



Comparative Analysis on the Clients' Perception of the Quality of Tourist Products and Services

Gina-Ionela Butnaru^{1*}

¹Lecturer Ph.D., Department of Economy and Business Administration, Alexandru Ioan. Cuza. University of Iași, Romania.

Supported by European Social Fund through Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013, project number POSDRU/1.5/S/59184 "Performance and excellence in postdoctoral research in Romanian economics science domain"

*Corresponding author.

Address: Bulevardul Carol I, Nr.11, Iasi, Romania, Corp B, Etaj 1, Secretariat FEAA, Sala B425, 700506

Email: gina.butnaru@uaic.ro

Received 17 July 2011; accepted 20 August 2011

Abstract

In general, the technical progress, especially the innovation and progress of the telecommunication means, the development of the cultural, educational, and professional level have determined a rapid development and evolution of preferences and tastes concerning the choice of a certain tourist destination by potential clients. From this point of view, the quality of tourist products is considered as depending on the beauty of the tourist patrimony, on the accessibility, and on the technical performances of the tourist infrastructure, on the professionalism and competence of the service providing personnel. In this context, the subjective factor has a major influence in the clients' evaluation of the qualitative level of a tourist product. Thus, a higher quality of a tourist product cannot always compensate the lower quality of another. Consequently, the buying clients wish to be informed correctly and thoroughly in what concerns the quality of the chosen tourist product, so as to be able to choose the product which best meets the level of their expectations. This study, referring to the perception of the clients of tourist receiving structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț (Romania) in what concerns the quality of the tourist products and services offered, has the purpose to identify the points of view of the tourist consumers.

Key words: Quality; Tourist product; Market

research; Clients' evaluation; Qualitative level; Perception of the clients

Gina-Ionela Butnaru (2011). Comparative Analysis on the Clients' Perception of the Quality of Tourist Products and Services. *International Business and Management*, 3(1), 63-76. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ibm/article/view/j.ibm.1923842820110301.088> DOI: 10.3968/j.ibm.1923842820110301.088

INTRODUCTION

Specialty literature offers several meanings to the quality concept, term derived from the Latin "*qualitas*", *i.e.* "characteristic" or "way of being". However, the shortest and the most used definition is considered to be: quality as "*the aptitude for the use*" (Juran, 2002). Consequently, in the economic field, where the term has the highest frequency, quality can be defined as "*the totality of characteristics and features of a product or service, joined in order to satisfy a certain specified or implied necessity*" (British Standard 4778, 1987).

The specified or implied necessity means that the client becomes eventually the quality referee. The activities developed in the service providing companies involve the clients' necessities. For example, in the moment of closing a service providing contract, these new types of necessities can be established in a mutual agreement with the client. They become then a series of expectations from the clients' point of view - concerning the type of service which they would desire, or as long as they are willing to pay for that type of service, and so on. If these expectations are greater than the ones desired or imagined by the clients, then they will be satisfied, and they will have a "quality" experience. However, if these unwritten expectations are not in agreement with the ones desired or imagined by the clients, then quality cannot be offered, and consequently the clients and their expectations will

remain unsatisfied. These differences between the clients' expectations and the offer of the required services were very well studied by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (Melidonioti, M. & Gotzamani, K., 2007).

In ISO 9000-2000 standard, quality is defined as “*the degree in which a totality of intrinsic characteristics fulfil the demands*”.

Quality nowadays has become a strategic element in the service providing companies, due to the fact that it determines “*competitiveness*” at its highest degree. In the European Quality Chart, quality is defined as “*the key to competitiveness*” of the companies, which should work towards the mutual objective of quality promotion in all the countries from the European Union.

The concept of quality must be analysed from the point of view of both the consumer (the client), and of the provider (the producer). For the consumer, quality means “*the satisfaction which a certain good can offer in its use or consumption*” (Maxim, E., 2007), and for the producer, quality means “*the level of the characteristics of the products or services offered to the clients*” (Juran, J., M., 2000). Therefore, we can conclude that the companies have the clients' demands as a reference of the quality performed. This is why the clients' expectations must be thoroughly analysed, “*both from the perspective of the results, and from the perspective of the realization process*” (Maxim, E., 2007). Among the factors determining the clients' expectations we mention: the experience they had regarding a past offer from the company, the dialogue with other clients, the expectations in what concerns solving a problem, and so on.

Other *notions* are also correlated with the concept of quality:

- *Quality management*, defined as the totality of the modalities to obtain quality;
- *Quality planning*, activity implying the establishment of the objectives;
- *Quality control*, process measuring the results;
- *Quality improvement*, process of positive change of the company performances;
- *Quality objective*, an active target of the quality;
- *Zero defects*, *i.e.* a product with no flaws; this notion is practically a slogan used to stimulate quality (Crosby, 1984).

With such a multidimensional character, quality is also of several types (Armean, P., 2003):

- *Designed quality* – it involves individual values of the product, at a level chosen as a result of the comparison among several alternatives, in order to satisfy the clients' needs;
- *Prescribed quality* – it indicates the level of the product characteristics as compared to the standards and norms;
- *Certified quality* – having the characteristics of a product certified by a competent commission;
- *Real quality* – the real product quality level

determined at a certain moment;

- *Commercial quality* – concerning commercial characteristics;
- *Contracted quality* – the level of the quality characteristics established between the parts involved.

Meanwhile, quality allows the economic units to benefit of a competition advantage, because by quality, each organization is different from the other, with similar products or services. On the other hand, quality is in a close correlation with the field of marketing, because the marketing decisions must consider quality, for it “*influences the volume of services demand and the structure of the clientele*” (Niță, V., 2004). The exhaustive definition, joining a great part of the definitions given to the term along the time, is as follows: “*quality represents the aptitude of an entity to dispose of a totality of intrinsic characteristics, which offer it the possibility to satisfy in a certain degree some specified or implied necessities*” (Maxim, E., 2007).

1. RESEARCH CONCERNING THE CLIENTS' PERCEPTION OF TOURIST ACCOMMODATION STRUCTURES FROM THE AREAS VATRA DORNEI AND NEAMȚ (ROMANIA) REGARDING THE QUALITY OF TOURIST PRODUCTS AND SERVICES OFFERED. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS 2008 - 2009

1.1 A Short Presentation of the Two Regions

Neamț County lies in the north-east of Romania, in the central-northern part of Moldavia, covering the basins of Siret, Bistrița and Moldavia rivers (the two rivers are tributaries on the right of the river Siret), being guarded, at the same time, by the high peaks of Ceahlău (1907 m), Bistrița (1753 m) and Tarcău (1662 m) Mountains. The county lies between 46°40' and 47°20' North latitude, and 25°43' East longitude.

