

INTEGRATED APPROACH TO SERVICE QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN RURAL TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract: *the services sector has experienced great expansion and has become the dominant sector in many economies. Over time, interest in service quality has grown, as studies have shown that it is a prerequisite for the success and survival of companies in a competitive environment, in other words, providing quality service to customers creates an opportunity for companies to gain a competitive advantage in the market.*

Tourist satisfaction can be viewed in five phases as expected, experienced, given, desired and quality prescribed by the business system. There are variations between phases, and the goal is to eliminate differences in order to reduce this "gap", that is, to connect certain phases. There are several interest groups in the destination for quality assurance: entrepreneurs, management, employees, guests, locals and society (state) as a whole. It is necessary to coordinate the interests of all and find the level of quality that will satisfy them.

In recent years, an integrated approach to managing the quality of a tourist destination has developed. Integral Quality Management (IQM) is a leading European initiative that aims to strengthen the development and implementation of sustainable development and quality-oriented tourism. The authors analyze the conditions of application of IQM in rural tourism with special reference to the situation in the Republic of Serbia.

Keywords: *tourism, service quality, integrated management, innovation*

Introduction

Rural tourism in the Republic of Serbia has started to develop since seventies of twenty century. Nowadays it has different intensity, form and character in the different part of the country. It depends of four factors (Vuković. P. 2017):

- 1) Natural-geographical characteristic of local area,
- 2) Degree of development of the local economy
- 3) Anthropogenic heritage
- 4) Awareness of the local population about the importance of tourism for the development of the local community
- 5) Investments and various incentives by the state.

If we follow research of A. B. Zodorov (2009), rural tourism in Serbia has same phases with same characteristic. First phase can be named “independent establishing”. The villages that were so called the “pioneers” of the development are Sirogojno, Seča Reka and Devići. At that time, the leading tourist agencies “Yugoturs” and “Putnik” were involved in the business of bringing foreign tourists to rural areas. The largest number of tourists was recorded from Great Britain, Germany, Russia and Italy. Rural tourism has started to develop without any plan.

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A new beginning has been recorded since 2000. The second phase, dedicated development started in 2006. Namely, at that time, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia made decision to allocate in a total of 91 580 215 dinars for the development of rural tourism in the period from 2006 to 2008 and diversification of economic activities in the countryside (“Analysis of budget support to the development of rural tourism in Serbia and diversification economic activities in the countryside“, 2009, p. 2). The number of villages and municipalities involved in rural

tourism increased in 2009 (41 municipalities, 119 villages with 164 households with 570 rooms and 1 628 beds).

Nowadays, one of the key problems of developing rural tourism is to ensure quality of service to tourist who visit rural tourist destination. One of concept who ensures satisfaction in whole tourism supply chain is Integral Quality Management of services.

Discussion

The concept of integrated management of rural tourism has developed as a result and consequence of a large number of scientific research in the field of social sciences. The aim of this concept is to synthesize the interests of all stakeholders involved in the offer of rural tourist destinations.

Integral Quality Management (IQM) is one of the leading European initiatives aimed at strengthening the implementation of sustainable development based on the concept of quality. The assumption is that quality can only exist if tourists get what they expect. This applies to the entire chain of tourist offer, from the moment of initial travel planning to a rural tourist destination, obtaining appropriate information in destination, travel, accommodation, quality of services and care during your stay in the destination, to returning home.

It is imperative in business that the management process is put in the "first place". This seems to be to ensure that tourists live a "special tourist experience". This means that tourists experience all the expectations they had before arriving. Moreover, it is desirable that these expectations be exceeded in a positive sense. All this should be done in a way to realize the benefits for the tourist destination. This approach is actually an imperative of this approach to business.

Integrated Quality Management (IQM) should not be seen as an “instant path to success”, but it should lead to the following key strengths on which to build the success of a rural tourist destination:

- „more local awareness and support for tourism development in general in the destination, among the local population in all rural areas;
- better coordination between local tourism entrepreneurs and greater support and engagement for the management and marketing of the tourist destination;
- improve the image of the destination on a realistic basis, without providing tourists / visitors with false expectations;
- offer of tourist products that can be promoted with confidence;
- increase customer satisfaction, with more repeated business actions and with appropriate recommendations;
- better knowledge of the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism and strengthening the capacity to adapt to them.

