

## CERTAIN ASPECTS REGARDING THE TOURISM PRODUCTS' FEATURES

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### Abstract

*The authors of this publication believe that, once the main features of a tourism product are known, tourism services that can adequately see to the potential consumers' needs can easily develop in perfect harmony with the targeted area in which they would be implemented.*

*This instance is no stranger to this method; after elaborate definition and research regarding the products' aspects and its acceptability in the desired area of implementation, the Baile Herculane tourism product has been developed.*

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**JEL Classification:** JEL M31, JEL M21, JEL M11

### 1. Defining the tourism product:

Starting from the base concept of produce, the tourism product is defined as an ensemble of material goods and services capable of satisfying the tourism needs of a consumer in the given timespan between the departure moment and the moment of arrival in the departure space. Thus, the tourism product is made up of material goods and services.

### 2. The tourism product on three levels

In order to fully grasp the products features, Ph. Kotler, defined the product as a combination of elements laid down on three levels: the central product, the tangible product and the developed product. By extending this concept we can assess the following aspects of the tourism product as a whole:

a. The central tourism product, situated at the centre of the total tourism product, it represents what the consumer is actually purchasing. This level of the product can be obtained via the following questions: What does the consumer obtain from buying this product? What advantages does he hope to obtain upon consumption?

b. The tangible tourism product encompasses the features of the product, mainly: level of quality, characteristics, style, brand name.

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c. The developed product encompasses all the additional aspects of the product, aspects that the consumer enjoys before, during and after purchase of the product (insurance, information services, reservation, rentals, mediation, etc.). Also, the developed product also encompasses accessibility, climate and consumers' interaction with the service system, consumer interaction per se and the participation of the consumers in its development.

### 3. Tourism product classification

Based on the number of services they may contain, tourism products fall under the following categories:

- *Integral*, or megaproducts, which are complex products, formed from all manner of basic and auxiliary services which have already been described;
- *Compound products*, whose formulae lack certain base services (transport, in the instance that tourists travel with their own vehicles, housing, when the tourist stays at friends or relatives during the consumption of the product, meals, etc.);
- *Simple products*, which offer a single basic service, other aspects not being included in the product offer, such aspects being available via self-sustenance or donation.

Even though tourism products are perishable, based on the duration of the tourists' motivation, or on how long the offer stands, they can fall under the following categories:

- *Durable*, when the needs and the possibilities to meet them are being maintained a certain period of time, such aspects being tied to durable tourist attractions; it is under that category that we will find the Baile Herculane tourism product, for example;
- *Non-durable*, in which case the period of time allocated by the offer is minimal (such as those for political rallies).

Bearing in mind the products' nature and generated motivation, such products can be (like tourism in general): cultural, historic, sports-related, medical, family-wise, business, etc.

Based on the duration of the sojourn, the following categories distinguish themselves:

- Long lasting sojourn, or vacations, which last relatively long;
- Short-term sojourn, which can last only a few days;
- One day only sojourns, like a field trip;

Based on the distance travelled, services divide into:

- Short-distance (meaning the same region);
- Medium distance (in the same country);
- Long distance (interstate or intercontinental);

Based on the calendar and season, tourism services fall under:

- On-season, including summer period (July-August), when most holidays are scheduled, or on Christmas Season, etc.
- Off-season, meaning the rest of the year;
- Occasional;

Taking into account the number of people joining in we have:

- Individual;
- Family trips;
- Group trips;

Based on the way the holiday unfolds, tourism services fall under:

- Itinerant, when tourist attractions targeted by the beneficiaries are placed in different areas, consumers visiting each (usually in a closed circuit);

- Sojourn, when a beneficiary consumes the product in the same place;

Based on **several already-mentioned criteria**, the basic profile operates on the following types of tourist products:

- *Invariable products*, whose structures encompass all the afore-mentioned products (information, reservation, lodging, meals, entertainment) and contributes to satisfying the needs of a person or collective, offering them a final product (usually by a tour agent);

- *Resorts*, which represent a market with only one sojourn (sports base, entertainment, congress centre, bath resort, etc.);

- *Event-related products* (sports, cultural, recreation) whose life-spans are very short and feature high-risks (mainly because of shallow character of the operation and high competition), huge organisational and promotional effort and other difficulties.

