Scientific discussion is focused on a current problem concerning service quality management in rural tourism sector.

Author presents the problem, which covers the elements of quality management of rural tourism services, describes the service quality management model as a result of upgrade regional tourism. The process of delivery of rural tourism services is based upon the implications of regional traditions and products. Diversification of rural tourism services is forced on investigation the conditions, under which the regional rural tourism could become more competitive, or creation the possibilities to affect the consumer expectations, and increase their sensitivity to regional products and rural tourism services.

Service quality management of rural tourism is fitted on creation tight relationship upon the consumers. Besides, the gain from changes of service quality builds the preconditions to change content and price of services, and to propose for consumers new quality of services, which could be identified as competitiveness of rural tourism farmsteads or focused on growth of consumer loyalty.

Rural tourism, rural tourism services, quality of services, service quality management, changes of service quality, competitiveness, consumer loyalty.

Introduction

The survey is focused on service quality management of rural tourism, and fitted on different definitions of service quality elements and their implication in rural tourism sector.

D. A. Collier presented the broad-brush attitude concerning the service content and service quality. D. E. Bowen, R. B. Chase, T. G. Gummings defines service quality by special determinants and standards (Rukuižienė, 2007b). According to D. A. Collier external and internal service quality standards have to become congruent (Collier, 1990, p. 243). In fact, the product quality can’t be directly transferable to service quality. For example, D. A. Garvin describes five approaches defining product quality and fits the idea, that the dimensions of product quality have no direct adjustment to service quality (Garvin, 1988, p. 40–41). Such an idea is approved by A. Parasuraman, V. A. Zeithalm, L. L. Berry (Parasuraman, 1985, p. 42). They assure, that service quality is more difficult for consumers to evaluate, and depends upon consumers expectations with actual service performance and service delivery process. They define the main differences of industrial services and other services. Besides, they notice that the tangible differences exist in different service groups, and there is no possibility to identify the general peculiarities of service quality definitions applicable for all industries.

Task of research – identify the conceptual issues concerning service quality management of rural tourism.

Objectives of research:
1) define the conceptual items of service quality management;
2) identify the determinants of service quality in rural tourism;
3) determine the factors and facilities impacting the service quality management of rural tourism.

Object of research: processes of service quality management in rural tourism sector.

Methodology of research: the survey is focused on identification and determination the elements and factors of service quality management of rural tourism and other service sectors under the analysis of conceptions of foreign researchers. Theoretical survey is presenting the consequences, which are focused on the conceptions of improvement facilities of service quality management of rural tourism.

Service quality framing determinants in the context of rural tourism development

Rural tourism sector includes the specific services, which are comprised in different social systems, or has the focus on complementary elements of regional product. Rural tourism services are friendly to the technical, intellectual or natural or artificial environmental systems of business: experience, competence, product novelty or quality, managerial methods, modern technical issues for measurement consumers’ loyalty, and etc. (Collier, 1990, p. 236). Rural tourism services have the specific attributes and can be identified as idea, entertainment, information, knowledge, change of consumer health and expectations, social innovation, convenience, food, security, deed, social event, output for consumption in production place, and etc. (Collier, 1990, p. 237).

There are three generic views for analysis of service quality according to A. Parasuraman, V. A. Zeithalm and L. L. Berry: 1) service quality depends upon consumers expectations prior to experiencing the service with service delivery system performance concerning advertising, previous expectations, culture; 2) service quality is focused on specific interactions between consumer service and quality level (CS-QL); 3) service quality is defined by the help of gaps, which exist between service deliver and service quality, such as: a) discrepancy between consumer expectations and management perceptions of those expectations; b) discrepancy between management perceptions of what features constitute a target level of service quality and the task of translating these perceptions into executable specifications; c) discrepancy between service quality specifications and their implementation; d) discrepancy between actual service delivery system performance and external communications with consumers; e) all four discrepancies lay the foundation for making the function for fifth gap with reliable measures (Collier, 1990, p. 238–239). The five-gap system helps to build actual foundation for service quality management by the firm’s competitive position with the regard to service quality.

Many scientific discussions are focused on measurement problems of service quality and the imprecision of parameters of service quality.
Tangible and intangible attributes of service are the basement to evaluate the quality of rural tourism services according to R. H. Williams and R. M. Zigli (Williams, 1987, p. 14). Rural tourism service package fills more intangible attributes, ex. security, convenience, ambience, privacy, respect, friendliness, competence, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, politeness and honestly, – which are very impressive for consumers, and can impact the understanding about quality of services (fig. 1).