The relief of the county has the shape of a huge amphitheatre, its tiers decreasing from west to east, depending on the succession of landforms: the Eastern Carpathians, the Moldavian Sub-Carpathians, the Moldavian Plateau, as well as the large valley couloirs of Siret and Moldavia, its tributary. The natural tourist potential of Neamț County is only partly used, the mountainous and sub-mountainous areas having most advantages from this point of view.

Out of the mountainous units above, the Ceahlău Massif particularly stands out in the landscape, definitely prevailing over the neighbouring geographical units. Ceahlău National Park covers more than 8,000 hectares. More than 1,100 species of flowers and 90 species of birds

and animals (such as the edelweiss, the Chamois, the lynx etc) are protected by law in this park.

Neamț County has an important man-built tourist potential, but it is only partly turned to good account. The strong orthodox monastery life in the Neamț area has brought about the appellation of Romania's Athos Mountain, due to the greatest density of monasteries and hermitages in the country. The man-built tourist stock is made up of cultural-historical, ethno-cultural and ethno-folklore targets that point out the cultural-artistic and historical patrimony. From this point of view, the county comprises more than 350 historical and architectural monuments, whose artistic vigour is derived from the creative vein of the Romanian people.

Of all the depressions from Suceava County, Dornelor Basin is endowed with the greatest tourist potential, the natural environment harmoniously combining with ethnographical and folklore elements. The spa potential and peat bogs of Poiana Stampei round off the special tourist strengths of this area. Carbo-gaseous waters are the greatest wealth of all the mineral waters of the county. The main mineral water concentration lies in Dornelor Depression (more than 40 springs). Recently, people have begun to practise rafting on the mountain rivers surrounding the resort Vatra Dornei.

The Romanian village took preserve in some areas where the authenticity, traditions and folk customs, old by hundred years, have been transmitted. The rituals can command respect through formal and conventional behaviours, working after unwritten laws. Those characters are magic or religious, sometimes playing a social function role (maintaining some behaviour rules). The birth, the marriage, the funeral are rituals full of cultural values, which could be aesthetically and artistically picked up especially by foreigner tourists. The proper religious celebrations like Christmas, Easter, orthodox monasteries celebrations, are also important cultural manifestations.

1.2 Objectives and Method

The research realised for the elaboration of this work has the main purpose to learn about the managers' perception regarding the tourist accommodation structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț, in what concerns the quality of tourist products and services offered.

The objectives of the research regarding the purpose mentioned above were as follows:

O.1. To obtain the necessary data for the realization of a complex market research, using as a data collecting instrument the questionnaire applied to the clients of the tourist accommodation structures.

O.2. The comparative analysis 2008 – 2009 of the data obtained as a result of the research regarding the clients' perception of the quality of tourist products and services offered by the tourist accommodation structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț.

The working hypotheses concerning the basis of the present research are as follows:

H.1. The perceptions of the clients from the tourist accommodation structures of the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț are different for the two periods of time under study.

H.2. There is a certain degree of subjectivism of the clients from the tourist accommodation structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț concerning the quality of tourist products and services offered.

1.3 Research Methodology

The methods used in this research were varied and in agreement with the objective established. These methods are as follows:

- The documented study which consists of two aspects: the bibliographical documentation from internal sources, and the bibliographical documentation from external sources;

- The theoretical analysis;
- The observation;
- The practical documentation and gathering the informative material by field research;

- Statistical data analysis;

- The exploratory study, which means obtaining the data with the help of the inquiry, using the questionnaire applied to the clients of tourist accommodation structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț - Romania (109 clients in the area Vatra Dornei and 121 clients in the area Neamț) as a data collecting instrument. This inquiry had the result of obtaining quantitative data essential for the research;

- The synthesis of the information. The information was gathered and processed with the SPSS 13.0 programmes for centralising the information, and Excel for centralising the frequencies.

The theoretical documentation had the purpose to identify and to review the level of knowledge in the field of quality of tourist products and services. The documentation sources used in the theoretical documentation were: specialty literature, specialty magazines, studies, official statistics, etc., available at "M. Eminescu" Central University Library from Iași, "Gh. Asachi" Library from Iași, The French Cultural Centre library from Iași, The Canadian Cultural Centre library from Iași, "British Council" Library from Iași, Romania, etc. In order to realize the inquiry by questionnaire we used a questionnaire with ramifications applied to the clients of the tourist accommodation structures. The questionnaire consisted mainly of closed questions, its manner of administration being the oral inquiry, face to face (Albu, M.,2000).

The research area consists of two tourist Romanian areas:

- Vatra Dornei tourist area;
- Neamț tourist area.

The intended group of subjects is formed by the total number of clients of tourist accommodation structures from the area under study which were functioning during that particular period of time;

The resulted group of subjects is formed by:

- *A target group for Vatra Dornei tourist area:* 39 clients of tourist accommodation structures (hotels, tourist B&B, and agricultural tourism), representing the total present population during the development of the research in the locations under study on October 11th, 18th, and 25th, 2008;

- *A target group for Neamț tourist area:* 43 clients of tourist accommodation structures (hotels, tourist B&B, and agricultural tourism), representing the total present population during the development of the research in the locations under study on October 11th, 18th, and 25th, 2008.

The research area:

Table 1
The Research Area

The research area	frequency
Dornelor Area	109
Neamt Area	121

The structure of the target group in percentages is presented in Figure 1:

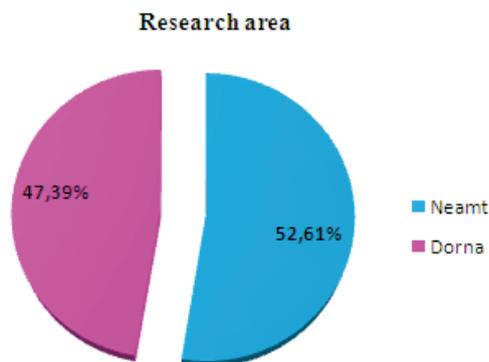


Figure 1
Structure of the Target Group

As we also repeated the research in the year 2009, we used as subjects the target group from the year 2008, because we intended to make a comparative analysis of the results obtained after the research concerning the perception of the clients of the tourist accommodation structures referring to the quality of tourist products and services offered. We also used the same periods of time for the development of the research. The questionnaire was applied on October 10th, 17th, and 24th, 2009. We mention that both in the year 2008, and in the year 2009, the three days of research were the Saturdays from the middle weeks of the month of October.

