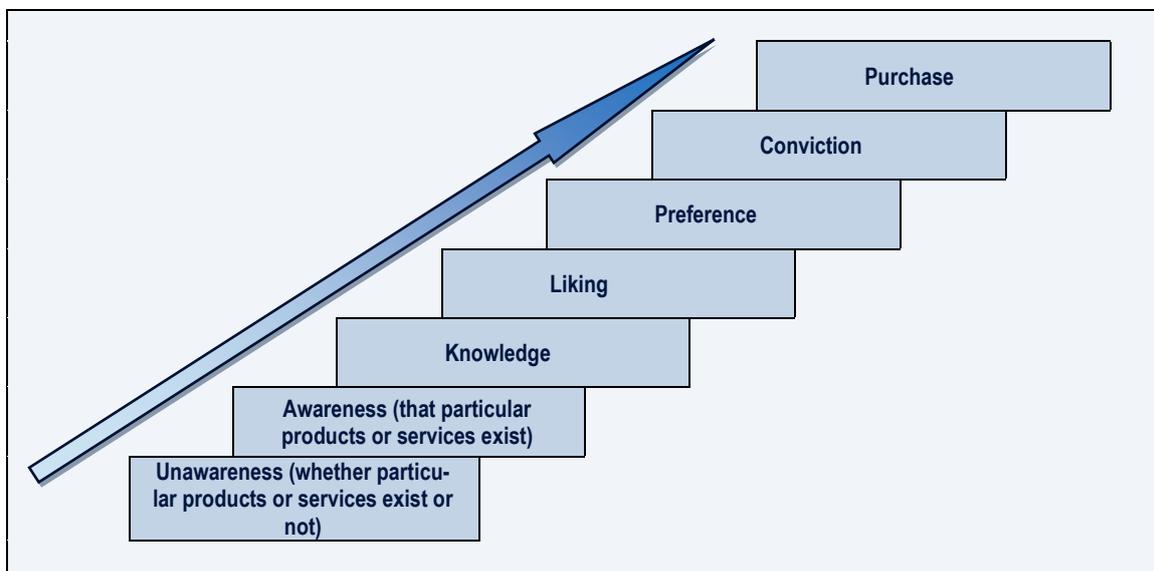


Fig. 1 The Hierarchy of Effects Model [2, p. 16].

Tab. 1. *Shaping the quality of hotel services [1, p. 167]*

Levels of shaping the quality	Tools of shapi the quality
Gathering information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – getting information about guests, – effective vertical communication system, – flat organisation structure.
Designing a service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – creating a concept of a service product as a counterpart of – previously recognised features, – designing a system, which can assure appropriate realisation of services – creating a project of a full-cycle realisation of services thanks to using graphics.
The service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – appropriate recruitment, – training courses, – motivation, – creating a quality-oriented environment in the company.
Feedback on quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – management of promises connected with a service, – educating guests.

Quality of client service is a subjective variable. This means that an individual scale of evaluation is applied and this scale is based on clients' impressions and constitutes an assessment expressed by them. The aspect of quality will always be significant for consumers of tourist services, which consequently leads to sustaining client service on a high and permanent level and taking various criteria into consideration while making an assessment (Tab. 2)

Tab. 2 *Selected criteria of quality of tourist and recreational services.*

	Criterion	Detailed criteria
1	Tangibles (comfort and aesthetics of the environment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – equipment in a hotel room, – appearance of and equipment in a travel agency, – quality of a coach, – other subjects which offer services in a hotel, – devices used for recreation and free time organisation, – location.
2	Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – reliability of the contractor, – credibility of information, – accuracy of information, – promptness of providing services, – repetitiveness of quality of services (each time the service is done).
3	Sensitivity of guests, responsiveness of contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – speed of the service, – timing and appropriate response to guests' needs, – effectiveness of fulfilling guests' needs, – consultancy skills, – discretion and confidentiality of contractors.
4	Credibility and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – professionalism of contractors, – qualifications and skills of contractors and the staff, – responsibility of contractors, – financial protection of companies (insurance protection and protection in banks), – trustworthiness, – kindness and politeness, – guests' sense of security.
5	Knowing the customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – recognizing guests' needs, – making new contacts easily, – understanding guests' needs.

Dynamic growth of the sector of services has made a demand for specifying manners of quality service management. Service quality management in tourism industry is still an underrated issue compared to management of supplies or yield management, which means effective management of prices conducted by airline companies [7, p. 204 – 206].

