

Some conclusions about perceptions of accommodation managers concerning quality strategies for tourism products and services - case study for Neamt and Vatra Dornei region (Romania)

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Abstract

When we intent to study the quality of services in accommodation industry, the primary temptation is to ask the customers about their perceptions about the services provided by the supplier. But the managers of accommodation industry, which is their perceptions about the quality strategies conceived and applied? This working paper is based on a research managed in two regions of Romania, Neamț and Vatra Dornei, both with a recognized tourist potential. A research has been made among the managers of accommodation buildings (hotel and boarding houses). A questionnaire has been developed to get the answers; a data processing of the results has been made and a model process has been tried. The conclusions are analyzed in correspondence to other studies developed among the customers and their perception on services quality. Obviously, the managers have a good appreciation about their work; however we can identify some ideas concerning the quality assessment.

Keywords: quality; strategy; tourist product; market research;

JEL Classification Codes: L15; L83

Introduction

The speciality literature offers various significances to the concept of quality, term which comes from the Latin "qualitas", meaning "distinguishing quality", or "character", "nature". However, the shortest and the most used definition proves to be: the quality as "the aptitude for the use"(Juran, 2002, p. 11). Thus, in the economic field, where the term has the highest frequency of use, the quality can be defined as "all the characteristics and the distinguishing qualities of a product or service, reunited in order to satisfy a specified or an implied necessity" (British Standard 4778, 1987). The quality nowadays has become a strategic element in the services providing companies, because it determines "the competitiveness" to the highest level.

The concept of quality must be analysed both from the consumer's point of view, and the client's point of view, and also that of the provider's, or of the producer's.

For **the consumer**, quality means "the satisfaction which a certain good can offer in its use or consumption" (Maxim, 2007, p. 10), and for **the producer**, quality represents "the level of the characteristics of the products or services offered to the clients" (Juran, 2000, p. 137). Thus, we can conclude that the companies have the clients' solicitations as a reference in 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, 2007, p. 31).

When the quality is considered a distinct strategic element, we can define three types of strategies:

- strategies of adaptation of the quality of tourist products and services to the demands of each market segment;
- strategies of qualitative differentiation as compared to the other competitors;
- strategy for quality improvement, when the tourism companies hold a powerful position on the market.

The performances of the leadership of a company can be obtained by the implementation of the concepts of politics and strategy concerning the quality of the products and services in general, and of the tourist products and services in special.

In fact, depending on the way they are formulated, the strategies answer to a series of questions such as "How?" How will the established objectives be achieved? How will the competitor companies be overtaken? How will be the competition advantages realized and maintained? How will the actual position of the company be strengthened and maintained?

The company policy contains a set of objectives on an average term, referring either to the totality of the activities, or to their major components, together with the volume and the structure of the resources available, the major actions to undertake, the people who are mainly responsible for their realization, the financial sources, the final and intermediary deadlines, the global or partial efficiency indicators.

The policy in the field of quality belongs to the general business policy of the tourism company, with the purpose to obtain on long term the clients' satisfaction, and it represents the directions of strategic action established by the top management in order to apply the mission of the organization.

Research regarding the perception of the managers of the accommodation' buildings from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț, concerning the global quality strategies of tourist products and services

A short presentation of the two regions

Neamt County lies in the North-East of Romania, in the Central-Northern part of Moldavia, covering the basins of Siret, Bistrita and Moldavia rivers (the two rivers are tributaries on the right of Siret), being guarded, at the same time, by the high peaks of Ceahlau

(1907 m), Bistrita (1753 m) and Tarcau (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 Neamt 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 Ceahlau Massif particularly stands out in the landscape, definitely prevailing over the neighbouring geographical units. Ceahlau 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.