IQM in rural tourism has two basic goals:

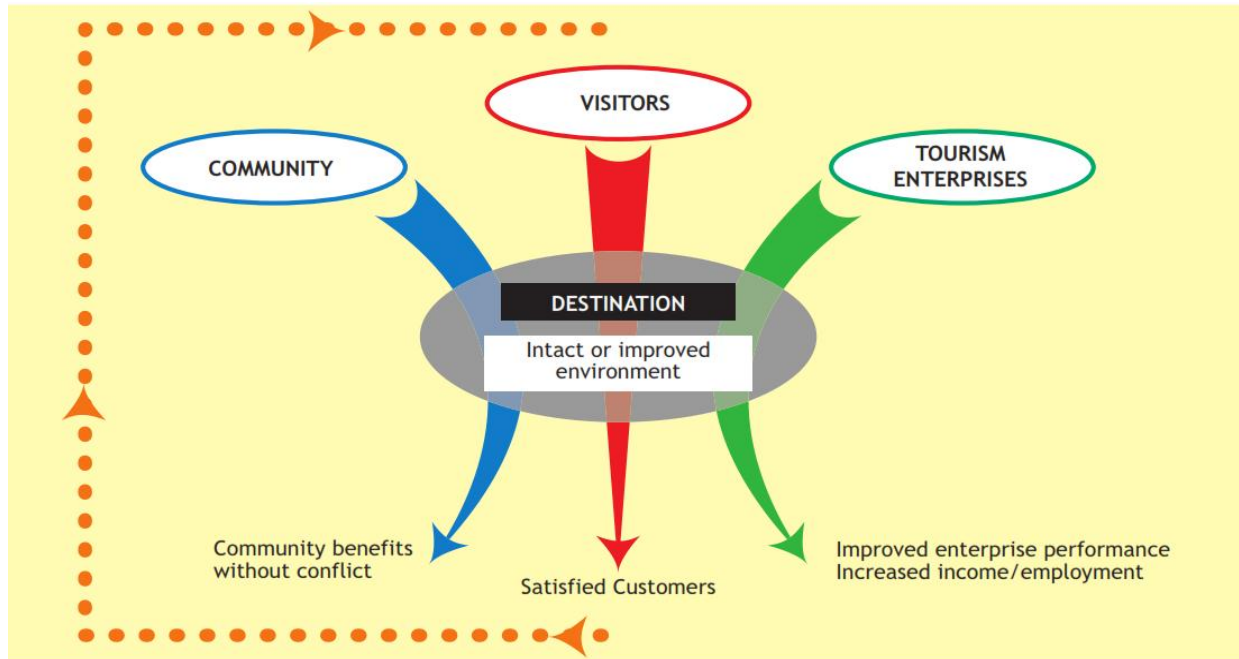
1) Focus on tourists / visitors, means improving the quality of the offer, meeting the needs and influencing the activities, so that tourists / visitors want to return or recommend a rural tourist destination to others;

2) Involvement of the local community and local tourism companies / entrepreneurs in the destination management process, as current participants, as well as tourists, as consumers / clients, in order to improve the performance of the destination.

The working definition of IQM rural tourist destinations is the management of a tourist destination in a way to improve / increase the satisfaction of visitors / tourists, while improving the local economy, environment and quality of life of the local community.(Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows three key stakeholders in the development of a rural tourist destination (local community, tourists / visitors, tourism enterprises). The goal of the process is to ensure: customer satisfaction, improve the performance of tourism companies, increase employment, increase employee salaries, increase benefit for the local community.

Figure 1. The process of integrated quality management in rural tourism



Source: European Commission (2000): „Towards quality rural tourism – Integrated quality management (IQM) of rural tourist destinations“, p.11, Enterprise Directorate-General Tourism Unit, Brussels, 2000.