Quality of client service is an inseparable part of comprehensive management. International standard-setting norms (ISO) are not widely used in Polish hotel industry, however, this situation is changing gradually. More and more hotels decide to undergo the process of certification with a view to strengthening their position in the market and gaining advantage over their competitors. Image of certified hotels is significantly improved, as the name and the logo ISO is a beneficial marketing device, which creates favourable conditions for effective promotion in the market [5, p. 125-126]. ISO 9001 certificate provides that the company values quality highly by referring to strict internal assessment criteria and, what is more, meeting external requirements of quality assessment [3, p. 107].

Quality is the fundamental factor of establishing long-lasting relations with clients, therefore, understanding their needs should be the first stage of creating quality.

What should also be emphasised is the fact that relations between senders and recipients of market signals must be mutual. Owing to a positive feedback between the senders and the recipients, the company can share their offer, urge potential customers to making a purchase, generate new needs and reinforce positive image of the product brand or a service.

Current changes within market phenomena accentuate significance of direct communication and interactive marketing which is addressed to a particular customer. What is also increasing is the importance of conducting systematic research of the market and having detailed and relevant database of clients, which allows to build integrated systems of marketing communication.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research was conducted in selected high-standard hotels in Lublin between 1 July 2014 and 31 August 2014, and between 1 January 2015 and 28 February 2015. The following hotels were chosen:

1. Alter,
2. Ilan,
3. IBB Grand Hotel Lublinianka,
4. Europa Hotel,
5. Merure Lublin Centrum,
6. Best Hotel Agit Congress&Spa,
7. Browar Lwów Hotel,
8. Forum Fitness Spa & Wellness Hotel.

The diagnostic poll method was used and an authorial questionnaire was given to 70 respondents. The following issues were discussed:

1. Trip destination.
2. General assessment of accommodation sector in Lublin.
3. Significance of hotel categorisation for respondents.
4. Assessment of separate elements of services offered by hotels.
5. Intentions of hotel guests concerning revisiting and recommendation of hotels.

4. SELECTED RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

Along with obtaining current assessment of particular aspects discussed herein, characteristics and demands of different social groups for services of hotels in Lublin were identified (Fig. 2).

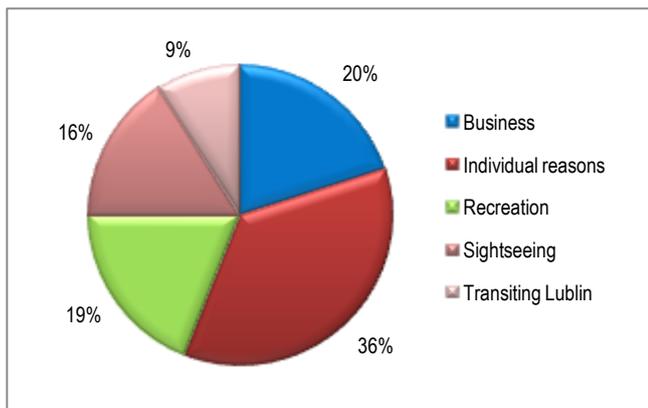


Fig. 2 Structure of hotel guests in selected hotels in Lublin.

As the diagram presents, the majority of hotel guests are people who visit Lublin for individual reasons. Considerable part constitute people who visit Lublin for business purposes or for sightseeing and recreation. The results unambiguously point to range of services where some changes should be implemented in order to improve the quality and increase the number of potential clients

Recommendations of former guests of accommodation sector in Lublin concerning revisiting Lublin are significant indicators in this research. The structure of these recommendations is depicted in Figure 3.

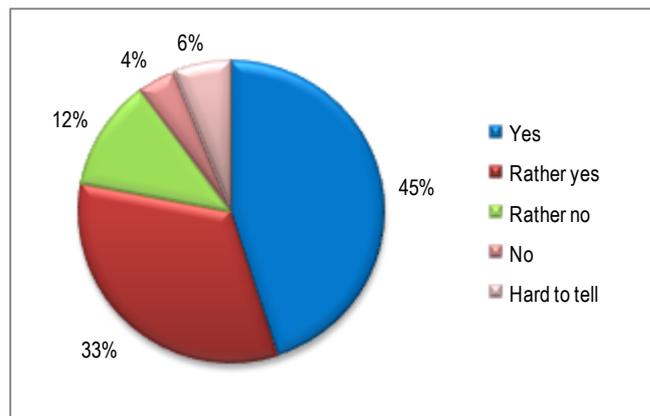


Fig. 3. Recommendations of former guests of accommodation sector in Lublin concerning revisiting Lublin.

