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## QUALITY OF TOURIST SERVICE IN CREATING MARKET POSITION

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**Abstract:** It is well known that in Serbia tourism has never played a major role in economic development, although there is a tendency to solve many economic and social problems with its economic effect. Serbia's comparative advantages in the tourism market are diverse tourism offer with natural and anthropogenic resource values. The authors of the paper presented the current position of Serbian tourism in the regional tourism market, as well as the quality assessments of the services obtained through the 2019 survey, using a modified SERVQUAL questionnaire. The aim of the study was to determine the correlation between the expected and perceived values of service quality. All data obtained were processed in the SPSS software, version 23.00. As a result of the survey, it was found that tourists had significantly higher expectations than perceived service.

**Keywords:** tourism, market position, Serbia, quality

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an industry that can present Serbia in a much better light on the world market. So far this has not been possible due to the poor economic and political situation in the country and the region. It must be emphasized that Serbia is an area of extraordinary socio-cultural, natural and demographic values, with special ecological areas, which carry the traditional culture and diversity of ethno-cultural heritage. The Republic of Serbia has a very important and favorable geographical, geo-strategic and macro-regional position, which provides it with a transit and intermediary role in relation to its closer and further environment. Serbia has other advantages: specific relief and climate, flora and fauna, rivers and lakes, spas, nature protected areas, valuable cultural and historical monuments. However, before the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, which also included Serbia, the state of tourism was at a satisfactory level, but after the disintegration, a significant part of the space was lost, and therefore what was available on the market. Today, there are all prerequisites for mass tourism development in Serbia, but Serbia has not built the image of a recognizable destination in the world (Woo et al, 2018). The problem lies in insufficient marketing as an important segment of destination positioning in the tourism market. Tourism has never occupied a significant place, nor has it ever been at the forefront of economic development in Serbia. This is evidenced by tourism revenues and expenditures, which do not participate in the generation of national income, although there are real chances and opportunities to be placed in a better place on the market due to the resource base and potentials that the state possesses. It is the view of many theorists that by improving the quality of service, they achieve a position in the market and overcome competition.

The importance of the research work carried out by the authors is reflected in the assessment of the current state of the quality of tourism services, as well as the identification of key problems and finding corrective measures for improving the service and placing them in a better position. The work can contribute to the development of broader research on current issues and finding solutions for better market positioning.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Republic of Serbia has been in a difficult political and economic situation for many years, which is certainly reflected in the overall economic development and survival in the tourism market. Serbia has a lot to offer, but so far the right path has not been found to emerge from the crisis and invest more resources to promote Serbian tourism. Serbia has communication with the market based on the authenticity of nature and cultural and historical heritage, and tourism marketing is based on experiences and feelings (Petrović et al, 2018). Today, the Republic of Serbia has only comparative advantages in tourism, because it has a diverse structure of tourist offer, is close to traditional and new tourist markets, has a long history and general recognition, preserved natural resources, relatively good communication and has great human potential (Zhang et al, 2019). Since only integrating into the world tourism trends can achieve a sustainable tourism development strategy, the issue of competitiveness of the tourism industry is one of the most important issues among economic policy makers. As this is a very complex concept, there has never been a generally accepted theory or definition of national competitiveness. Simply put, the competitiveness of

a national economy is reflected in its ability to respond to the demands of the international tourism market in terms of quantity and quality of tourism products and services (Gajić et al, 2018). The aim is to create a unique perception of Serbia as a tourist country in the international market, that is, a unique promise of basic values that should then be fulfilled, visible in all segments of the tourism business and at all levels.

Improving Serbia's tourism competitiveness is one of its economy's priorities, as it is crucial for achieving dynamic rates of economic and tourism growth and sustainable development. In contemporary literature and research, quality is defined as the attitude of the user on the excellence of the tourist service or perhaps even on its superiority. The modern concept of quality puts the customer at the center of interest (Milunović Koprivica et al, 2019). Quality is certainly an attainable condition that reduces the gap between what is expected and what is obtained. The difference between what tourists expect and what they get in a tourist spot (Wang et al, 2008). Every organization strives to create the perfect way or gain the ability to meet expectations and exceed what every tourist consumer expects for the service they have paid for in advance (Gajić et al, 2018). Continuous gathering of information by tourists and the market reduces defects and errors, and thus the quality reaches its expected level. The basis for achieving quality is also the constant adaptation to change, because the way to fight competitors is to change the way the business system works, at a faster pace than changes in the environment are happening (Fu et al, 2020). Focusing on the consumer involves understanding their wants and needs, because quality means a satisfied consumer. Quality can be very complex and multidimensional because it extends across a range of usable values and intrinsic characteristics (Vujic et al, 2019). The definition of quality should equally include an objective and subjective point of view. Yasuo (2007) points to the importance of the corporate image, where in addition to the technical and functional aspect of the tourism business, the third ethical aspect or social aspect should be emphasized. This aspect is not easy to evaluate either before or after consuming the service (Akababa, 2006). It involves the safe execution and delivery of the service, where security is viewed from the point of view of the customer or the supplier.