![Fig. 1. Attributes of rural tourism services](composed by author according to R. H. Williams and R. M. Zigli)

There is originated a new understanding about the structure, measurement and establishment standards of monitoring, control and evaluation of service quality according to different authors, and there is presented different attitudes about the structural, managerial and measurement dimensions of service according to J. A. Czepiel, M. R. Solomon and C. F. Surprenant (Czepiel, Solomon, Surprenant, 1985). Service quality management as a process is the interdisciplinary object of scientific researches, which covers different introduction concepts of quality concerning the process of service quality management and appropriation of the firm’s competitiveness.

There is the necessity to determine the of service quality management as the system of impacts with interdependent elements. For identification the facilities to improve the service quality management process in rural tourism sector, consumers have to evaluate the rural tourism service package by its structure (content), timing, price and applied service delivery technologies (reference, admission, attendance, reservation and information search technologies). Rural tourism service quality management covers the problem, connected with creation of significant service package according to dislocation, specialization and size of rural tourism farmstead.
The factors impacting the efficiency of service quality management in rural tourism

During the 20th century the service quality theory was explicated as a key for a firms to gain in the marketplace: “1) service as a critical element of marketplace success; 2) service as a tool for emphasis relationships with clients, eventually for creation new service demand; and 3) quality as an important element in strategic management for creation marketing strategy portfolio.

Service quality, as an important measurable dimension, has the same significant power for up-grade competition in the tourism market (Collier, 1990, p. 235). A. C. Sturm notices that quality as the dimension of service value, does not have the beginning and an end, but depends upon business validity, which constitutes a series of staff competences with experience to manage the consumer preferences and to impact the structural elements of services (Sturm, 1988, p. 68). The delivery process of services within the relationship with consumers can create continuing economic result – higher consumer loyalty. Other authors, A. H. Rubenstein and E. Geisler, emphasize the impact of information technology on service as a parameter for measurement and management the quality of services (Collier, 1990, p. 266–272). Their survey includes the idea about the operations of information technologies, which serve the consumers with special needs and preferences to construct special configuration for obtaining the necessary information. This factor in many cases does not included into the system of measurement of service quality management. A lot of farmsteads of rural tourism use IT as a parameter so useful in service quality management, because the search of information has to be a rapid process. The impact of information technologies is high and can be identified as information amount, timing, place, quality, cost and etc. Information system of rural tourism is connected with worldwide tourism information system, and information delivery has to be rapid, explicit, and low-priced. Internal direct and indirect indicators of service quality are defined by A. H. Rubenstein and E. Geisler. These authors emphasize the importance of integrated information technologies into service quality management process (Rubenstein, 1990).

Rural tourism sector is so sensitive to various changes of consumer preferences and resolves. The appliance of rural tourism services is limited because of size and specialization of rural tourism farmsteads. For instance, the information technology has to be convenient for consumer in searching appropriate records, in reservation of additional services, in looking for special recreation products. Notable examples of profitable activities in countryside are focused in rural tourism sector, because of application of IT in rural tourism farmsteads and regional tourism information center, which create popular belief about welfare rise in this sector.

Service quality management is fitted to the measurement results of service quality according to G. M. Hostage, T. Peters, R. H. Waterman, R. C. Lewis, B. H. Booms, J. H. Donnelly, G. L. Berry, P. Thompson and N. A. Austin.
D. A. Collier suggests improving the process of service quality management by the help of service quality performance standards, because they are the key parameters for finding facility layout (Collier, 1987, p. 45–46). He presents the idea, that accordance to monitoring and control of service quality, there is a possibility to find general approaches of service quality management through some key points: 1) a service is a facility, process, equipment and job; 2) improvement of staff competences; 3) structure of service systems and procedures; 4) external communication (Collier, 1990, p. 238).

Technical quality of a service performance is not easy to evaluate for the consumers. The current elements of service quality in case of reliance to a product can be complementary, peripheral or supporting a product, when the consumers can evaluate a quality of services, but not a quality of product. This fact lets to construct an idea, that the rural tourism services for consumers have to be presented strictly by their structure (content) or price, and afterwards, consumers can evaluate the quality of complementary elements, ex., regional products and services, separately (Rukuižienė, 2007a).

Rural tourism sector covers the specific developing concepts of service quality. Service quality in rural tourism sector depends on many service delivery criteria – physical service idea and content, service complexity, technical issues in service delivery process, staff stock, experience and qualification of service delivery staff, service delivery period and time span, service existence or duration as efficient and competitiveness in appropriate services group, and etc.