Results of the research perfectly complement already presented assessment and show that Lublin is a town of considerable tourist attractiveness. This is supported by the majority of positive recommendations to revisit Lublin, which have reached 78% (answers: yes and rather yes).

In evaluation of quality of hotel services the levels of usefulness and comfort of their particular elements are of major importance. The data gathered in the chart (Tab. 3) present the range of the analysis which has been done within the research. As the data shows, the majority of selected elements in the hotels were assessed well and in many cases the marks exceeded 50%. A considerable amount of positive feedback proves that the accommodation sector has very good reputation, especially when Internet access, manned car parks, catering sector, staff, location and extra services are concerned. This means that the range and character of services meet clients' demands and satisfy them. However, attention should be paid to elements which hotels have influence on, namely tidiness, equipment in rooms and food, all of which received negative feedback. Nevertheless, the perspective of conducting categorisation in the foreseeable future, the idea of which receives

Tab. 3. Assessment of separate elements of hotel services

	Good [%]	Very good [%]	Average [%]	Bad [%]	Very bad [%]
Hotel location	28	42	27	2	1
The staff	30	58	12	-	-
Tidiness	29	52	18	1	-
Food	11	61	23	3	2
Security	26	70	4	-	-
Availability of a manned car park	42	50	8	-	-
Internet connection	55	32	10	3	-
Attractiveness of the region	5	59	30	4	2
Availability of infrastructure	9	81	9	1	-
Catering sector	30	50	10	7	3
Extra services*	23	55	10	8	4
Equipment in rooms	12	51	28	8	1
Accessibility for the handicapped	19	48	8	32	3
Ratio of quality to prices	16	13	52	9	10

*SPA, swimming pool, a place for a bonfire/ grill, conference rooms, places to play for children, a garden, rental of bikes, Nordic walking poles and other sport equipment.

Source: Own elaboration.

considerable support from the respondents, may eliminate defects in quality (Fig. 4).

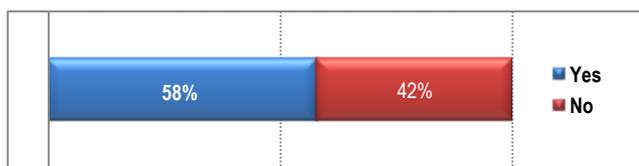


Fig. 4 Significance of categorisation for the respondents.
Source: Own elaboration.

Available statistics show that there has been systematic growth of the number of visitors of Lublin observed. This is undoubtedly connected with tourist attractiveness of the town, especially with having numerous tourist and environmental values. It is claimed that hotel owners make use of these favourable conditions and they gradually improve the level of infrastructure quality. Although some improvements of particular elements are still necessary, the general level of quality has received very positive feedback and it has been evaluated very well by the respondents, which is further reflected in results of the research where people declare to revisit selected hotels in the town.

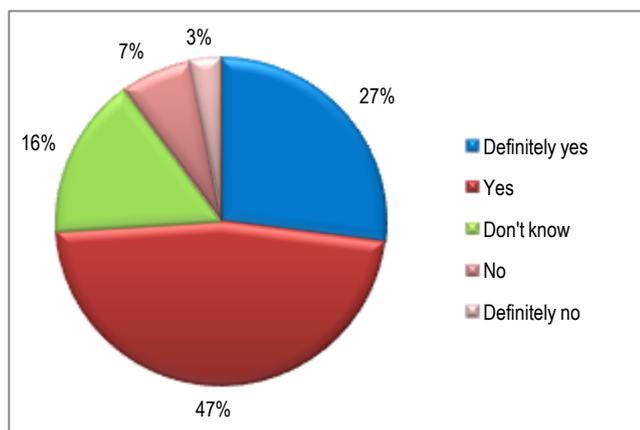


Fig. 5. Recommendation concerning revisiting selected hotels.
Source: Own elaboration

The accommodation sector has received positive feedback, which can be supported by 74% of respondents' opinion (definitely yes or yes) who declare to revisit the hotel if possible.

