

## **EVALUATING THE POSSIBILITIES OF IMPLEMENTING THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT AT THE TRAVEL AGENCIES FROM SIBIU AND HUNEDOARA**

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### **Abstract**

*Based on the analysis of specialized theory, this paper primarily aims to assess the possibilities of implementing the quality management on the travel agencies from Sibiu and Hunedoara, starting from the fact that the production and commercialization of better quality products helps to reduce losses, translated through customer loyalty and profitable business development. The need to focus on quality management is given by the fact that in any organization in the tourism especially business performance is influenced both internally and externally by the quality products and processes of the organization.*

**Keywords:** *quality management; travel agency; quality standard*

**JEL classification:** *L83, L84, M11*

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### **1. Introduction**

At the national level one of the major issues currently facing the tourism industry is "manufacturing" and commercialization of products non-compliant with the requirements of users in terms of quality. However, this shortcoming can be overcome by orienting the policy and objectives of each organization in the quality field, in other words by implementing quality management.

According to the World Tourism Organization, the concept of quality – in tourism – can be interpreted as the *"the result of a process involving the needs of products and services, requirements and expectations of the consumer at an affordable price, in accordance with the quality standards"*

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*related to the provision of safety and security of tourists, hygiene, accessibility, authenticity and harmony of tourism activity with the natural and human environment."*

Also, in tourism the approach and quality assessment is influenced by the characteristics of intangibility, heterogeneity, simultaneity and perishability of services. Thus, according to some specialists (Parasuraman, Zeithmal și Berry) there are five categories of gaps: between consumer expectations and the management's perception; between consumer expectations perceived by the management and the characteristics of service quality; between quality characteristics and service delivery; between service delivery and what is communicated about the service to the consumer, which will "form" the expectations; between consumer expectations and their perceptions about the current quality of service provided.

In these circumstances, travel agencies have a significant contribution to the efficiency of tourism activities, given that both the success of the activity of service providers and the satisfaction of tourists, depend on them (Muhcină, S.; Popovici, V., 2008).

The continuous improvement of tourism offer must be a constant concern of travel agencies, becoming an imperative step in achieving performance, whether that performance is viewed in terms of maximizing the profit or obtaining a high satisfaction among tourists. In this respect, it should be noted that various specialists – Hongyi, 2000; Piskar, 2009; Heras-Saizarbitoria, Casadesús și Marimón, 2011 – have highlighted the impact of implementing the model defined by ISO 9000 standards on business performance.

Considering these aspects, I conducted a research on the assessment of the possibilities of implementing the quality management in the travel agencies from Sibiu and Hunedoara, the aim being to highlight the interest of tour operators on quality management systems, and the level of ISO: 9001 implementation, in other words emphasizing that units selling tourism products are concerned with customer satisfaction and improving the effectiveness of the organization in terms of quality.

## **2. The implementation of quality management - a necessary approach in the current environment**

### **2.1. General considerations regarding quality management**

Globally, the tourism market is characterized by a intense increasingly competition, which requires managers of various tourist establishments to pay more attention to customer orientation in their action and desire to achieve profit maximization and growth rate market. Thus, customer orientation, as a quality management principle, significantly influences controlling and shaping the customer's preferences and expectations (Di Mascio, 2010 ; Ariffin&Maghzi, 2012 ; Guchait et al., 2012 ).

In the tourism industry, managers were concerned since the 80s about the quality of their products, since then considered a lever for achieving economic performance (Johns, 1995). Thus, the specialized literature abounds in studies highlighting that tourism units are implementing the quality management system because as a result of this approach they are obtaining the quality improvement of tourism products and services, achieving the desired economic performance and creating a positive image in the marketplace (Claver-Cortés *et al.*, 2006; Claver-Cortés *et al.*, 2008; Tari *et al.*, 2010; Wang *et al.*, 2012)

At the same time, according to international standards ISO 9000the quality management means *"all activities of the general management function that determine the quality policy, objectives and responsibilities, in order to implement them in the quality system by specific means such as: quality planning, quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement."* The same standards states that, *"the success of an organization is based on meeting the needs and current and future expectations of actual or potential customers and final users"* (International Standards Office, 2008.). In this regard, standards, provides guidance to achieve a lasting success in a complex and ever changing environment, through a quality management approach.