#### 4. Conceptual barriers of the tourism product

Although some experts argue the **goods** have the specific feature of being tangible products while services are being offered (without tangible form) and with the expression “goods and services” being often used, by goods we still understand every aspect that gives satisfaction upon consumption, upon use or possession, whether it has a material form or not. We approve of these aspects in light of utility theories, because if a product doesn’t offer satisfaction it means that the product is “not good”, being a useless, or even worse, a bad product. Even the expression “material goods”, which is so often used, allows room for immaterial goods as well. This being said, the term “good” has a very wide register, referring to what language would describe as product and services.

On the other hand, when we say product we mean a material good that is capable of satisfying certain needs. In marketing, to this notion we have a bigger meaning attributed: designating an ensemble of physical features and characteristics of any other tangible nature, all reunited in an identifiable form. Thus, a product can

be: an object, a service, an activity, a human being, a place, an organisation, an idea, or the result of a process (even a natural one).

It is imperative to note that the concept of product encompasses that of a service. In a certain sense, the sphere of influence of a product is larger than that of goods. Falling into this category are all the elements that are not “good” for man, these being the results or by-products of certain processes.

Material goods are those products that present themselves as material bodies with stable shape and size. Such products can be used whenever or wherever the consumer decides.

Services are being defined as products, without shape or size, that do not offer the notion of property or belonging to consumers or users, services being consumed only at a given time and place.

Compared to material goods, **services** (even tourism-related services) present several features.

- a. Immaterial form is the main feature of services, from which all others derive.
- b. Impossible to stock is the second aspect. Not having a material shape, they cannot be stocked when demands are low, in order to sell when the market is favourable.
- c. Partial offer rigidity compared to demand is a feature that flows from the other two. This means that, on short-term, the tourism service offer cannot be increased without damaging quality.
- d. Concomitance of production and consumption is another feature with profound impact on the marketing policies of service rendering companies, the possibility of a time lapse between production and consumption being impossible. As a result, the provider and the consumer are always in touch, the consumption taking place right before the producers' eyes, in his own perimeter, and very rarely within the premises of the consumers' household. For example, in order to enjoy travel services, you must first board the providers' vehicle; in order to consume a theatre show, you must be in a theatre room, etc. Even if you cannot separate production from consumption, this doesn't mean that exchange would be an inseparable aspect of the two processes. Making a hotel room reservation for one night, for example, is a service that can be bought long before obtaining and consuming the product.
- e. Production inseparability from consumption leads to another special feature: in this case, certain negative aspects regarding quality cannot be separated after purchase. Preventing and not repairing should be a main concern for maintaining customers.
- f. The perishable aspect is also a general feature of a service (in the case of material goods, this aspect is encountered only rarely). Service production is interpreted as de ability to produce, which may or may not be used. That is why is it is not used to its' maximum potential, the loss is permanent. For example if a 100 seat bus travels with only 10 people, or if a show would take

place in a 1000 seat-room, but only before 200 people, etc., those services take place at their fully potential but at reduced income, their usefulness ending in the same moment the processes that produce them reach their end (which could not happen to a shirt, for example, which, if not sold today, could be sold some other time, maintaining its' usefulness in the future).

## 5. Tourism product features

A basic component of marketing mix, the product policy covers a wide range of activities that highlight its' contents:

1. Product research means studies that target quantity and quality of the analysed product. This aspect acts like an analysis and diagnostic which allows the identification of weak and strong points in the product or product range.
2. Innovation activity is the factor that gives the product policy its' offensive aspects. It affects certain activities regarding the product and target-audience, and it stretches the producers' abilities and resources.
3. Moulding the product follows the desire to customize the product based on client demands, which can be seen from market studies.
4. The products' legal insurance is given by the legal actions that protect the product.
5. The attitude towards older products shows if the producer is or is not giving up on liability products.