When asked about sharing their opinion on attractions in Lublin, the respondents enumerated the following:

1. Picturesque town where you can spend time nicely.
2. Good place for having a rest and calming oneself.
3. A charming town with lots of buildings and places to see.
4. A town with numerous tourist attractions.
5. Tourist-friendly ambience.
6. Well-developed catering and accommodation sectors.
7. Scenic location of town and beautiful landscapes.
8. Town with many tourist attractions but not as crowded as other cities.
9. Interesting events which promote the town.

What should be emphasised is the fact that hotel owners not only are constantly striving to improve quality of their services, but they are also more and more actively cooperate with institutions responsible for urban and regional tourist development. The prognosis indicate possibilities of activation of further arrivals to the town, and consequently, growth of demand for hotel services. Ow-

ing to interesting activities of local institutions, tourist and cultural attractiveness of Lublin is increasing and the town is likely to claim the title of "eastern capital of the region".

CONCLUSIONS

1. Effective exploitation of significant tourist attractions of Lublin depends to a great extent on having accommodation sector of good quality, including catering sector on high level of quality, multifunctional conference rooms and gym, SPA and wellness at hotel guests' disposal.
2. Hotel owners should pay attention to improving basic demands for standards concerning tidiness and equipment in rooms.
3. Inseparable part of service quality management in hotel industry becomes taking actions within corporate social responsibility (CSR) or corporate moral responsibility (CMR) by introducing solutions leading to conserving energy, saving water and utilising rubbish effectively.
4. Hotels should extend their activities concerning corporate social responsibility in accommodation sector. Saving the environment, supporting local societies and creating friendly conditions for the hotel staff has become a standard to be met.
5. Hotel administration should conduct and then analyse research concerning evaluation of the hotel services by the guests. The research conducted exclusively for the paper herein indicates that guests pay special attention to security, availability of manned car park, availability of infrastructure and qualifications of the staff.

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Wybrane aspekty oceny standardu usług hotelowych

Najnowsze trendy kształtowania usług hotelowych świadczą o istotnym zwiększeniu zakresu działań związanych z szeroko pojętą jakością. W związku z tym branża hotelarska konsekwentnie podnosi poziom komfortu, wykorzystując między innymi nowoczesne kanały komunikacji z konsumentami. W ostatnich latach wzrosła również świadomość potrzeby prowadzenia działań z zakresu społecznej odpowiedzialności biznesu do których konsumenci przywiązują coraz większą wagę.

W artykule zaprezentowano zagadnienia teoretyczne dotyczące znaczenia jakości w procesie konkurencji na rynku przedsiębiorstw hotelowych i zaprezentowano schemat dotyczący zarządzania jakością usług hotelarskich. Badania przeprowadzone w lubelskich hotelach, charakteryzujących się ofertą o podwyższonym standardzie, umożliwiły wieloaspektową ocenę świadczonych przez nie usług. Respondenci ocenili poziom bazy noclegowej w Lublinie,

wypowiedzieli się na temat znaczenia kategoryzacji, ocenili poszczególne elementy usługi oferowanej przez hotel oraz wypowiedzieli się co do planów związanych z powtórным odwiedzeniem obiektu.

Celem artykułu jest ocena poziomu usług hoteli w Lublinie, charakteryzujących się wysokim standardem. Wśród nich znalazł się jeden hotel pięciogwiazdkowy i hotele czterogwiazdkowe.

Authors:

dr hab. **Joanna HAWLENA** - Uniwersytet Przyrodniczy w Lublinie, Katedra Turystyki i Rekreacji. 20-950 Lublin; ul. Akademicka 15. Tel: + 48 81 445 66 53, Fax: + 48 533 35 49, E-mail: hawlana@interia.pl

dr **Jerzy KOPRON** - Uniwersytet Przyrodniczy w Lublinie, Katedra Turystyki i Rekreacji. 20-950 Lublin; ul. Akademicka 15. Tel: + 48 81 445 66 53, Fax: + 48 48 533 35 49,

E-mail: kopron@op.pl

mgr **Paulina CHUDYGA** - Uniwersytet Przyrodniczy w Lublinie, Katedra Turystyki i Rekreacji. 20-950 Lublin; ul. Akademicka 15. Tel: + 48 81 445 66 53, Fax: + 48 533 35 49, E-mail: Paula.chudyga@gmail.com