We intended by this research to get information from the clients of the tourist accommodation structures in the research area regarding the quality of tourist products and

services offered to them. We elaborated a questionnaire for the two categories of subjects (clients of the tourist accommodation structures from Vatra Dornei area, and from Neamț area), whose questions targeted the general objectives of this research.

The statistical analysis was realized according to the methods recommended in the Romanian and foreign specialty literature.

1.4 Observations concerning the elaboration of the questionnaire applied to the clients of the tourist receiving structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț (România)

The realisation of the questionnaire is a highly important activity for the future development of the research based on a poll inquiry. From a structural point of view, the questionnaire applied to the clients of tourist receiving structures contains an introductory phrase emphasizing its purpose, followed by the questions of the inquiry.

Question No. 1 is formulated in order to find out the location of the tourists' accommodation. A nominal scale is used.

Question No. 2 contains a nominal scale which allows us to classify the tourists according to their gender.

Question No. 3 contains an ordinal scale in order to find out the tourists' level of education, taking into account the fact that they can influence in a significant way the orientation towards a more or less qualitative product or service.

Question No. 4 contains a nominal scale in order to find out which is the profession of the tourists inquired, taking into account the fact that the profession influences in a significant way the orientation towards a more or less qualitative product or service.

Question No. 5 has the purpose to classify the tourists according to their age; a nominal scale is used.

Question No. 6 contains a nominal scale and allows to classify the tourists according to their social status.

Question No. 7 contains an ordinal scale and allows to classify the tourists according to their monthly income per family.

Questions No. 8, 9 and 10 are formulated in order to find out which is the purpose of the tourists' voyage, and their preferences for the chosen destination. Nominal scales were used.

Question No. 11 contains a nominal scale which allows us to identify which are the persons with whom the tourists prefer to travel.

Question No. 12 contains a nominal scale which allows us to find out how the travel was organized.

Question No. 13 is formulated in order to classify the tourists according to the way of transportation they used. A nominal scale is used.

Question No. 14 is formulated in order to find out

which are the types of entertainment preferred by the tourists. A nominal scale is used.

Question No. 15 contains an ordinal differential scale which allows us to organize the different “services” from a tourist product, according to the importance given by the client.

Question No. 16 contains an ordinal scale, and it was formulated to classify the tourist accommodation structures according to the category of comfort.

Question No. 17 and 18 contain an ordinal differential scale allowing us to organize the different “attributes” of a tourist accommodation structure, according to the importance given by the client.

Question No. 19 invites the clients of tourist accommodation structures to express their opinion regarding a series of aspects related to the accommodation unit. For the measurement it was used an alternative of the ordinal scale, with the organization of the preferences, as it follows: the subject has to grade each scaled characteristic from 1 to 5, according to the most representative qualification in his/her opinion.

Question No. 20 contains an ordinal scale, and it was introduced with the purpose to obtain evaluations concerning the behaviour of the personnel of the tourist accommodation structures from the research area.

Question No. 21 contains an ordinal differential scale which allows us to organize the clients’ preferences for the extra services offered by the tourist accommodation structures from the research area.

Question No. 22 is an open question addressed to the clients with the purpose to find out which service is the most appreciated by the tourists of the tourist accommodation structure. A nominal scale is used.

Question No. 23 contains a nominal scale in order to find out the information sources which are at the basis of the decision to get accommodation at a certain tourist accommodation structure from the research area.

Question No. 24 is addressed to the tourists with the purpose to find out if the price paid for the services offered is in direct proportion with their quality. A scalar scale is used.

For the **Question No. 25**, a nominal scale was used from the questionnaire, and we intended to find out if tourists would spend much more for a higher quality standard.

The tourists who answered positively at question no 25 will go to **Question No. 26**, which contains a scalar scale, and which was formulated in order to find out the amount of additional money they would be willing to spend.

For **Question No. 27** an ordinal scale was used, and this was introduced in the questionnaire with the purpose to find out to what extent the tourists are bothered by the pollution effects caused by the locals’ incorrect behaviour.

Question No. 28 is formulated in order to ask the tourists if they found sufficient information about the possibilities of entertainment from the research area. A scalar scale is used.

Question No. 29 is an open question formulated in order to ask the tourists about their reason to come back to the area.

Question No. 30 is formulated to ask the tourists if they would recommend the places they visited to other persons.

Question No. 31 they could also specify the number of persons to whom they would recommend that particular tourist area.

2. STATISTICAL RESEARCH BASED ON THE FREQUENCY OF THE QUALITY OF TOURIST PRODUCTS AND SERVICES DEMANDED BY THE CLIENTS OF TOURIST ACCOMMODATION STRUCTURES FROM THE AREAS VATRA DORNEI AND NEAMŢ (ROMANIA)

Quality of tourist accommodation structures implies *the quality of the check in equipment, but also the quality of the bedclothes, furniture, plumbing, and the last, but not the least, of the personnel*. In this context, the quality accommodation services get a series of aspects as emphasised in Table 2:

Table 2
Types of Quality Accommodation Services

Classifica-tion criteria	Types	Defining elements
Spatial quality	Accessibility	It refers to: - means of transportation (by air, land, or water);
	Clarity of the sign posts	- type of transportation from the client’ s home to the location of the hotel. It refers to all the efforts which the client should make for the orientation in order to find the hotel
	Parking and other facilities for cars	The certainty of finding a parking lot when the client goes to a hotel
	Possibilities offered by the neighbouring environment of the hotel	It involves the existence of some real attractions: sports equipment, cultural animation, different types of commerce, entertainment (casino).

To be continued

Continued

Classification criteria	Types	Defining elements
Quality of the choice	Diversity of offers	The client will appreciate the offer of different rooms, each with a specific ambient
	Variety of services	In several cases, the accommodation areas also offer other services beside the basic one, as the following: restaurant, sauna, swimming pool, etc.
General Quality	Material parameter	There are 5 types of norms: material norms, usage norms, maintenance norms, cleaning norms, security norms.
	Personnel availability	The existence of an adequate number of employed personnel to deal with the clients
Relational Quality	Direct Relational Quality: employed personnel - client	The quality of receiving a client in a hotel determines the most often the future attitude of the client, either of rejection, or of trust. In other words, the personnel should realize the three relational elements: the verbal, the visible, the gestures or the behaviour
	Indirect Relational Quality	It refers to the fact that the services take place in areas shared by other clients.