Product policy must be correlated with price policies, publicity, otherwise some initiatives regarding the product might be fully or partially annihilated by the other marketing variables. The main possible directions that are to be followed in the tourism product policy are found, obviously, within the strategies adopted by the producer:

- The stability of the product range;
- Limiting the product range;
- Diversification of the product range;
- Diversification of product;
- Perfecting tourism products;
- Renewing the product range;

As we have shown, the difference between service marketing and sports-related tourism marketing, unlike other subjects, stems from the nature and characteristics of these aspects. They highlight all the aspects of the mix. The deepest aspects are found, naturally, in the product policy. The policy targets the product contents, creating and deploying adequate strategies. The product contents is expressed by the basic elements their services, approached from a marketing point of view.

Highlighting these aspects stems from the concept of a previously presented service. Understood as a mass of activities destined to satisfy certain needs, the

product offered to all clients is presented as a global service, built from a series of services falling under the following categories: basic, auxiliary and secondary.

The basic service represents the motive behind the existence of a firm on the market. It becomes the main activity of a service-rendering company (ex: an airlines' service is transport while a hotel renders lodging). In order to provide a basic service, a series of auxiliary services must be provided first-hand (an airline, in order to transport passengers, provides check-up services for passengers and their luggage as well as in-flight services. A hotel offers reception services before lodging). Last but not least, secondary services are activities that sustain the basic service. They do not facilitate its function, but increase its value and highlights it out from the rest of the products. Sometimes, in this aspect we find only material goods (shampoo, soap and the daily newspaper delivered to your hotel room, etc.). The difference between auxiliary and secondary services is a blurred line. The same service could be auxiliary or secondary, depending on the situation (serving an in-flight meal during a continental flight is an auxiliary service, while during a short flight it is considered secondary). Usually auxiliary services are mandatory because without them we can't have the basic service, while the secondary ones are optional, the basic service being able to exist and function without them, albeit less attractive and competitive.

Although important in defining the product, grouping services in these categories proves insufficient in offering a clear image on their contents. Capturing some specific elements means considering some aspects regarding the intangibility, quality and clients' participation regarding a service. This intangibility raises a number of questions regarding market approach. This aspect acclaims the identification of methods that might diminish any implication towards product policy. Such an undertaking starts from realising that providing services is always closely-related to material, tangible aspects that the client comes in contact with. The number of these aspects tends to be quite high, differing from a service category to another.

Beginning with the place in which provider-consumer interactions take place, these aspects can fall under the following categories: ambiance, material aspects required for service providing, and the materials the personnel requires.

*Ambiance*, includes all the material aspects that insure an adequate picture in which provider-consumer interactions take place: building, furniture, functional aspects of organisational features, etc.

*The material elements* required to provide services differ from one service category to another. Even the simplest of services require a modicum of immaterial aspects to run along with providing. In the case of equipment dependant services, the list could go on for quite a while. For example, transport vehicles that insure transport services require electronic apparatus for the financial aspect.

*Personnel requirements* are made-up of elements that directly concern the intangible components. They encompass: physical aspects, wardrobe (uniform or individual) and company-offered gifts.

*Service quality* represents another particular aspect of a product, determined ultimately by intangibility. It expresses the measure of satisfaction in regards to

consumer demands. As a consequence, quality is appreciated by the consumer. Service quality has long been approached by specialised writers. Research has targeted the direction of defining, appreciating and moulding quality. With all the discretion of the services and the difficulty with which they can be appraised, the following features have been identified:

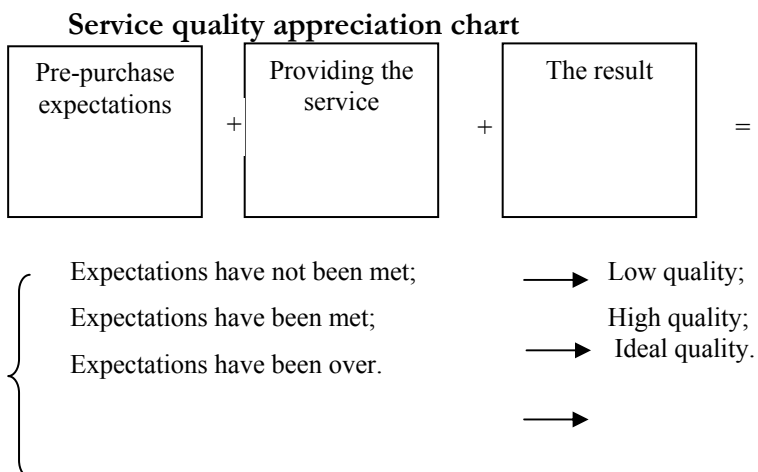
- a). Providing the service in the utmost conditions by respecting the contract and carriage in the best conditions. This means writing the checks, proper accounting and providing the service on time.
- b). The provider must manifest maximum responsibility, expressed mainly by receptivity and the desire to answer the consumers' call. Such demands imply prompt service, optimal transactions, phone assistance, etc.
- c). Quality personnel, insured by qualified staff and specialised knowledge.
- d). Service accessibility insured by easy contact with the provider (transport, parking space), schedule, time elapsed, etc.
- e). The staff civility, politeness, respect and friendship; Communications which insure the informing the consumer is done in an adequate manner, although adapted to different consumers. This may imply describing a service to a consumer, its prices and persuading the consumer that the service will be provided.
- f). Company credibility insured by name and reputation, staff-specific traits and the depth of the relation between provider and the consumer.
- g). Safety, which means eliminating any danger, risk or doubt regarding the service provided. This could refer to physical safety, financial or just customer confidentiality.
- h). Understanding basic consumer needs, which means customising needs and relationships.
- i). Tangible elements that must be as attractive as possible: comfortable waiting rooms, nicely dressed staff members, modern apparatus.

If by tourism product we mean an ensemble of physical features, chemical or any other nature, all reunited in one tangible form capable of satisfying a person's tourism need, then the need to identify and define its quality features would surely surface.

In general, as with all other products, the tourism product features present themselves as such:

- Image-related features, which give the product its means for communication with the outside, although in close binds with the products' and the firms' prestige, basically everything (good or bad) the product has accomplished in the eyes of the consumer.
- Functional characteristics which insure the products utility and value, respectively its ability to satisfy the tourism need of its consumers.

Usually the consumer appreciates the quality of a provided service comparing his or her expectations with the experience gained while the service was provided. The result can be presented like this:



Source: Olteanu Valerică, Cetină Iuliana, *Services Marketing*. (Editura Expert, București, 1994).

The quality of a tourism product, which represents the level of insured satisfaction of all tourist needs (or the concordance between customer expectations and what the producer offers them), can be appraised by means of various aspects.

From the wide range of ways to differentiate quality features in tourism products, we will present only one, which refers to separating various aspects into major groups: natural, technical, management, human, social and cultural, legal, economics, etc.

1. *Natural features* of a product are:

- Landscape beauty
- Pure air and water
- Access to local attractions (the presence or absence of natural obstacles)
- Altitude of any and all attractions
- Climate and temperature
- Season
- Flood, earthquake, avalanche, vulcanic eruption and other natural disaster rate and magnitude.

All these aspects can render a tourism product more or less appealing, increasing or decreasing the tourists' satisfaction. Excepting, maybe, water and air purity all the other aspects are well beyond the influence of tourism companies, thus registering impossible values. What is, however, left at their discretion is the way in which these aspects are highlighted and left unaffected. The more varied and attractive the landscape, the more customers will chose the destination for hiking, or seasonal activities, with fresh air and pure water comes more bearable climate, and with a lower rate of bad weather and natural disasters the better the consumer will



feel, also allowing the chance for a repeatable experience and transmitting a favorable influence to his or her immediate entourage.