All this should be done in a way that reconciles the interests of all parties, without the existence of any conflict. In this sense, the IQM concept was created as comprehensive and addresses internal, operational and management issues. At the same time, IQM solves a range of other problems (social, cultural, environmental), which play a significant role in influencing the development of tourism.

Table 1. sets out the basic principles of IQM which, taken together, offer a plan for sustainable development based on a common interest of all stakeholders in rural tourism.

These principles of IQM should be understood as a comprehensive system that is included in the rural tourist destination. Both the private and public sectors are involved in these principles. It is important that the local community with interests in tourism development is strongly involved in the concept.

Table 1. Basic principles of IQM in rural tourism.

1.	Integral approach	Concern for quality, and management techniques in order to achieve them, should be integrated into all tourist functions of the destination.
2.	Authenticity	Visitors are looking for and appreciating original (real) experiences. The quality of tourist experiences should not be devalued or fabricated.
3.	Distinctiveness	Quality delivery should focus on the delivery of special distinctive features and tastes of the destination.
4.	Market realism	Quality management should be based on informative and realistic assessments of the potential of the market area, identification of competitive advantages and a way to ensure that they do not collapse.
5.	Sustainability	Rural areas can often have locations that are "fragile" and small local communities that are vulnerable to tourist intrusions and congestion. However, visitors today are increasingly looking for an untouched environment – the quality provided must take into account the management of the impact of tourism on the environment.
6.	Consumer orientation	Quality management is to get as close as possible to the tourist / visitor, understand his needs and determine whether they are met.
7.	Inclusiveness	Quality should not be delivered to just a few - a good experience should be provided for all visitors, especially those with special needs.
8.	Attention to detail	It is necessary to be creative but also pay attention to details – provide enough information, control / check facilities, provide "extra" services to guests.
9.	Rationalization	A small number of good initiatives are better than many that are poor (not creative). Activities that are sub-resource and of poor quality should be discontinued, or combined with a stronger and more sustainable product.
10.	Partnership	Working together is the "right" and the "principle" essential to success. Quality cannot be delivered as a "solo" project – tourism companies / organizations and community groups should work together.

11.	Interdependence	Quality in rural tourism depends on, and in turn supports, many other activities such as agriculture, the craft industry, transport and local services.
12.	Time	Improving quality takes time. Success depends on stable planning, which ensures achievable progress from year to year.
13.	Commitment	Personal enthusiasm and commitment to achieving quality is essential. This means involving the wider community.
14.	Accurate communication	Providing visitors / tourists with accurate and up-to-date information is key to aligning reality with expectations and ensuring an appropriate level of satisfaction.
15.	Monitoring	Quality management involves regular monitoring and evaluation of the impact of visitors / tourists, businesses on the environment and the local community.

Source: European Commission (2000): „*Towards quality rural tourism – Integrated quality management (IQM) of rural tourist destinations*“, p.62, Enterprise Directorate-General Tourism Unit, Brussels, 2000.

The involvement of the local community is viewed from the aspect of the impact of tourism on the development of receptive capacities, as well as the negative impact that tourism has on the environment (rural with all its characteristics). This integrated approach aims to enable the so-called. "Dialogue" between stakeholders. In this way, the sustainable development of a rural tourist destination is ensured.

Conclusion

One of the promising aspects of tourism development in Serbia is rural tourism. Serbia has respectable conditions for that. Namely, more than 80% of the territory consists of rural areas and about 44% of the total population lives in these areas. Also, a large number of natural and social (anthropogenic) attractions are located in these areas, which can help create a large number of different rural tourist products. In order to ensure the satisfaction of tourists with rural tourism products, it is necessary that

quality be present in the entire chain of tourist offer. In this sense, an integrated approach is important.

The IQM concept connects all interest groups (tourists, local community and tourism industry) in order to provide satisfied tourists, ie create loyal consumers in a way that residents through their statification increase their income and benefit in the development of the destination. In everything, it is important that tourism develops in a sustainable way. This is one of the premises on which rural tourism is based. Any development that would disrupt the original ambience would be to the detriment of the very concept of rural tourism.

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