Adapted after Niță, V. and Butnaru, G., I., 2007

For example in Romania, in order to reach a high level of quality at the standards demanded by the client it is necessary to solve some present tourism and hospitality industry issues.

We need to move from the slogan “*I have enough experience and I know what quality means in a hotel*” to the slogan “*I am always ready to learn anything new which means for my hotel more clients, and more faithful ones*” (Rotaru, I., 2004). Consequently, there are four stages to go through, as it follows:

- *The first stage* consists in the general information of the whole personnel regarding the quality problems, especially the ones related to quality management;

- *The second stage* consists in the selection from the personnel of the ones who want to consider this information, transforming it into knowledge, habits, and activity patterns, and who, cooperating with the specialists from outside the company, will have as mission and attributions the design, the implementation, the certification and the permanent improvement of some quality management systems in accordance with different codes and models of good operational and managerial practices;

- *The third stage* consists in designing and implementing the quality management system in the company.

- *The last stage* consists in the certification of the system conformity with a reference adopted by the company as a model of good practice.

This action is run through an external audit realized by an independent certification organism, and it ends by the emission of a conformity certificate, followed by a certification mark. This certification mark is the main marketing instrument of the company, the main factor for attraction, selection, and fidelisation of the clients of the accommodation unit.

Knowing that a completely integrated tourist product is joining four categories of tourist services (*accommodation, transportation, food, entertainment*), the questionnaire applied to the clients also included a question from which we could get the qualitative appreciation of services of which the clients of the tourist accommodation structures from the research area benefited.

In table 3(a) and (b) it was calculated the average of the frequency of the answers received to the question no 15 from the questionnaire, addressed to the clients of the tourist accommodation structures concerning the quality services in the tourist areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. For these answers we used the following grading system:

- Factor A (Vatra Dornei area and Neamț area) for *the quality levels 1...5 (1 - very satisfied, 2 - satisfied, 3 - neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied, 4 - dissatisfied, 5 - very dissatisfied, or I don't know, I will not answer)*

- Factor B of appreciation of quality services for *the levels 1...4 (accommodation, transportation, food, and entertainment).*

The purpose was the identification of the significant influence factors in order of their importance.

Table 3 (a)
Centralizer with the Frequency Average of the Answers Received to the Question No 15 from the Questionnaire, Addressed to the Clients of the Tourist Accommodation Structures Concerning Quality Services in the Tourist Areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 – 2009

Aij Factor 2008	Quality accommodation services	Quality transportation services	Quality food services	Quality entertainment services	Frequency average 2008
	%	%	%	%	%
A11	26.6	26.6	39.8	31.2	31.05
A12	62.4	41.3	45.9	48.7	49.57
A13	11	29.4	11.9	18.3	17.65
A14	0	2.7	0	0	0.68
A15	0	0	2.4	1.8	1.05
A21	44.6	37.8	24	35.5	35.48
A22	55.4	42	68.6	49.6	53.9
A23	0	13.5	7.4	12.4	8.32
A24	0	1.7	0	0	0.42
A25	0	5	0	2.5	1.88

Table 3 (b)
Centralizer with the Frequency Average of the Answers Received to the Question No 15 from the Questionnaire, Addressed to the Clients of the Tourist Accommodation Structures Concerning Quality Services in the Tourist Areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 – 2009

Aij Factor 2009	Quality accommodation services	Quality transportation services	Quality food services	Quality entertainment services	Frequency average 2009
	%	%	%	%	%
A11	28.4	28.4	39.4	30.3	31.63
A12	61.5	41.3	46.8	49.5	49.78
A13	10.1	27.5	11	16.5	16.27
A14	0	2.8	2.8	0.9	1.62
A15	0	0	0	2.8	0.7
A21	43.8	33.9	23.1	34.7	33.87
A22	55.4	40.5	62.8	48.8	51.87
A23	0.8	15.7	11.6	10.7	9.7
A24	0	3.2	0.8	2.5	1.63
A25	0	6.7	1.7	3.3	2.93

Significance: A11 – Vatra Dornei area, answer alternative “1”; A21 – Neamț area, answer alternative “1”, A12 – Vatra Dornei area, answer alternative “2”, etc.

The values from Table 2(a) and (b) are presented graphically in Figure 2 – The histogram of the frequency average concerning quality tourist services for the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative analysis 2008 – 2009.

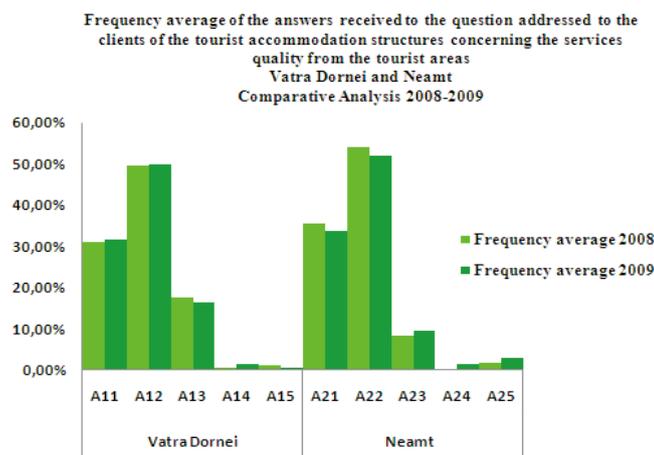


Figure 2
The Histogram of the Frequency Average Concerning the Quality of Tourist Services for the Areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 – 2009

From the graphical representation of the values it results that:

- In Vatra Dornei area, in the year 2008, from the 109 clients who benefited from the services offered by the tourist accommodation structures under research, 62.4% were satisfied with the accommodation services, while 11% were neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied; 41.3% were satisfied with the transportation services, and 2.7% were dissatisfied; 45.9% were satisfied with the food services, and 2.4% were very dissatisfied; 48.7% were satisfied with the entertainment services, and 1.8% were very dissatisfied. *Calculating the frequency average it results that 49.57% of the 109 clients were satisfied with the tourist products and services offered by the tourist accommodation structures from the area Vatra Dornei.* In the year 2009, from the 109 clients who benefited from the services offered by the tourist accommodation structures under research, 61.5% were satisfied with the accommodation services, while 10.1% were neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied; 41.3 % were satisfied with the transportation services, and 2.8% were dissatisfied; 46.8% were satisfied with the food services, and 2.8% were very dissatisfied; 49,5% were satisfied with the entertainment services, and 2.8% were very dissatisfied. *Calculating the frequency average it results that 49.78% of the 109 clients were satisfied with the tourist products and services offered by the tourist accommodation structures from Vatra Dornei area.* Making a comparative analysis, we can say that in the year 2009, according to the results obtained, we registered a slight increase (with 0.21%) of the frequency average reflecting the quality degree of tourist products and services offered by tourist accommodation structures from Vatra Dornei area.