Service quality is an approach for managing organizational processes to ensure the satisfaction of consumers of tourism services (Vujic et al, 2019). Achieving quality has become a current topic in many scientific studies. The quality of services is still rather undefined, while the quality of material products is linked and interpreted through the concept of marketing. Quality is a concept that provokes great ebb and interest in the scientific literature, because of the difficulty in defining it (Milunovic et al., 2019). Baum (2011) proposes five categories of interpretations of quality: transcendent interpretations of subjective, personal, and eternal character, and relate to the concepts of beauty and attachment; product-based interpretations where quality is seen as a measurable variable and the basis for measurement is objective product features; user-based interpretations of quality, where quality means satisfied customer; production-based interpretations and value-based interpretations where quality is determined by cost (Williams et al, 2001; Devesa et al, 2010). The SERVQUAL model was developed in the 1980s by a group of authors, noting intense refinement and constant change. The model is based on the fact that quality is measured as the deviation or gap between the quality that users expect and the quality they receive. Quality is expressed as the difference between two measurement results, before and after using the service (Jaakkola et al, 2015; Sharpley et al, 2014). This model is a very important tool for hospitality managers, both for their own perceptions and for finding sources of problems related to the quality of individual services.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The paper presents the position of Serbia in the region through the World Economic Forum, The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, 2017, 2019. The main objective and purpose of the research is to determine the existence of a relationship between the perceived and expected level of quality of the tourist service and the current position on the market by collecting and processing primary and secondary data. In the research of the given problem, the bibliographic-speculative method was used to collect, analyze and interpret the obtained data or to structure the theoretical part of the paper. In the immediate application of this method, the primary source of data consisted of relevant bibliographic units. All survey data obtained in the field were analyzed in SPSS software, version 23.00. The modified SERVQUAL questionnaire was applied in the survey, which presents 24 questions, grouped in five dimensions of the model (tangibility, reliability, responsibility, safety and empathy), and the questionnaires are distributed before use and after use of the service. A five-degree Likert scale is used to measure perceptions. A total of 1,000 survey questionnaires were distributed, of which a sample of 680 respondents was taken into consideration, namely only complete questionnaires. The survey was conducted in Belgrade and Novi Sad, between June and September 2019.

*Table 1. Categories of SERVQUAL model*

<b>Tangibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convenient location</li> <li>The exterior of the building should be visually appealing</li> <li>* The interior of the building should be visually appealing</li> <li>Availability and attractiveness of brochures, brochures, menus, souvenirs.</li> <li>Satisfactory Food and Drink Quality</li> <li>Satisfying Food &amp; Beverage Assortment</li> <li>Room hygiene at a satisfactory level</li> <li>Hygiene Room, bathrooms at a satisfactory level</li> <li>* Employees act neatly</li> <li>Possibility to organize entertainment programs for guests</li> <li>Availability of appropriate amenities for guest recreation</li> <li>Organizing excursions</li> </ul>
<b>Reliability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Accuracy of personalized services</li> <li>* Troubleshoot delivery problems.</li> <li>* Constant quality of initial and final delivery phase</li> </ul>
<b>Responsibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Engaging versus users</li> <li>* Staff openness to customers</li> <li>* Staff response rate</li> </ul>
<b>Security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Communication, customer communication</li> <li>* Staff Expertise and Staff Competency</li> <li>* Guests of the property should feel safe</li> </ul>
<b>Empathy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Attention to users</li> <li>* The employees of the facility should treat the guests honestly and compassionately</li> <li>* Facility staff should understand the specific needs of their guests</li> </ul>

Source: Survey adapted from a survey based on the SERVPERC scale of the original SERVQUAL model according to: Zeithaml, V. A., Parasuraman, A., Berry, L., L. (1990.): Delivering Quality Service: Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations, The Free Press, New York, 181-183.

Постављене су и хипотезе истраживања:

Ho: There is no statistically significant difference between arithmetic means between pairs of expectations and perception

Ha: There is a statistically significant difference between arithmetic means between pairs of expectations and perception

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The authors presented the data to the World Economic Forum (The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, 2017, 2019). One can notice the position of Serbia in relation to the other 134 countries of the world when it comes to these services. The lowest average grade is Natural Resources 2.01, while the highest Health and Hygiene is 6.04.