Neamt County has an important man-built tourist potential, but it is only partly turned to good account. The strong orthodox monastery life in the Neamt 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 balneal potential and peat bogs of Poiana Stampei round off the special tourist strong points of this depression. Carbogaseous 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 the authenticity, the traditions and the 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 valuables, which could be aesthetically, artistically picked up especially by foreigner tourists. The proper religious celebrations like Christmas, Easter, the orthodox monasteries celebrations, are also important cultural manifestations.

Objectives and method

The research which was done has as **main purpose** to learn about the managers' perception regarding the tourist receiving structures with role of accommodation from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț, in what concerns the global quality strategies of tourist products and services.

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

- 1 To obtain the necessary data by the realization of complex market research, using as a data collecting instrument the questionnaire applied to the managers of the tourists' receiving structures.
- 2 The comparative analysis regarding the attitude of the managers of the tourists' receiving structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț concerning the quality of tourist products and services offered by them.
- 3 The identification of the types of global strategies concerning the quality of tourist products and services.

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

- A The tourism managers' insufficient knowledge of the necessity to implement a global quality strategy for the tourist products and services, which can lead to the offering of low quality tourist products and services, with a low qualitative level.
- B The lower or absent use of global strategies, which sometimes leads to the occurrence in this field of activity of disagreements between the price of tourist products and services offered, and their quality.

Research Methodology

In order to attain the purpose of this work, during the research we combined the theoretical and practical aspects.

The methods used in the research were diverse, and in agreement with the objectives established. These methods are:

- the documentary study with two aspects: the bibliographic documentation from internal sources, and the bibliographic documentation from external sources;
- the theoretical analysis;
- the observation;
- the quantitative and qualitative analysis of quality characteristics;
- the practical documentation and realization of the informative material by field research;
- the data statistical analysis;
- the exploratory study which involves to obtain the data with the help of the inquiry, using as data collecting instrument the questionnaire applied to the managers of tourist receiving structures from the areas Vatra Dornei - Neamț (82 managers of tourist receiving structures). This inquiry has as result to obtain quantitative data, essential in the research that was realized;
- the information synthesis. The information was obtained and processed with the programs SPSS 13.0 for their centralisation, and Excel - for the table of frequencies.

The theoretical documentation had the purpose to identify and to review the **know-how stage** in the field of strategic management and of the management 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, "Gh. Asachi" Library, French Cultural Centre Library, "British Council" Library, etc., from Iași, Romania.

The research area refers to two Romanian tourist areas:

- the tourist area Vatra Dornei;
- the tourist area Neamț.

Population and the research group

The designed research group is made of:

- the total number of tourist receiving structures from the area under research, which were functioning in the period of reference;

The research group resulted has:

- a target group for the tourist area Vatra Dornei: 39 managers of tourist receiving structures (hotels, bed & breakfast, and agricultural tourism). The research was realized on the 11th, 18th, and 25th October 2008;
- a target group for the tourist area Neamț: 43 managers of tourist receiving structures (hotels, bed & breakfast, and agricultural tourism). The research was realized on the 11th, 18th, and 25th October 2008;

By this research we intended to obtain information from the managers of tourist receiving structures of the research area, regarding the **global strategies concerning the quality of tourist products and services**.

A single type of questionnaire was established for this category of subjects (managers of tourist receiving structures of the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț), whose questions regarded the research general objectives.

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

The structure of the research area is presented in table 1, referring to 82 managers of tourist receiving structures with accommodation from the two Romanian tourist areas, as it follows:

Table 1: Research area

Statistics			
Area			
Dornelor	N	Valid	39
		Missing	0
Neamt	N	Valid	43
		Missing	0

The data from table 1 are represented graphically in figure 1 - „Structure diagram concerning the research area” as it follows:

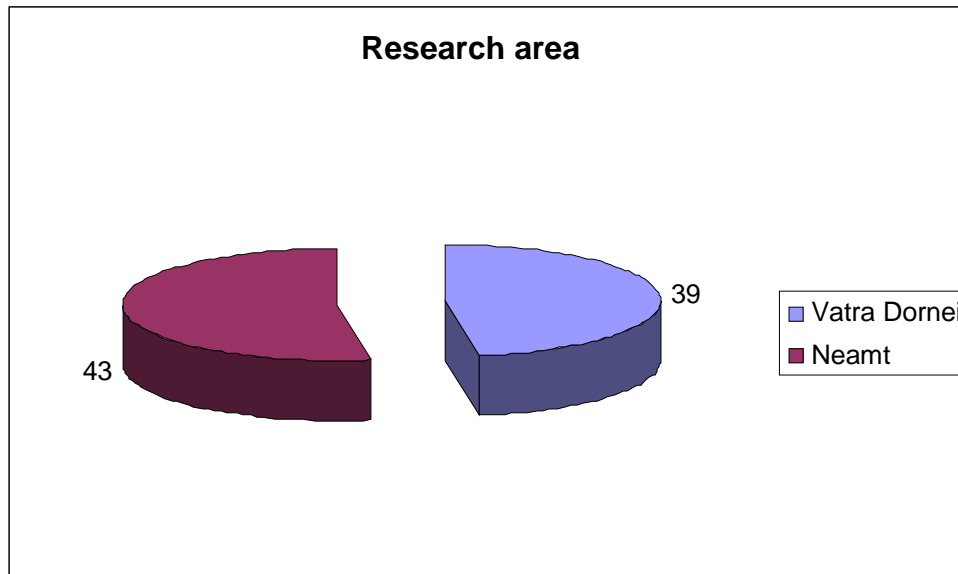


Figure 1: Structure diagram concerning the research area

The perception of the managers of tourist accommodations with role of accommodation from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamt concerning the quality of tourist products and services, and also their quality strategies was emphasized with the help of complex market research, using the questionnaire as a data collecting instrument.

Observations concerning the elaboration of the questionnaire applied to the managers of the tourist receiving structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamt

The making 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 managers 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 type of ownership of the tourists' receiving structure with role of accommodation. A nominal scale is used.

Question no 2 contains an ordinal scale in order to find out the number of employees of the economic agent.

Question no 3 contains an ordinal scale in order to find out the main clients of the tourists' receiving structures from the research area.

Question no 4 contains an ordinal scale in order to find out the opinion of the managers of the tourist receiving structures in what concerns the competition in the field of tourist accommodation services from the research area.

Question no 5 has the purpose to identify the main component concerning the total quality of a tourist product or service. A nominal scale is used.

Question no 6 contains a differential ordinal scale, permitting an arrangement of different "attributes" of tourists' receiving structures, according to the importance granted by the client.

Question no 7 contains a differential ordinal scale, permitting an arrangement of different "attributes" of tourists' receiving structures, according to the importance granted by the client.

Question no 8 is asking the managers of the tourist receiving structures to express their opinion regarding a series of aspects related to the accommodation unit, for whose measurement an ordinal scale was used, with the preferences ranking / arrangement, where the subject must evaluate each scaled characteristic from 1 to 5, according to which is the most representative grade in his/her opinion.

Questions no 9 and no 10 are formulated in order to find out if the personnel employed in the accommodation unit is influencing or not the quality of tourist products and services offered by them.

Question no 11 contains an ordinal scale allowing us to find out the type of behaviour of the tourists checked in those structures.

Question no 12 contains an ordinal scale allowing us to find out if the tourists checked in those structures come back another time.

Question no 13 is formulated in order to find out which are the main reasons for which the tourists come back in the area. A nominal scale was used.

Question no 14 is formulated in order to find out which is the most useful information concerning the clients. A nominal scale was used.

Questions no 15 and no 16 were introduced with the purpose to find out how the micro-environmental and macro-environmental factors can influence the improvement of the quality of tourist products and services offered by the accommodation unit from the inquiry. For these questions, a nominal scale was used.