2. *Technical quality features* are aspects related only to overall vehicle performance, means of communication, the infrastructure of hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions and other pieces of equipment that contribute to the well-being of the basic and secondary tourism products. Of these we highlight:

- Wear and tear aspects, which are the opposite of what one understands by quality services, being closely related (the older the equipment to more used it will be). Sometimes (historical monuments) age represents a positive aspect.
- Availability and maintenance, which influence the cost and duration of services, customer comfort, tourist safety, etc.
- Lighting and signaling, which are important aspects concerning tourist transport services, lodging and even recreation.
- Noise and vibrations which unavoidably accompany tourism services, these aspects correlate with the level of comfort.
- Travelling speed (of vehicles, buses, trains, elevators, etc.) which must fall under a certain limit in order to insure the safety of the tourists, and to make sure the landscape can be properly observed, but also to make sure the voyage isn't too long and tedious.
- Receiving and production capacity of any and all equipment (lodging, transport, meal service, recreation), based on prompt or late service, avoid crowded areas and stress.
- Level of comfort during travel and the sojourn, which is ensured by other features, but also targets the vehicle class used in transport, hotel stars and restaurant category).
- City and building architecture.

Insuring these aspects implies a large number of investments, high maintenance and repair. *Management* related aspects are service-specific, and in this case fall under the following categories:

- The beginning and end of the tourism service, which must coincide with the consumers' expectations, any issue in this respect could cause the consumer to seek services elsewhere.
- The open-closed time of any resorts, these aspects must be chosen in such a manner as all clients can enjoy the provided services whenever they order them, and the company can make best use of its facilities.
- Configuring the travel circuit. The duration of a journey, the fatigue, landscape variety and attraction availability all depend on this certain aspect.
- Visiting program and recreational programs which must adhere to the customers' expectations.
- Service synchronization (information, transport, lodging, recreation) gives the tourism product its contents. Tourism product attractiveness and the

satisfaction these products offer depend whole on the companies' management solutions. That is why a qualified agent must be a good manager in order to offer high quality services to those interested.

Taking into consideration the technical and management-related aspects, now we can talk about *technical and management-related features* of tourism services, like:

- Duration of partial and integral services, which, on one hand must be perfectly balanced in order to not bore or fatigue the consumer, and on the other hand must not be too small in order to give the beneficiaries the chance to enjoy something as much as they want, this aspect being tied to the technical and management-related aspects of the equipment used as well as the skill level and management skills of the employed staff members.
- The level of security during the unfolding of the service, which depends on the level of attractiveness and price.
- The difference between the duration of the recreational part and other complementary services, the products' quality increasing along with its level, recreation being something essential in the tourists' eyes.
- Crowding, which depends on the receiving capacities of every tourism company, the level and distribution time of a request, schedule, etc.

3. *Staff-related features* regarding services heavily influence their quality. Under this banner we have:

- The number of available personnel, which needs to be large enough to promptly serve clients but small enough to not have any negative effects on prices.
- Structuring the staff by professions, qualification levels, service categories, age, all aspects must adhere to the structure of the consumer demands, all highlighted structural criteria must be met in order to ensure the staff can handle any and all the needs of their clients.
- Employees missing from work, when in large numbers may compromise all efforts towards ensuring proper service quality.
- Kindness, politeness and availability of every staff member, all these aspects imposing strict employee selection, formation and supervising criteria.
- The proper attire and attitude, which can satisfy or displease tourists.
- The working and lodging conditions of all tourism employees, based on the staff members' capacity to fully satisfy the expectations of their jobs, which can be higher or lower.
- The level of the paycheck, which can depend on employee motivation, availability and good character.
- Honoring the working hours, an employee missing from an assignment can cause displeasure among clients.
- The knowledge of foreign languages, which is an imposed feature when working with tourists from abroad.

Romanian companies confess to an increased level of failure, particularly because they cannot yet insure complete satisfaction of the afore-mentioned aspects.