- In Neamț area, in the year 2008, from the 121 clients who benefited from the services offered by the tourist accommodation structures under research, 44.6% were

very satisfied with the accommodation services, and 55.4% were satisfied; 37.8% were very satisfied with the transportation services, and 42% satisfied, 13.5% neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied, 1.7% dissatisfied, and 5% very dissatisfied; 68.6% were satisfied with the food services, and 49.6% were satisfied with the entertainment services. *Calculating the frequency average it results that 53.9% of the 121 clients were satisfied with the tourist products and services offered by the tourist accommodation structures from Neamț area.* In the year 2009, from the 121 clients who benefited from the services offered by the tourist accommodation structures under research, 43.8% were very satisfied with the accommodation services, and 0, 8% were neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied; 33.9% were very satisfied with the transportation services, and 40.5% satisfied, 15.7% neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied, 3.2% dissatisfied, and 6.7% very dissatisfied; 62.8% declared that they were satisfied with the food services, and 48.8% were satisfied with the entertainment services. *Calculating the frequency average it results that 51.87% of the 121 clients were satisfied with the tourist products and services offered by the tourist accommodation structures from Neamț area.* Making a comparative analysis for the two periods under research, we notice that in Neamț area it was registered a slight decrease (with 1.03%) of the frequency reflecting the answers for the clients' perception concerning the quality of tourist products and services consumed.

On a calculus chain at different sublevels of factor B (*exterior aspect, location, name and reputation, ambient, services offered, diversity and quality of the menu, prices, other facilities and endowments*), we calculated the average of the answers obtained at question no 17 from the questionnaire applied to the clients of the tourist accommodation structures from the research area.

The values obtained are presented in Table 4(a); 4(b):

Table 4(a)
Centralizer with the Frequency Average of the Answers Received to the Question No 17 from the Questionnaire Addressed to the Clients of the Tourist Accommodation Structures Concerning the Choice of the Accommodation Structures in the Tourist Areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 – 2009

Aij Factor 2008	Exterior aspect	Location	Name and reputation	Ambient	Services offered	Diversity and quality of the	Prices	Other facilities and endowments menu	Frequency average 2008
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
A11	16.5	25.7	17.5	30.3	44	41.3	47.7	10.1	29.14
A12	28.4	19.3	26.6	33	42.2	24.8	18.4	28.4	27.64
A13	35.8	48.6	27.5	34.9	13.8	32.1	33.9	52.3	34.86
A14	19.3	4.6	16.5	0	0	1.8	0	9.2	6.42
A15	0	1.8	11.9	1.8	0	0	0	0	1.94
A21	20.7	42.1	14.9	56.2	64.4	20.7	55.4	9.9	35.54
A22	31.4	39.7	48.8	34.7	33.1	65.3	24.8	34.7	39.06
A23	35.5	18.2	18.2	6.6	2.5	14	15.7	52.9	20.45
A24	8.3	0	10.7	0	0	0	4.1	2.5	3.2
A25	4.1	0	7.4	2.5	0	0	0	0	1.75

Table 4(b)
Centralizer with the Frequency Average of the Answers Received to the Question No 17 from the Questionnaire Addressed to the Clients of the Tourist Accommodation Structures Concerning the Choice of the Accommodation Structures in the Tourist Areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 – 2009

Aij Factor 2009	Exterior aspect	Location	Name and reputation	Ambient	Services offered	Diversity and quality of the	Prices	Other facilities and endowments menu	Frequency average 2009
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
A11	16.5	23.9	16.5	29.4	42.2	37.6	44	10.1	27.53
A12	26.6	23.9	25.7	33	40.4	24.8	20.2	24.8	27.42
A13	39.5	45.8	29.4	34.9	16.5	33.9	34.9	55	36.24
A14	17.4	4.6	18.3	0.9	0.9	3.7	0.9	9.2	6.98
A15	0	1.8	10.1	1.8	0	0	0	0.9	1.83
A21	21.5	37.9	17.4	53.6	59.5	21.4	55.4	10.7	34.67
A22	29.8	39.7	42.1	33.1	33.1	59.5	20.7	33.9	36.49
A23	37.4	20.7	19.8	9.1	7.4	17.4	19.8	51.2	22.85
A24	9.6	1.7	12.4	1.7	0	1.7	4.1	3.4	4.32
A25	1.7	0	8.3	2.5	0	0	0	0.8	1.67

Significance: A11 – Vatra Dornei area, answer alternative “1”; A21 – Neamț area, answer alternative “1”, A12 – Vatra Dornei area, answer alternative “2”, etc.

The values from Table 4(a) and (b) are presented graphically in Figure 3 – The histogram of the frequency average concerning the choice of the accommodation structures from the areas Vatra Dornei - Neamț. Comparative analysis 2008 – 2009.

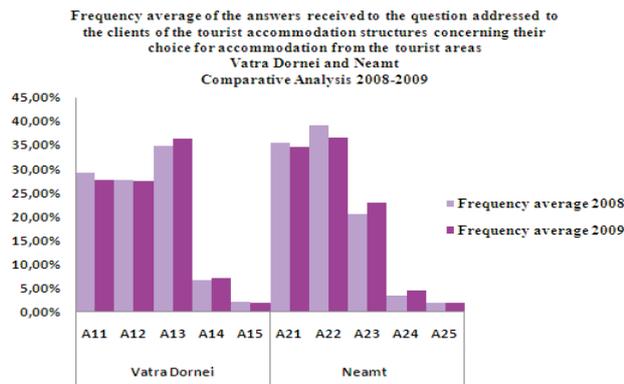


Figure 3
The Histogram of the Frequency Average Concerning the Choice of the Accommodation Structures in the Areas Vatra Dornei - Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 – 2009

From the graphical representation of the frequency average of the answers received it results that for the eight quality attributes (*exterior aspect, location, name and reputation, ambient, services offered, diversity and quality of the menu, prices, other facilities and endowments*) chosen for the two areas under research, the following results were obtained:

- In Vatra Dornei area, in the year 2008, from the 109 clients, 34.86% declared that these quality attributes were important for the choice of the tourist accommodation structures, 29.14% declared that they were extremely important, and 27.64% declared that they were very

important; in the year 2009, from the 109 clients, 36.24% declared that these quality attributes were important for the choice of the tourist accommodation structures, 27.53% declared they were extremely important, and 27.42% declared they were very important. Making a comparative analysis, we can say that in the year 2009, according to the results obtained, we registered a slight increase (with 1.38%) of the frequency average of the answers reflecting the quality of the choice of tourist accommodation structures from Vatra Dornei area.