For the **question no 17**, which has the purpose to find out the type of marketing communication strategy used for the improvement of the quality of tourist products and services offered by the unit, a differential ordinal scale was used. For the option no 3 we introduced an open question with the purpose to identify the type of strategy that was applied.

Question no 18, for which an ordinal scale was used, had the purpose to find out if the company formulated a managerial strategy in order to assure the quality of tourist products and services offered to the clients.

Questions no 19, no 20, no 21, and no 22 are formulated with the purpose to identify the type of managerial strategies concerning the quality of tourist products and services used in tourists' receiving structures with role of accommodation situated in the research area. For these four questions ordinal scales were used.

The same scale was used also for the **questions 23, 24 and 25**, whose purpose was the identification of the time range necessary for the implementation of a managerial strategy in order to assure the quality of tourist products and services. The same, by the answers obtained at questions 24 and 25 we managed to find out if the managers of tourists receiving structures from the research area had heard of Q Mark - Model of good practices for implementation and certification of quality hotel services in Romania, and if its implementation was necessary or not.

Question no 26 contains an ordinal scale, and it was formulated in order to find out if this Q Mark was implemented or not, and if its implementation was desired.

For the **question no 27**, with four answering options, two types of scales were used: ordinal and scalar, and they were formulated in order to find out which were the results obtained by the tourist accommodation units after the implementation of Q Mark.

Question no 28, formulated on a nominal scale, has the purpose to find out which employee is responsible for the decisions concerning the observance of the requests imposed by the managerial strategy in order to assure the quality of tourist products and services implemented within the tourists' receiving structure.

Question no 29, the last from this questionnaire, contains an ordinal scale, and was formulated with the purpose to identify the field(s) in which the elaboration of a new strategy is desired.

Statistical research concerning global strategies of the quality of tourist products and services offered by the tourist receiving structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț

In the category of **global strategies concerning the quality of tourist products and services** we can include:

- the strategy of implementation of total quality management in tourist receiving structures;
- the restructuring strategy of tourist receiving structure (the activities leading to significant changes in the content and functioning of the tourist accommodation unit will be taken into account);
- the continuous quality improvement strategy for tourist products and services (the technical-economic and social progress determines the change of characteristics of tourist products and services, but also of the consumers' demands, preferences, and mentalities);
- the quality-price strategy of tourist products and services offered.

In Table 2 we emphasized the frequency of the answers obtained from the application of the questionnaire, for which the following grading system was used:

- 1 - yes;
- 2 - no;
- 3 - it is not the case.

The purpose was to identify the type of **global strategy** used within the tourist receiving structures for the two tourist areas which were analysed.

Table 2: Centralizer with the frequency of the answers obtained at the question concerning global strategy from the questionnaire addressed to the managers of the tourists' receiving structures from the areas Vatra Dornei and Neamț

Factor Aij	Strategy of implementation of total quality management	Restructuring strategy	Strategy for the continuous quality improvement of tourist products and services	Quality-price strategy for the tourist products and services offered	Frequency average
	%	%	%	%	%
A11	20.5	12.8	25.6	35.9	23.70
A12	48.7	56.4	43.6	33.3	45.50
A13	30.8	30.8	30.8	30.8	30.80
A21	11.6	9.3	48.8	25.6	23.83
A22	51.2	53.5	14.0	37.2	38.97
A23	37.2	37.2	37.2	37.2	37.20

Explanation: A11 - Vatra Dornei area, answering option "yes"; A21 - Neamț area, answering option "yes", A12 - Vatra Dornei area, answering option "no", etc.