4. *Social and cultural features* that may influence the quality of tourism services adhere to:

- The ethnic structure of the population within the tourism areas, which is in close correlation with the demands for tourism services (especially international tourism) and with the level of attractiveness of the targeted areas, all these depending on each nationalities' traditions, local tensions and existing conflicts, etc.
- The education and cultural level of the population, which can affect its character: more open to receiving tourists, communicative, tolerant, keen attention, etc.
- The number of people who speak international languages, among these there is also the level of attractiveness towards foreign tourists.
- A land rich in folklore and cultural and historic monuments, are important aspects for tourists who manifest an attraction to them.
- Hospitality and tolerance of the locals.

5. The most important *legal aspects* are as follows:

- The image of the population and regime of the targeted country.
- Political and social stability.
- Border-crossing formalities and the restrictions they impose.
- Access to public services.
- Local, regional and national authorities' attitude towards tourism.
- The law concerning tourism, heritage and licenses, etc.

Obviously, such aspects are well beyond the influence of tourism companies and in the hands of public and central powers of the said country.

6. *Economical features* of a tourism product refer to:

- Cost level and structure.
- Prices.
- The magnitude of any and all commercial networks in the area, etc.

Raising the bar when it comes to tourism products, or any other products, means high resource consumption, which leads to higher prices through which the companies ensure a profit, thus regaining their investment. Due to the fact that as long as a person maintains the "tourist" aspect, they manifest themselves as a buyer, then obviously the magnitude of the commercial network in the tourism area will constitute an attraction (a tourism product will prove to be of higher quality, the more it is accompanied by commercial services).

According to the experts at the World Tourism Organization, the main quality features of a tourism product would be:

- Validity, rendering the product usable.
- Reliability, the feature which ensures consumption in prime conditions.

- Efficiency, appraised by the relation between: effect, satisfaction and effort.
- Integrability, which is the feature that can offer a whole service range that defines contents.
- Flexibility, the ability to easily adapt to the clients demands.

All these features can be viewed as aspects upon which the level of tourism demand depends on.

*Creating and providing services* represents another main aspect that separates policy from product. Its features are determined by the specific way in which the services are rendered, which is why some writers would propose assimilating the processes of creation and production, under the name “servuction”. In the opinion of some reputable French researchers, this system is based on the interaction of three elements:

- Phisics
- Personnel
- Processing and customers

As we can see, the central element is the internal organization, which ensures the combination of all the elements necessary to provide a certain service. When forming the product policy, the company will have to consider the components and the relations between them in such a way as to ensure the satisfaction of even the highest demands.

Product strategies are composed of three known aspects: quality, innovation and diversity, all of these with adequate variables. The basic element is determined by the dominant position of the profit strategies, service quality being also a key element. Improving service quality is a difficult thing to manage. This means that the company must fulfill its promises and provide higher than average services at all times. A special contribution to improving a service's levels of quality would be projecting the service as a single system, because one such system cannot perform at high quality if its components do not operate at the same efficiency. In some cases, it's the small details that escape even the keenest marketers' line of sight. Thusly, a poorly lit hotel will discourage its customers to perform any nocturnal activities that would require stronger lighting. Another method that ensures high quality services is earning and keeping customer and employee loyalty. Consumers usually don't separate service quality from the honesty and trust that a service provider might offer.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the last two decades, society has witnessed a series of change regarding consumer behavior. Heading towards a healthier lifestyle, heightened attention towards environmental issues and the continued interest for quality services are but a few to name the least in modern society. Research shows that these aspects influence consumers when they are looking to pick a holiday destination. These days tourists, known as “new tourists”, care a great deal for what they can obtain from holidays,

especially the uniqueness of it all. Tourist motivation is a complex subject that falls onto the hands of psychology in order to explain the process behind an individual making a decision as well as their behavior before and after the holiday. Their motivation reflect their inner desires and that's what pushes them to find in holidays the experiences that will yield satisfaction.

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