Thus, the organization's management should ensure environmental awareness of the organization, stimulating learning and proper implementation of improvement measures in correlation with those relating to the innovation capacity development of the enterprise (International Standards Office, 2009).

Looking at this context, touristic agents with a quality culture, no matter the provided touristic products or services are characterized as follows (Stanciu, Hapenciu, 2009):

- the tourists messages are actively considered in order to continuously improve touristic products quality;
- tourism agents are equally involved in the continuous improvement of touristic products quality;
- education and training are necessary in order to ensure competent employees at any level;
- promotion and promontory offers are based on each agent contribution;
- touristic services providers are treated as partners.

Suitably, the key element that determines not only the opportunity of implementing quality management at tourism operators, but especially the need for such an approach is customer orientation, his satisfaction being decisive for achieving the objectives related to the company financial performance.

Under these conditions, in the following paragraphs will be presented and analyzed a number of representative data for the most important aspects related to the quality management of the travel agencies from Sibiu and Hunedoara.

## **2.2. Evaluating the possibilities of implementing the quality management at the travel agencies from Sibiu and Hunedoara**

Having as primary objective the provision of high quality services and increase customer satisfaction on the products and services purchased through the development of a quality culture, travel agencies managers can decide the operationalization of quality management, to meet the current and future requirements of tourism consumers.

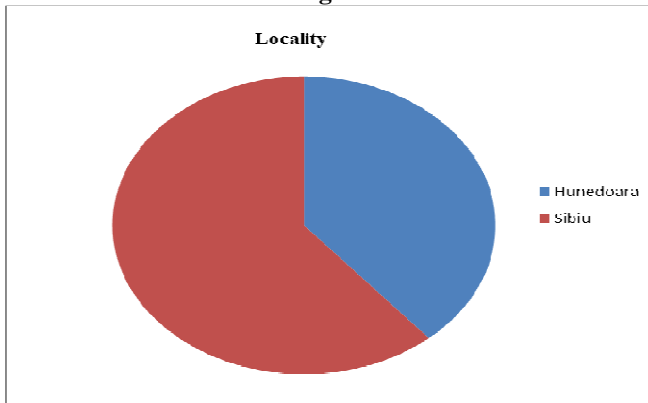
In this context, I used field survey as research method and questionnaire as a tool for quantitative research in order to know, understand and interpret the theoretical models of quality management.

The survey was conducted among travel agencies managers from Sibiu and Hunedoara and was aimed at evaluating the possibility of implementing quality management.

I focused on bibliographic and field documentation in my research activities to inform and make travel agencies managers from Sibiu and Hunedoara aware of the benefits of implementing quality management and achieving global certification of quality products and services.

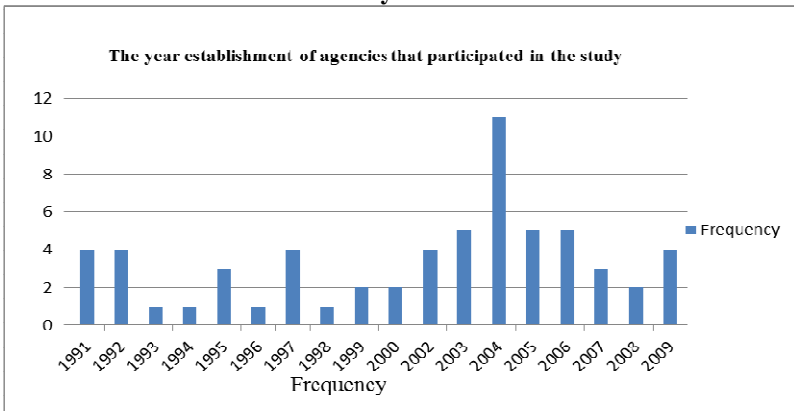
The questionnaire, includes useful data in quantitative and qualitative analysis regarding the evaluation of quality-oriented management practices, and was distributed to 62 travel agencies from Sibiu (61.3%) and Hunedoara (38.7%) (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Locality to which travel agencies that participated in the study belong**



To provide pertinent answers to the questionnaire were selected units with experience on the market, only 6.5% of agencies were established in 2009 (see Figure 2).