The data from Table 2 reflect the economic reality concerning the type of **global strategy** used for the implementation of a quality management system, and they are the proof that managers are striving to improve the quality of tourist products and services. This average frequency on types of global strategies is represented graphically with the help of structure diagrams. Thus, for Vatra Dornei area, the structure diagrams are presented in figures 2, 3, 4, and 5:

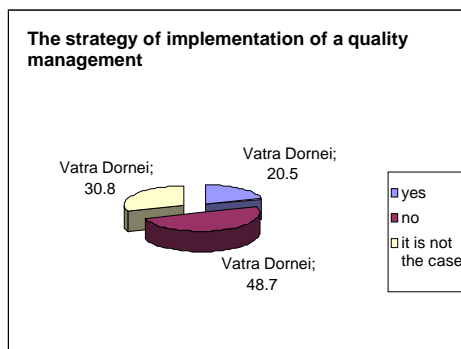


Figure 2 Structure diagram of the answers concerning the strategy of implementation of total quality management

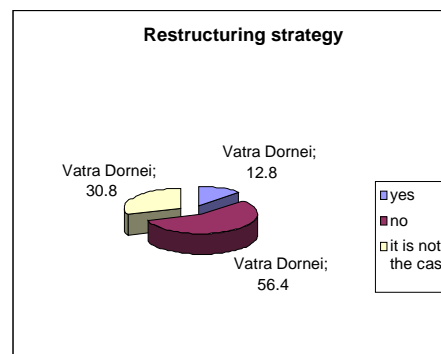


Figure 3 Structure diagram of the answers concerning the restructuring strategy

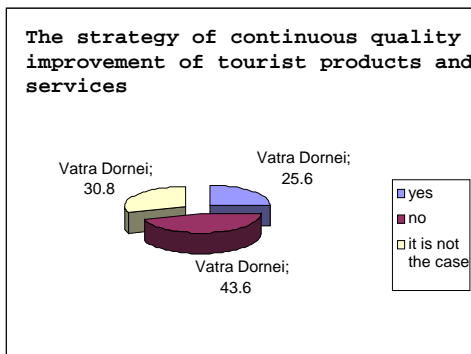


Figure 4 Structure diagram of the answers concerning the strategy of continuous quality improvement of tourist products and services

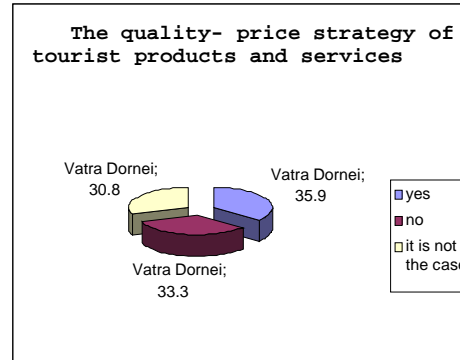


Figure 5 Structure diagram of the answers concerning the quality-price strategy of tourist products and services

For the area which was investigated, it results that 35.9% of the managers use the quality-price strategy of tourist products and services, this strategy being the last one in the classification. The strategy situated on top of the classification is the restructuring strategy of tourist receiving structure, which is 12.8%. Its purpose is to realize activities through which significant changes are produced in the content and functioning of quality subsystems.

In what concerns the strategy of implementation of total quality management, only 20.5% of the managers support this change in order to improve the quality of tourist products and services offered.

Due to the fact that the technical-economic progress involves high expenses from the part of the provider of tourist products and services, only 25.6% of the managers declared that they used a strategy of continuous quality improvement of tourist products and services.

In figure 6 there is a graphical representation of the answers concerning global strategies of the quality of tourist products and services offered by the tourist receiving structures from Vatra Dornei area.

From the graphical representation results that in Vatra Dornei area the global strategy concerning the quality of tourist products and services is implemented in 23.7% of the tourist receiving structures.