- In Neamț area, in the year 2008, from the 121 clients, 39.06% declared that these quality attributes were very important for the choice of the tourist accommodation structures, while 35.54% declared that they were extremely important; in the year 2009, from the 121 clients, 36.49% declared these quality attributes were very important for the choice of the tourist accommodation structures, while 34.67% declared that they were extremely important. Making a comparative analysis for the two periods under research, we notice that in Neamț area it was registered a slight decrease (with 2.57%) of the frequency average of the answers reflecting the quality of the choice of tourist accommodation structures.

According to the results obtained for the two research areas, we can say that the clients’ preferences concerning the choice of the tourist accommodation structures are generally the same, they are positive, and they confirm the fact that the clients are not indifferent in what concerns the aspects of the quality of tourist products and services.

In Table 5(a) and (b) we calculated the frequency average of the answers received to question no 18 from the questionnaire applied to the clients of the tourist accommodation structures from the research areas, on four quality sublevels (*spatial quality, quality of the choice, general quality, and relational quality*). For each sublevel we made the average of the values of appreciation in order of their importance, and with the purpose of a correct evaluation of the basic criterion.

Table 5(a)
Centralizer with the Frequency Average of the Answers Received to the Question No 18 from the Questionnaire Addressed to the Clients of the Tourist Accommodation Structures Regarding the Quality of Tourist Products and Services Offered to Them in the Tourist Areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 - 2009

Aij Factor 2008	Spatial Quality	Quality of the choice	General Quality	Relational Quality	Frequency average 2008
	%	%	%	%	%
A11	21.71	22.95	35.76	25.7	26.52
A12	44.06	31.15	40.26	32.1	36.89
A13	27.83	27.55	22.7	23.85	25.48
A14	5.8	16.5	1.28	15.6	9.79
A15	0.6	1.85	0	2.75	1.32
A21	40.8	27.3	36.03	20.25	31.09
A22	44.06	43.8	44.63	38.05	42.64
A23	8.53	26.4	18.84	25.2	19.74
A24	6.61	2.5	0.25	10.75	5.03
A25	0	0	0.25	5.75	1.5

Table 5(b)
Centralizer with the Frequency Average of the Answers Received to the Question No 18 from the Questionnaire Addressed to the Clients of the Tourist Accommodation Structures Regarding the Quality of Tourist Products and Services Offered to Them in the Tourist Areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 - 2009

Aij Factor 2008	Spatial Quality	Quality of the choice	General Quality	Relational Quality	Frequency average 2008
	%	%	%	%	%
A11	25.45	21.55	30.73	25.7	25.85
A12	37.85	31.15	36.85	29.35	33.8
A13	30.3	29.85	29.97	26.15	29.07
A14	5.95	15.6	2.45	16.05	10.02
A15	0.45	1.85	0	2.75	1.26
A21	38.22	26.05	31.82	19.85	28.98
A22	43.57	41.3	37.87	35.95	39.67
A23	12.82	28.55	29.2	29.75	25.08
A24	5.39	4.1	1.11	9.95	5.14
A25	0	0	0	4.5	1.13

Significance: A11 – Vatra Dornei area, answer alternative “1”; A21 – Neamț area, answer alternative “1”, A12 – Vatra Dornei area, answer alternative “2”, etc.

The values from Table 5(a) and (b) are presented graphically in Figure 4 – The histogram of the frequency average concerning the quality of products and services offered by tourist accommodation structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative analysis 2008– 2009.

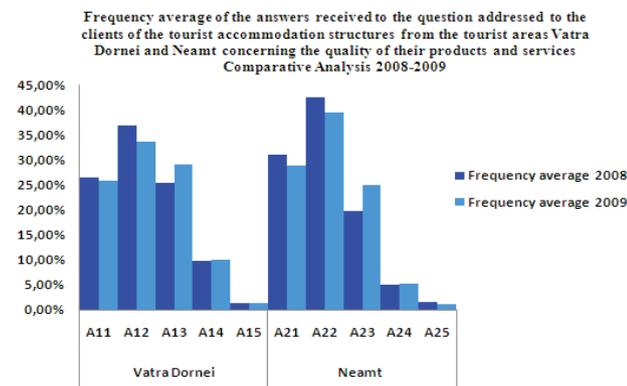


Figure 4
The Histogram of the Frequency Average Concerning the Quality of Products and Services Offered by the Tourist Accommodation Structures from the Areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 – 2009

From the graphical representation of these values it results:

- In Vatra Dornei area, *in the year 2008, general quality* referring to the material parameter (for which there are five norms taken into account – norms of material, norms of use, maintenance norms, cleaning norms, and security norms) and to the personnel availability is considered “*very important*”. 40.26% of the clients answered positively for this type of quality, while the quality of choice was on the last position with 31.15%; in the year 2009, the perception of the general quality registered a decrease from 40.26% to 36.85%. Making a comparative analysis, we can say that in the year 2009 it was registered a slight decrease (from 36.89% to 33.80%) according to the results obtained, reflecting the quality of products and services offered by the tourist accommodation structures from Vatra Dornei area.

- In Neamț area, in the year 2008, the clients considered *the four types of quality as very important*, the frequency average registering 42.64%, while the same frequency average calculated for Vatra Dornei area registered 36.89%. In the year 2009, *the frequency average registered 39.67%*, a decrease by 2.97% as compared to the year 2008.

In Table 6(a) and (b) it was calculated the average of the values of appreciation on five sublevels of quality (*check in quality, quality of the porters behaviour, quality of the room-maids behaviour, bar quality, and restaurant quality*), and for the elementary level “*quality of tourist*

products and services in general.” The results obtained have the purpose to correctly evaluate the clients’ perception concerning the quality of tourist products and services offered by the tourist accommodation structures from the research area.