Fig. 2. The model of formation new quality of rural tourism services (composed by author)
The elements of service quality are a quality mix in service delivery process, which can have the great influence to consumer loyalty. New quality recognitions appear, when the alterations of service quality or price are provided (fig. 2).

The technical issues of services in service delivery process are not important for consumers, because they can’t evaluate them, but they focus attention on their own facility in appropriation the qualitative services. The place, time and staff behavior, as the internal rural tourism business environmental peculiarities, directly impact the service quality, and can be defined as the constructive means of competitiveness of rural tourism farmstead.

Results of research

Rural tourism services are oriented to special consumer groups concerning their attitudes to quality. When appears the possibility to integrate into rural tourism service package new local product, then consumers evaluate services as new quality in the frame of regional cultural influences – traditional environment, landscape, staff behaviour, experience, and etc. Therefore, there is a grateful impact when service quality management involves the relationship between consumers and staff, then service quality can be evaluated according to marketing and operational information. In such case, the behaviour of consumers becomes adequate to the service quality and gets the expression of high perception. Such a consequence is important in the interpretations of service quality dimensions. The existence of considerable suggestions to evaluate of service quality turn the researchers to discover more effective methods to quantify the service quality dimensions. P. B. Crosby proposes to evaluate service quality attributes by three scales – binary, ordinal or ratio, because the service quality is a free category (Crosby, 1979, p. 16).

W. F. Sasser, R. P. Olsen and D. D. Wyckoff observe the dimensions of services and build the staple understanding, that the beneficial services have to be performed with supporting facilitating goods (Sasser, 1978, p. 10–11).
Fig. 3. Model of service quality management of rural tourism
(Rukuižienė, 2007)

Notably, that alteration of service quality can be more rapid, when the profitability of rural tourism farmstead is growing, and the competing farmsteads can extremely change the content, price or staff experience of services. It means that consumers immediately react at changes of service quality, and only 15 percent of consumers are irrelevant to service quality perception (Thompson, 1988, p. 20–25). Such a conclusion provides an idea that changes of service quality play a great role as a new purchase decision or conversion of consumer loyalty.

Conclusions

Rural tourism services can be performed as high goods by their content with a lot of intangible attributes. The final point could be identified as more intended concept of service quality management after analysis of cultural influences – service delivery and perceived service quality, consumer expectations and preferences, consumer sensitivity to cultural issues. The cultural influences help to describe the dimensions of service quality.

Service quality management of rural tourism has to have a focus on following solution of problems:

1. Involvement of regional traditions and products helps to reveal the regional peculiarities, which impact the service content as a new service quality for consumers.
2. Differentiation of rural tourism services concerning dislocation, specialization and size of rural tourism farmsteads.
3. Development of information system with regarding technology for consumers to learn about new service quality.
4. Rural tourism farmsteads have to assign a strategic role to their IT function, and to implement more efforts to concentrate to information coordination concerning their business with target points to service quality management.

References


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Santrauka

Šiuo metu vyksta aktuali mokslinė diskusija – kaip plėtoti kaimo turizmą atkuruose Europos Sąjungos regionuose. Pagrindinės idėjos pagerinti regionų konkurencingumą yra orientuojamos į kaimo turizmo paslaugų kokybės valdymo, lemiančio kultūrinių išteklių panaudojimo galimybes, proceso analizę.

Autorė pateikia paslaugų kokybės valdymo modelį kaip priemonę plėtoti turizmą reginę. Regionų produktų vaidmuo yra atspindėti vietovės tradicijas ir juos panaudoti kaip priemonę, pagerinančią kaimo turizmo paslaugos teikimo kokybę. Turizmo paslaugų turinio pagerinimas visada susijęs su regiono tradicijų įvairove ir ypatumais, todėl turizmo paslaugos skiriasi skirtiniose regionuose, skirtinai padidinantų mažiausią regioniniams produktams ir paslaugoms.
Kaimo turizmo paslaugų valdymas yra procesas, orientuotas sukurti glaudžius ryšius su vartotojais. Be to, paslaugų kokybės pokyčiai sukuria daugiau naudos verslininkams – atsiranda galimybės keisti paslaugos struktūrą arba kainą, todėl vartotojai paslaugas vertina kaip naujas. Vartotojų lojalumo didinimui yra pasitelkiama paslaugos struktūros ir jos vertės tapatinimo koncepcija, kuri padeda paslaugos kokybėi valdymo procese.

Kaimo turizmas, kaimo turizmo paslaugas, paslaugų kokybė, paslaugų kokybės valdymas, paslaugų kokybės pokyčiai, konkurencingumas, vartotojų lojalumas.