*Table 2. Serbia's position in the world and average grade*

	WORLD RANG /134	SCORE
<b>BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT</b>	95	3.38
<b>SAFETY</b>	72	5.41
<b>HEALTH AND HYGIENE</b>	42	6.04
<b>HUMAN RESOURCES AND LABOUR MARKET</b>	82	4.43
<b>PRIORITIZATION OF TRAVEL AND TOURISM</b>	116	3.60
<b>INTERNATIONAL OPENNESS</b>	106	2.41
<b>PRICE COMPETITIVENESS</b>	76	4.82
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY</b>	61	4.18
<b>AIR TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	84	2.35

Source: The Tourism	<b>GROUND AND PORT INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	94	2.77	Travel and
	<b>TOURIST SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	76	3.92	
	<b>NATURAL RESOURCES</b>	130	2.01	
	<b>CULTURAL RESOURCES</b>	71	1.65	

Competitiveness Report, 2017.

Table 2 gives an insight into the average ratings of the aforementioned services, and based on them the position of Serbia in relation to the countries of the region can be established. The best position in the market is occupied by Croatia and the worst by Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Serbia ranks 83rd according to the average ratings of the services provided.

*Table 3. Average ratings and position of Serbia and countries in the region*

	Serbia 83	Montenegro 67	Croatia 27	Slovenia 36	N. Macedonia 101	Bosnia and Herzegovina 105
Global Rank						
Business Environment	4.4	4.6	3.8	4.3	4.3	3.4
Safety	5.5	5.6	5.9	6.1	5.2	5.4
Health and Hygiene	6.3	5.8	6.3	6.2	6.0	5.6
Human Resources and Labour Market	4.7	4.8	4.1	4.9	4.1	4.1
Prioritization of Travel and Tourism	3.9	5.0	4.9	5.1	3.7	4.1
International Openness	3.2	2.4	4.2	3.7	2.3	2.4
Price Competitiveness	5.5	5.6	5.0	5.1	5.8	5.5
Environmental Sustainability	4.5	4.7	5.1	5.4	3.6	4.3
Air Transport Infrastructure	2.6	3.2	3.6	2.6	2.4	2.0
Ground and Port Infrastructure	3.0	3.3	3.9	4.8	2.6	2.4
Tourist Service Infrastructure	3.9	5.5	6.5	5.4	3.9	3.9
Natural Resources	2.1	2.7	4.4	4.1	2.2	1.9
Cultural Resources	1.7	1.1	2.8	1.7	1.4	1.5

Source: The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, 2019.

It is noted that the position of Serbia is not at an enviable level and that services are not in the rank of first destinations by their quality. In order to speed up the process of tourist movement, it is necessary to have better organization in all areas and sectors (equipment, quality and service, overall organization of tourist and hotel facilities). Tourism has become an important source of income for many regions. International tourism is considered to be close to international trade in the environment. The main reasons for this trend were not only due to the external environment, but also due to internal factors such as organization and government policy that failed to encompass tourism as a branch of the economy that may be able to pull a country out of a difficult economic situation. it involves carrying out radical reforms.

The central tendency of numerical features is represented by the arithmetic mean (m), and the scatter by standard deviation (sd). Frequency distribution of numerical characteristics was examined by indicators of curvature (skewness) and elongation (kurtosis). Since all variables were normally distributed, parametric statistics methods were used. A t - test of pairs was used to test for differences, with Pearson correlation coefficient (r) also shown. The significance level selected is 0.05.

**Table 4. item analysis for expectation**

	m	sd
Convenient location	3,28	1,282
The exterior of the building should be visually appealing	3,73	1,112
The interior of the building should be visually appealing	3,71	1,354
Availability and attractiveness of brochures, brochures, menus, souvenirs	3,98	1,127
Satisfactory Food and Drink Quality	4,01	0,975
Satisfying Food & Beverage Assortment	4,29	1,057
Room hygiene at a satisfactory level	4,52	0,763
Hygiene Room, bathrooms at a satisfactory level	4,48	0,801
Employees act neatly	4,66	0,660
Possibility to organize entertainment programs for guests	4,40	0,947
Availability of appropriate amenities for guest recreation	4,68	0,620
Organizing excursions	4,59	0,693
Accuracy of personalized services	4,34	1,107
Troubleshoot delivery problems	4,38	1,112
Constant quality of the initial and final delivery phase	4,50	0,805
Engaging versus users	4,73	0,572
Staff openness to customers	4,40	0,970
Staff response rate	4,35	0,962
Communication, customer communication	4,35	0,964
Staff Expertise and Staff Competency	4,33	0,967
Guests of the property should feel safe	4,31	0,970
Attention to users	4,33	0,971
The employees of the facility should treat the guests with honesty and compassion	4,27	0,982
Facility staff should understand the specific needs of their guests	4,25	0,987