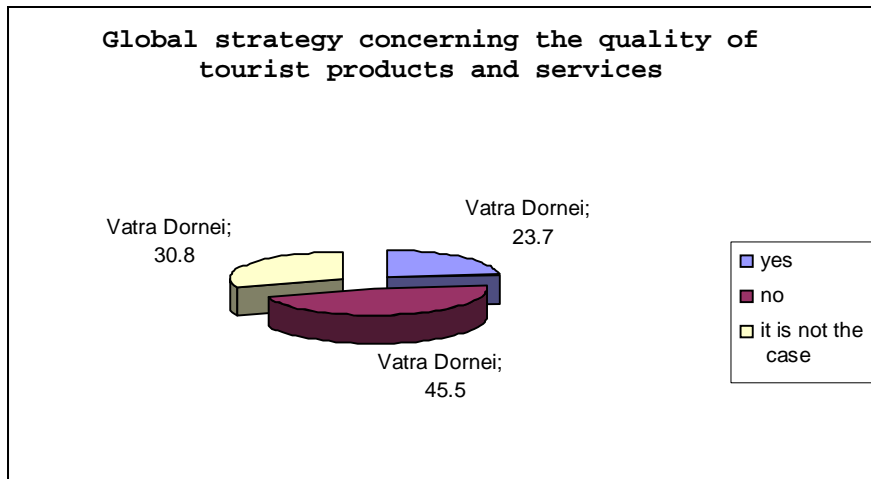


Figure 6 Structure diagram of the answers concerning the global strategy of the quality of tourist products and services

In the structure diagrams 7, 8, 9 and 10, the types of global strategies for Neamt area are represented graphically:

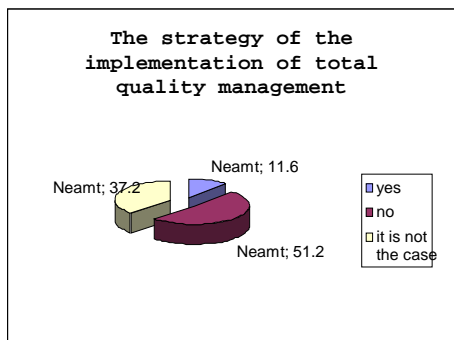


Figure 7 Structure diagram of the answers concerning the strategy of implementation of a total quality management

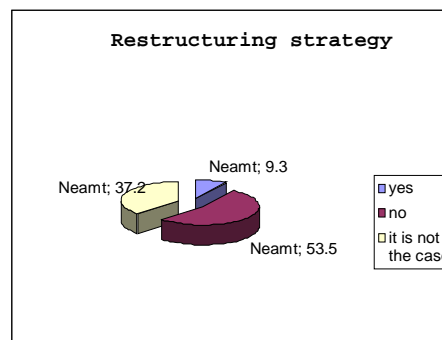


Figure 8 Structure diagram of the answers concerning the restructuring strategy

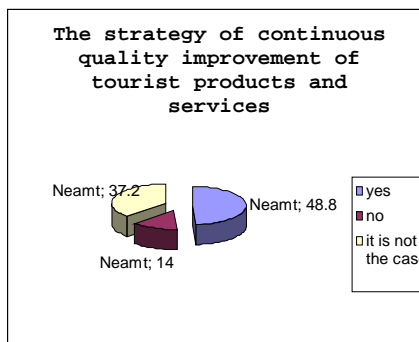


Figure 9 Structure diagram of the answers concerning the strategy of continuous quality improvement of tourist products and services

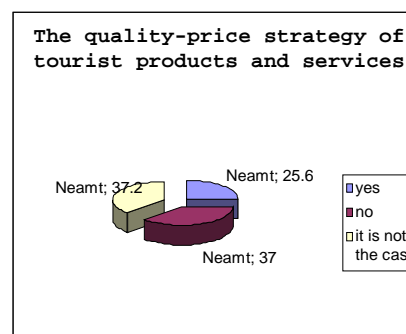


Figure 10 Structure diagram of the answers concerning the quality-price strategy of tourist products and services

From the graphical representation of the results obtained for this area, we notice that:

- 48.8% of the managers of tourist receiving structures use the strategy of continuous quality improvement of tourist products and services, which implies the development of the quality with the help of technical-economic and social progress;
- 25.6% of the managers of tourist receiving structures use the quality-price strategy of tourist products and services;
- 11.6% of the managers of tourist receiving structures use the strategy of the implementation of total quality management;
- 9.3% of the managers of tourist receiving structures use the strategy of their restructuring.