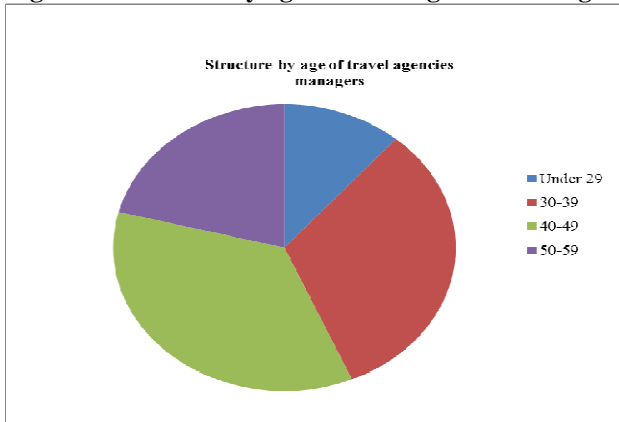
**Figure 2. The Year establishment of agencies that participated in the study**



Regarding the degree of professional training (level of their studies), out of all the respondents 30.6% graduated from the university, 69.4% have specialized university studies and 21% have completed tourism training courses, among which are worth mentioning the IATA course and that of Manager in tourism.

Regarding the structure by age groups, it was found that 11.3% of travel agencies managers are under the age of 29; 32.3% are between 30-39, 35.5% are between 40-49, and 21% are between 50-59, as shown in the figure below.

**Figure 3. Structure by age of travel agencies managers**



All travel agencies sell tourism products, 87.1% sell travel tickets and 56.5% offer complementary services, such as: medical insurance, baggage insurance, travel guides, insurance against the risks of air navigation etc.

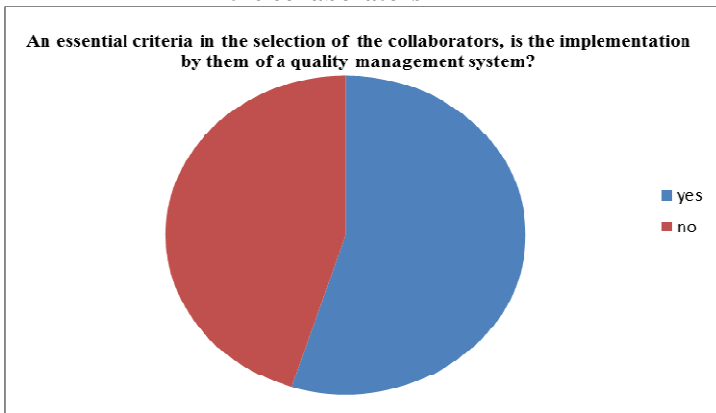
Given the ever-increasing demands of the Romanian business environment, travel agencies managers believe that to become competitive the units selling tourism products should orientate their efforts towards:

- "enhancing product and services quality " (82% of respondents);
- "diversification of the offered products " (46.8% of respondents);
- "improving the visibility of tourism offer - in the media and on the internet" (33.9% of respondents).

Therefore, the quality is the most precious argument for an organization in terms of permanent customers, so the will of an organization must be to provide products and services of superior quality to those of the competition.

In this context, at the question "An essential criteria in the selection of the collaborators, is the implementation by them of a quality management system?" 54.8% of managers said yes, while 45.2% do not consider quality certification an essential criterion in choosing collaborators (see figure below).

**Figure 4. The view of travel agencies managers regarding the selection of the collaborators**



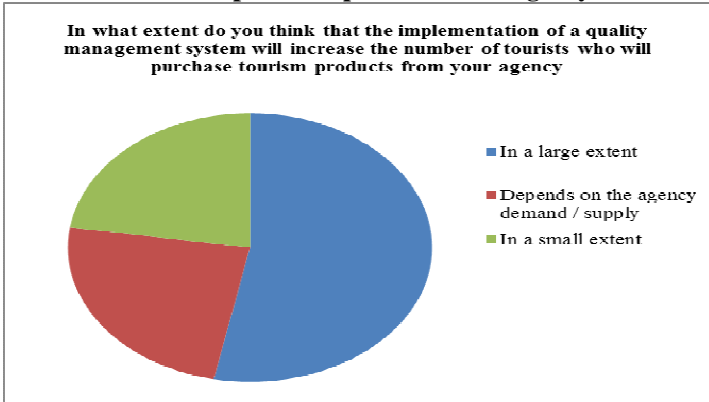
Regarding the *implementation of a quality management system*, analysis of data obtained by questionnaire research shows that only 4.8% of agencies have implemented the international standard ISO: 9001. However, after this action, the benefit that all of respondents felt was the more efficient monitoring of tourism services, to which is added - to a lesser extent - the identification of critical issues and making decisions appropriate for their removal.