Table 6(a)
Centralizer with the Frequency Average of the Answers Received to the Question No 19 from the Questionnaire Addressed to the Clients Concerning the Quality of Products and Services Offered by Tourist Accommodation Structures in General in the Tourist Areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 – 2009. Competence, Solicitude, Politeness and Promptitude Manifested by the Personnel

Aij Factor 2008	Check in	Porters	Room-maids	Bar	Restaurant	Frequency average 2008
	%	%	%	%	%	%
A11	36.72	20.8	13.8	12.8	33.7	23.56
A12	31.56	20.2	37.7	23.9	35.47	29.77
A13	19.42	27.2	16.5	25.7	24.91	22.75
A14	10.28	23.26	21	21.1	3.92	15.91
A15	2.02	8.54	1.8	7.3	2	4.33
A16	0	0	9.2	9.2	0	3.68
A21	38.5	20.36	39.7	24	56.44	35.8
A22	38.02	41.6	26.4	31.3	28.92	33.25
A23	7.34	19.26	9.1	21.5	9.46	15.33
A24	4.14	6.6	4.1	2.5	2.79	4.03
A25	2	3.86	0	0	2.39	1.65
A26	0	8.32	20.7	20.7	0	9.94

Table 6(b)
Centralizer with the Frequency Average of the Answers Received to the Question No 19 from the Questionnaire Addressed to the Clients Concerning the Quality of Products and Services Offered by Tourist Accommodation Structures in General in the Tourist Areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 – 2009. Competence, Solicitude, Politeness and Promptitude Manifested by the Personnel

Aij Factor 2008	Check in	Porters	Room-maids	Bar	Restaurant	Frequency average 2008
	%	%	%	%	%	%
A11	28.06	17.4	16.4	13.4	29.45	20.94
A12	28.08	20.5	35.8	24.8	32.67	28.37
A13	26.78	31.8	22	29.4	25.16	27.03
A14	14.32	22.33	18.3	18.3	7.32	16.12
A15	2.76	5.9	2.8	6.7	1.8	3.99
A16	0	2.07	4.7	7.4	3.6	3.55
A21	36.7	26.43	17.8	17.4	38.46	27.35
A22	37.02	38.26	33.5	24	27.74	32.10
A23	18.82	20.93	28.1	32.2	22.35	24.48
A24	4.96	9.93	14	20.7	4.82	10.88
A25	2.5	2	5.8	5.8	5.03	4.22
A26	0	2.45	0.8	0	1.6	0.97

Significance: A11 – Vatra Dornei area, answer alternative “1”; A21 – Neamț area, answer alternative “1”, A12 – Vatra Dornei area, answer alternative “2”, etc.

The values from Table 6(a) and (b) are presented graphically in Figure 5 – The histogram of the frequency average concerning the quality of tourist services in

general offered by the tourist accommodation structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative analysis 2008 – 2009.

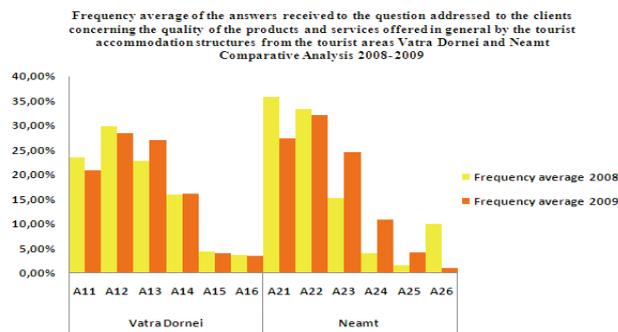


Figure 5
The Histogram of the Frequency Average Concerning the Quality of Tourist Services in General Offered by the Tourist Accommodation Structures from the Areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț. Comparative Analysis 2008 – 2009

From the graphical representation of these values, it results:

- In Vatra Dornei area, in the year 2008, 36.72% of the clients of the tourist accommodation structures considered that politeness, competence, solicitude and promptitude manifested by the check in personnel are very important, while 7.3% considered that the privacy and design offered by the area of the bar are not very important for the increase of the qualitative level of tourist services offered; in the year 2009, 28.06% of the clients of the tourist accommodation structures considered that *politeness, competence, solicitude and promptitude manifested by the check in personnel are very important*, while 6.7% considered that the privacy and design offered by the area of the bar are not very important for the increase of the qualitative level of tourist services offered. Calculating the frequency average, we can say that the average of the clients' perception concerning the quality of tourist products and services offered by the accommodation structures from Vatra Dornei area is registering a slight decrease in the year 2009, as compared with the year 2008.

- In Neamț area, in the year 2008, 56.44% of the clients of tourist accommodation structures considered that *the privacy and design offered by the area of the restaurant are very important*, while in the year 2009, only 38.46% of the clients of tourist accommodation structures considered that *the privacy and design offered by the area of the restaurant are very important*. We can notice a sudden decrease of the clients' perception concerning the quality services offered by this auxiliary area of the tourist accommodation structure.

3. TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

In order to test the H.1. and H.2, we analysed the results obtained after the application of the questionnaire to the 230 clients of the tourist accommodation structures

from the research areas. From the analysis of the answers received it results that the hypothesis H.1. is confirmed, and *the perceptions of the clients of the tourist accommodation structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț are indeed different for the two periods under research*, as the results obtained are registering differences in the year 2009 as compared to the year 2008. The same, the hypothesis H.2 is confirmed, because *there is a certain degree of subjectivism manifested by the clients of the tourist accommodation structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț concerning the quality of tourist products and services offered by them*.

CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of the answers received from the 31 questions of the questionnaires applied to the 230 clients of the tourist accommodation structures from the research areas, we can identify the most important tendencies and strategic directions of action which could be taken into account in order to assure, improve, and increase the quality of tourist products and services offered.

For this matter, according to the answers received from the clients of the tourist accommodation structures to the questions from the questionnaire, the following orientation and strategic direction are necessary in what concerns the assurance, improvement, and increase of the quality of tourist products and services:

- In what concerns the quality of the accommodation services, the analysis indicates that an improvement of the quality of this type of service is necessary, so as the satisfied clients would become very satisfied ones;
- The same, big investments in infrastructure are necessary, for example in the modernization of the roads, because the quality of the transportation services should be highly improved;
- The analysis showed that 144 clients from the 230 questioned ones, declared they were just satisfied by the quality of food services. For that matter, it is necessary to improve the quality of this type of service by the training of the existent personnel, or by hiring new ones;
- In what concerns the quality of entertainment services, the analysis showed positive answers, and the clients were satisfied. However, it is necessary to improve the quality service in order to transform the satisfied clients in very satisfied ones, and the dissatisfied clients in satisfied ones;
- In what concerns the spatial quality, it is necessary to realize some huge works to improve the quality of the roads, and the clarity of the sign posts to be able to reach a certain tourist destination;
- From the point of view of the car parking facilities, we must mention that at present tourist accommodation structures have insufficient parking places, which leads to the creation of a chaos during the tourist season;
- From the point of view of the possibilities offered by

the neighbouring environment of the accommodation unit, we must mention that nature plays a significant role in the mood created by the beauty of the landscape seen from the windows of the accommodation rooms;