Source: author's research; \* m = arithmetic mean; sd= standard deviation

Table 4 shows the arithmetic value and standard deviation of the questions for all five expectation categories (tangibility, reliability, responsibility, security, and empathy). It can be seen that visitors had relatively high expectations for all services. The lowest value of arithmetic mean is the question regarding the location of the object (m = 3.27, sd = 1.282). Slightly lower values of the arithmetic mean are borne out by the expectations expectations of the interior (m = 3.71, sd = 1.354), exterior (m = 3.73, sd = 1,112) and the availability of brochures and advertising material (m = 3.98, sd = 1,127). . The highest average values of the arithmetic mean are the aitem of user engagement m = 4.73, sd =, 572. Then the item Availability of appropriate amenities for guests' recreation (m = 4.68, sd =, 620).

**Table 5. Aitem analysis for perception**

	m	sd
Convenient location	3,22	1,241
The exterior of the building should be visually appealing	2,91	1,546
The interior of the building should be visually appealing	3,50	1,469
Availability and attractiveness of brochures, brochures, menus, souvenirs	2,64	1,207
Satisfactory Food and Drink Quality	3,85	1,367
Satisfying Food & Beverage Assortment	3,90	1,380
Room hygiene at a satisfactory level	3,16	1,574
Hygiene Room, bathrooms at a satisfactory level	3,35	1,614
Employees act neatly	4,05	1,347
Possibility to organize entertainment programs for guests	3,76	1,513
Availability of appropriate amenities for guest recreation	2,47	1,499
Organizing excursions	3,76	1,595
Accuracy of personalized services	3,48	1,490
Troubleshoot delivery problems	4,06	1,330
Constant quality of the initial and final delivery phase	3,69	1,315

Engaging versus users	3,94	1,305
Staff openness to customers	3,72	1,543
Staff response rate	3,99	1,448
Communication, customer communication	4,19	1,254
Staff Expertise and Staff Competency	3,84	1,300
Guests of the property should feel safe	3,60	1,312
Attention to users	4,04	1,234
The employees of the facility should treat the guests with honesty and compassion	3,77	1,318
Facility staff should understand the specific needs of their guests	4,44	1,082

Source: Author's research; \*  $m$  = аритметичка средина;  $sd$  = стандардна девијација

Table 5 shows the results of the descriptive analysis for the perception patterns. The highest rating was given to services related to the empathy category, namely the item that refers to the understanding of the specific needs of users by employees ( $m = 4.44$   $sd = 1,082$ ). High value of arithmetic mean is also the point of handling and communication with users ( $m = 4,19$ ,  $sd = 1,254$ ). An average grade of over 4 is also borne by the orderliness of the employees, as well as by solving the problem of service delivery. The availability of promotional material was the lowest ( $m = 2.64$ ,  $sd = 1.207$ ).

**Table 6. T-test of statistical significance of difference of arithmetic mean of expectation and perception (SERVQUAL gap)**

Dimension	$m_p$	$sd_p$	$m_e$	$sd_e$	$mp-me$	t (679)	p	L95%	U95%
Tangibility	3,38	0,381	4,19	0,269	-0,81	48,528	0,000*	0,779	0,845
Reliability	3,74	0,757	4,40	0,595	-0,66	15,399	0,000*	0,576	0,744
Responsibility	3,88	1,107	4,49	0,579	-0,60	12,481	0,000*	0,510	0,701
Security	4,08	0,814	4,28	0,843	-0,20	4,760	0,000*	0,118	0,283
Empathy	3,88	0,884	4,33	0,840	-0,45	9,216	0,000*	0,357	0,550
Sum	3,79	0,323	4,34	0,399	-0,55				

\*  $m_p$  = arithmetic value of a pair of perceptions;  $m_e$  = the arithmetic value of the expectation pair;  $m_p - m_e$  = value of the gap of expectations and perception; t (679) = t value and degree of freedom; p = statistical significance; CI = confidence interval (L (lower), U (upper)). \*  $p < 0.05$  statistically significant

The difference between perceived and expected quality is negative for all dimensions of quality. The highest expectations have the category responsibility  $m = 4.49$ , while the lowest value has the category tangibility  $m = 4.19$ . Visitors also had high expectations for the reliability category  $m = 4.40$ . The highest grade was given the safety category  $m = 4.0833$  and the lowest tangibility  $m = 3.38$ . The total SERVQUAL is negative and is  $-0.55$ . A score difference of 0.81 for the tangibility dimension was found to be statistically significant and confirmed by a 95% confidence interval ( $t = 6796$ ,  $p < 0.05$  CI 95% (L = 0.779; U = 0.845)). In other words, the expectation of tangibility was significantly higher. from the perception of the same in the average respondent.