When asked "In what extent do you think that the implementation of a quality management system will increase the number of tourists who will purchase tourism products from your agency?", as it can be seen from the analysis of figure 5:

- 53.2% of managers answered "in a large extent";
- 24.2% "It depends on the agency demand / supply ";

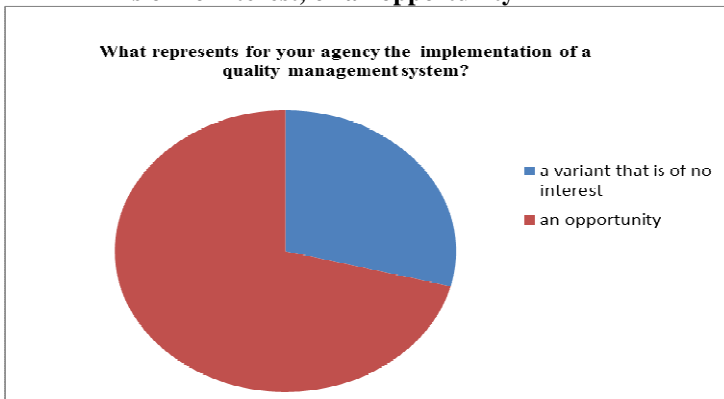
➤ and only 22.6% answered "in a small extent".

**Figure 5. The degree to which travel agencies managers believe that, currently implementing a quality management system will increase the number of tourists who will purchase products from agency**



At the same time, 71% of respondents believe that the implementation of quality management is an opportunity and only 29% see it as a variant that is of no interest (see the following figure).

**Figure 6. The degree to which travel agencies managers believe that, currently implementing a quality management system is a threat, a variant that is of no interest, or an opportunity**





Therefore, the majority of managers consider the implementation of ISO: 9001 a profitable decision. Moreover, in the agencies they manage specific quality management processes are performed. Thus, 90.3% of respondents say they are making efforts to improve quality; 54.8% for quality assurance; 21% for quality planning and 14.5% for quality control.

"Customer orientation" is considered by 91.9% of agencies managers as a mandatory principle for units providing tourism services, and 95.2% say that "continuous quality improvement of tourism products" is a principle which leads to performance in tourism and improved tourism offer quality.

Regarding the use of specific quality management documents, the study conducted revealed that 69.35% of the surveyed agencies use such documents, and of these 88.4% documentaries procedures; 44.2% quality plan; 9.3% quality manual and 4.7% documentary declaration.

The existence of these documents contribute significantly to the operationalization of quality management and hence to achieving compliance with the reference standard; training of human resources on the implementation of the quality management; *ensuring the procurement and commercialization of quality products meeting the requirements.*

The specific quality management documents and processes existing in surveyed travel agencies are an important source of information on activities performed in the quality field that can be offered to interested persons to guarantee them that the agencies are concerned with customer satisfaction and improving the effectiveness of the organization.

After processing the results, it also outcome that the activity carried out by travel agencies aimed at achieving quality objectives, as follows: 66.1% of agencies aim to meet customer needs and expectations through the quality procedures established and 62.9% involvement all employees in quality improvement activities.

Looking at this context, we can say that although only 4.8% of agencies surveyed have implemented a quality management system, there is a high probability that this situation will change in the very near future, especially since many fulfill the necessary conditions of this approach and see in the ISO: 9001 an appropriate decisions that could improve their current management system, increase the number of tourists and hence profit.

### **3. Conclusions**

The undertaken empirical study aims to raise the awareness of tourism operators on the need to continue to improve tourism offer, by promoting the idea that the major problems facing today and in the predictable future tourism company, can be solved only if the management of each touristic units proves it's efficiently and effectively in developing, commercialization and provision of high quality products and services.

Through the operationalization of a performant quality management system, travel agencies can identify in real time consumer requirements, thereby reducing the *significant differences between the characteristics of services, preferences and expectations of the customer*.

In this context, the results of the undertaken research show that there is an interest of the operators from Sibiu and Hunedoara for the quality of their products and therefore can be taken as a pilot in the implementation of quality management. By implementing ISO: 9001 the mentioned tour operators could be considered as good practice models for the operators from other places, which would bring a boost to tourism development through commercialization of products whose quality is globally certified.

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