- In what concerns the quality of the choice, it is necessary to offer the clients of tourist products and services as many and as diverse possibilities, by giving them several choices and different tourist products and services;

- In what concerns the general quality, the managers of the tourist accommodation structures should observe the laws, and strongly insist on the *norms of material, the norms of use, the maintenance norms, the cleaning norms, respectively the security norms*, because this is the only way to get a significant increase of the quality of tourist products and services offered;

- The personnel availability, the direct and indirect relational quality also lead to a significant increase of the quality of tourist products and services offered, and it is necessary to organize permanent trainings for the personnel employed in these tourist accommodation structures;

- For the tourist accommodation structures which have a bar and a restaurant it is very important to increase the quality by the equipment, by their privacy and design, by the diversity and also by the quality of the cuisine offered by the restaurant, respectively by a corresponding quality-price ratio;

- In order to increase the quality in the tourist accommodation structures and not only there, we also must take into account the advantages obtained by the employed personnel of the tourist accommodation units. Consequently, it is necessary to remunerate them according to the efforts developed within the company, so as to keep them motivated to offer higher quality services;

- The additional services are also very important in the tourist accommodation structures. Therefore, it is necessary to equip the tourist accommodation structures with: fitness room, beauty parlour, SPA area, Internet, etc.

In conclusion, we can say that the field of research is vast and extremely interesting, due to the complexity involved by the dynamics of the economic environment. Therefore, we grant this work the role of an attempt of conceptual analysis and of structuring of the research through the particular study over the perception of the clients of the tourist accommodation structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț in what concerns the quality of tourist products and services in the context of Romanian economy.

By this work we are not able to evaluate all the issues. However, by the theoretical and practical news brought on to everybody's attention, this work can lead to new directions of analysis and scientific research.

LIMITS OF RESEARCH

Due to the complexity of the questionnaire used for the two research activities included in this work, we intended to form a target group as representative as possible for the research area.

The results obtained are also influenced by the subjective evaluation of quality concepts of tourist products and services. We noticed the tendency of the target group to grade more certain levels of quality of tourist products and services included in the research. In reality, the tourists are very interested in the quality-price ratio. Consequently, the managers and/or the owners of the tourist accommodation structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț should make greater efforts to increase the level of quality of tourist products and services offered, so as to obtain a quality-price ratio according to the tourists' expectations.

REFERENCES

- Albu, M., (2000). *Metode Si Instrumente De Evaluare în psihologie* (pp 92–104). Cluj Napoca: Argonaut Publishing House.
- Armean, P. (2003). *Managementul Calității Serviciilor De Sănătate* (p11). București: Cores Publishing House.
- Bergman, Bo and Klefsjö, Bengt. (1994). *Quality for Customer Needs to Customer Satisfaction*. London: McGraw/Hill Book Company
- British Standard 4778, 1987
- Brakhahn, W. and Vogt, U. (1998). *ISO 9000 Pentru Servicii*. București: Technical Publishing House.
- Butnaru, G., I. (2007). *Quality and the Management System of Quality, Viable Solution of Increasing the Competitiveness in Romanian Companies*, Anuarul Institutului de cercetări economice "Gheorghe Zane", Iași, t. 16
- Butnaru, G., I., (2008). *Trends and Evolutions in the Sphere of Quality of Romanian Tourism Services*, vol. of MIBES conference (Management of International Business and Economics Systems), CD Published By Department of Business Administration School of Business & Economics T.E.I. of Larissa, Greece
- Crosby, P. (1984). *Quality Without Tears, The Art of Hassle-Free Management* (p74). McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Finn, M., Elliott-White, M. and Walton, M. (2000). *Tourism & Leisure Research Methods, Data collection, Analysis and Interpretation*. London: Pearson Longman.
- Government Decision No 668 of June 5th, 2003, Concerning the Approach of the National Program to Increase the Hotels Service Quality, and to Launch the "Q" Mark.
- H.G. no 237/(2001). Ghid de Legislație in Turism, Acte Normative in Vigoare, 2007
- Hapenciu, C., V. (2002). *Statistical Study of the Quality of the University Educatio*. "Stefan cel Mare" University of

- Suceava Publishing House
- ISO 9000: (2000).
- ISO-8402. (1994). *Quality Management and Quality Assurance Vocabulary*.
- Jaba, E. (2002). *Statistică*. București Economcs Publishing House
- Jaba, E. and Grama, A. (2004). *Analiză Statistică Cu SPSS sub Windows*. Iași: Polirom Publishing House.
- Juran, J. (2000). *Planificarea Calității* (p137). București: Teora Publishing House.
- Juran, J. (2002). *Supremația Prin Calitate. Manualul Directorului De Firmă* (p11). București: Teora Publishing House.
- Kotler, P. and Dubois, B. (1992). *Marketing, Management*. Paris: Publi-Unions Editions.
- Lewis, S. and Thornhill. (2003). *Research Methods for Business Students*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Maxim, E. (2007). *Calitatea Si Managementul Calității* (pp 10-31). Iași: Sedcom Libris Publishing House.
- Marca Q. (2004). *Model De Bune Practici Pentru Implementarea și Certificarea Calității Serviciilor Hoteliere Din România*. Ministry of Transportation, Construction and Tourism, National Authority for Tourism.
- Melidonioti, M. and Gotzamani, K. (2007). Standardization and Quality in Greek Banking Services. *International Journal Management of International Business and Economic Systems*, Published By Department of Business Administration School of Business & Economics T.E.I. of Larissa, Greece, 61.
- Niță, V. (2004). *Managementul Serviciilor De Cazare Si Catering* (p 97). Iași: Tehnopress Publishing House.
- Niță, V. and Butnaru, G., I. (2007). *Gestiune Totelieră* (pp114-117). Iași: Tehnopress Publishing House.
- Rotaru, I. (2004). *Globalizare Si Turism Cazul României* (p241). București: Continent Publishing House.
- Sykora, O. (2008). *Quality Management in Hospitality Services*. International Tourism, 3rd Seminar Organized by "Al. I. Cuza" University of Iași in partnership with La Fondation pour la Formation Hôtelière" Genève, Tehnopress Publishing House, Iași.
- Zaiț, D. and Spalanzani, A. (2006). *Cercetarea in Economie Si Management, Repere Epistemologice and Metodologice*. București: Economic Publishing House.