Figure 11: emphasizes the graphical representation of the answers concerning global strategies of the quality of tourist products and services offered by the tourist receiving structures from Neamț area:

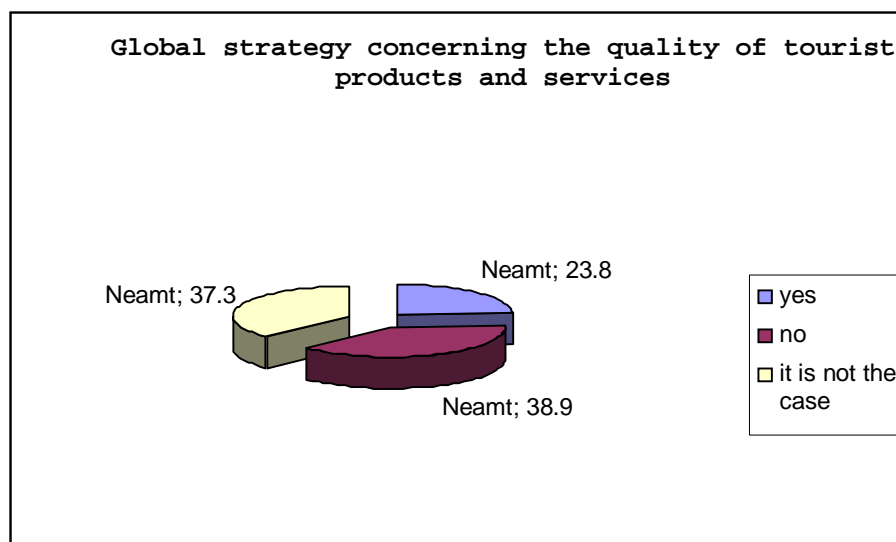


Figure 11: Structure diagram of the answers concerning global strategies of the quality of tourist products and services

From the graphical representation it results that in Neamț area the global strategy concerning the quality of tourist products and services is implemented in 23.8% of the tourist receiving structures.

Testing the hypotheses

In order to test the A hypothesis, the insufficient knowledge of the tourism managers of the necessity to implement a global strategy of the quality of tourist products and services, we analysed the results obtained after the application of the questionnaire to the 82 managers of the tourist receiving structures from the research area. From their answers it results that:

- in Vatra Dornei area, from the 39 tourists' receiving structures, a global strategy of the quality of tourist products and services is implemented in only 8 structures;
- in Neamț area, from the 43 tourists' receiving structures, a global strategy of the quality of tourist products and services is implemented in only 5 structures;

These results indicate that the first hypothesis is confirmed.

Conclusions

From the analysis of the answers given to the question referring to the global strategy from the questionnaires applied to the 82 managers of tourist receiving structures from the research area, we can identify the most important tendencies and strategic directions of action which could be taken into account in the elaboration of managerial strategies to assure the quality of tourist products and services.

Consequently, according to the answers offered by the managers of the tourist receiving structures, it appears the necessity of the following strategic directions concerning the global strategies in order to assure the quality of tourist products and services:

- From the point of view of the **global strategies concerning the quality management system**, we noticed that only in 8 tourist receiving structures from Vatra Dornei area a **strategy of implementation of a total quality management** is used, while in Neamț area the same strategy is implemented in 5 tourist receiving structures. Thus, an education to understand the need of the implementation of such a strategy is necessary;
- In what concerns the **strategy of continuous quality improvement of tourist products and services**, we noticed that in Vatra Dornelor area this is used in 10 tourist receiving structures, and in Neamț area in 21 tourist receiving structures. Thus, an education for the continuous quality improvement of tourist products and services is necessary;
- **The quality-price strategy of tourist products and services offered** is very important, and managers should be educated to offer tourist products and services for a price corresponding to the qualitative level.

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