The average expectation of the reliability dimension is  $m = 4.40$  ( $sd = 0.595$ ). However, the average value of perception at reliability also partly positive rating  $m = 3.74$  ( $sd = 0.757$ ). The obtained difference in values expectation reliability and perceived reliability, however, proved to be statistically significant:  $mp - me = 0.66$  ( $t = 679$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; CI 95% (L = 0.576; U = 0.744)). The value of the arithmetic mean on the expectation responsibility subscale is  $m_e = 4.49$  ( $sd = 0.579$ ), while the same value on the perception responsibility subscale is  $m_p = 3.88$ . A score difference of 0.60 was found to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ;  $t = 679$ , CI 95%). The arithmetic mean of expectations, the dimensions of security, as well as the perception of the same dimension, carry a partly positive rating. Although the difference in points was only 0.20, it still proved statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The subscale expectation of the empathy dimension was rated partly positive ( $m_e = 4.33$ ,  $sd = 0,840$ ), and the perception of empathy carried the score 3.88 ( $sd = 0.884$ ). The difference in the average between expectation and perception of empathy ( $mp - me = 0.55$ ) was estimated statistically significant, confirming the value of  $p < 0.05$ , and the confidence interval ( $t = 7679$ ; CI 95% (L = 0.357; U = 0.550) ). Based on the values presented and the differences of the arithmetic means for the dimensions of the couple's expectation and perception, it is concluded that the visitors had significantly higher expectations. The realized value of the t test, for a given number of degrees of freedom and a significance threshold  $p < 0.05$ , with a confidence interval of 95%, indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected and

confirmation is obtained by the alternative hypothesis. there is a statistically significant difference in the arithmetic values of expectation and perception pairs.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Tourism is considered to have an explicit impact on macroeconomic aggregates and increases the macroeconomic stability of each country, thereby accelerating regional and local development and increasing employment in underdeveloped areas. Many transition countries view tourism as a development opportunity that will allow them to enter international economic flows thanks to the valorisation of natural and anthropogenic attractions. The tourism sector in Serbia, in comparison with other sectors, has never been a major player in the state economy, although there are real conditions and all the prerequisites for this. The authors of the paper presented the position of Serbian tourism in the world and the region, with average ratings for certain services. It can be observed that the situation is not at an enviable level (Gajic et al, 2018). Tourist satisfaction is a very important indicator that is measured in various ways. This is the attitude that tourists take after using tourist services. The results of the survey showed that guests are generally not satisfied with the tourist services. Their expectations were higher than the perceived quality of service in all determinants. Statistical analysis confirmed the alternative hypothesis; there is a statistically significant difference between the arithmetic values of the expectation and perception pairs.

Given that tourism in Serbia can have a wide impact on socio-economic relations and given the need for systemic solutions within national economies, appropriate economic policies of the state and the international community, it has all the characteristics of being subject to macroeconomic analysis. There are numerous limitations to this type of research, however, the importance of the research is reflected in determining the current position of Serbian tourism, looking at limiting factors and finding adequate solutions to improve the position on the world market. Some of the assumptions of better positioning rely on suggestions of corrective measures. Public-private partnerships in local communities need to be strengthened. Next, include a wider area in the program, which requires education and advice from a developed international tourism organization. The organization of the tourist offer is necessary, which includes: a multi-day nature vacation that includes easy walks, one-day excursions and excursions; multi-day sports preparations; observing in nature or a weekend in nature with a tour of cultural and historical monuments; hiking, speleology, fishing, cycling, horseback riding. In order to market Serbia in the tourism market, it is necessary to find a good in-bound operator who can sell the product. Develop the use of our own tourist offices for limited in-bound operations based on local rather than mass tourism (Hyunsuk et al, 2020). Furthermore, it must be emphasized that much stronger and better cooperation with foreign tourist operators is required. Investing time and money comes first, but above all investing in the development of tourist infrastructure, small family or private hotels with a comfortable environment and hospitality.

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