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EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF TOURIST PACKAGES IN TUNISIA BY POLISH TOURISTS: A CASE STUDY USING THE SERVPERF METHOD

Abstract: Polish tourists who decide to spend a holiday in various countries can be classified as 'institutionalised' tourists. They mostly choose tourist packages proposed by tour operators and their quality is one of the determinants of purchase. Although there have been many attempts at assessing the quality of single tourism services/products, no consistent methods for evaluation of the quality of services in a tourist package have been developed so far. Therefore, the present study proposes a subjective consumer-based research procedure to assess the quality of such a package. The procedure was prepared based on the example of an assessment of Tunisia tourist packages chosen by Polish tourists. The study procedure included the assumptions and principles of the SERVPERF method as well as a diagnostic survey and the use of descriptive statistics. The results are a starting point for formulating recommendations for tour operators offering Polish tourists basic packages in Tunisia.

Keywords: tourist package, quality, tourist services, SERVPERF, Tunisia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Among Mediterranean countries, Tunisia is characterised by a dynamic development of tourism (POIRIER & WRIGHT 1993, WEIGERT 2012). This is associated with the constant tourist interest in this destination, greatest by visitors from European and Maghreb countries (WIDZ & BRZEZIŃSKA-WÓJCIK 2016). Among European tourists, Poles are in fifth place in terms of numbers after the French, German, Italian, and British.

In accordance with the concept of tourist behaviour formulated by E. COHEN (1973), Poles who choose a holiday in Tunisia can be classified as 'institutionalised' tourists. Their decisions follow the schemes and standards imposed by tour operators offering tourist packages and their popularity among Polish tourists is confirmed by statistical data. In 2000, the volume of tourism from Poland using packages was 7.2% (www.intur.com.pl); it increased to 14.0% in 2010 and to 15.9% in 2016. This means that every fifth foreign holiday for a Polish tourist in 2016 was organised by a tour operator (www.msit.gov.pl).

Given the unique nature of tourism services related to hedonistic, aesthetic and emotional elements (JOHNS 1999), many factors determine the choice of a package including perceived service quality, product quality and tourists' personal expectations (ZEITHAML, BITNER & GREMLER 2013). Dynamic changes in these factors oblige tour operators to develop packages taking them into account and to improve the product continually by adapting the offer to those changing expectations (GOŁEMBSKI 1999). Therefore, quality is an important component determining the attractiveness of a tourist package (BATYK 2012).

The problem of evaluating the quality of services in tourism and recreation has been analysed in the tourism literature with reference to the hospitality industry (e.g. RAPACZ 1996, CHOI & CHU 2001, JU-WAHEER 2004, POON & LOCK-TENG LOW 2005, GROBELNA 2009, MOHAJERANI & MIREMADI (2012), the tourism product (e.g. JAREMEN 2004, WĄSOWICZ 2004, INGALDI 2015, MACIĄG 2015), tour operators (JOHNS, AVCI & KARATEPE, 2004), and the tourism industry as a whole (FICK & RITCHIE 1991). The problem of the assessment of the quality of tourist services offered within a tourism destination (BHAT & QADIR 2013) or

on holiday packages (JOHANN 2014) has been addressed less frequently. The methodological aspect of such studies is important. Many of the above-mentioned studies have been conducted using different research procedures although often referring to the same categories. There is therefore a need to develop a uniform research model based on a subjective evaluation of a tourist package.

The aim of the article is to present a subjective consumer-based research procedure for evaluating tourist package quality. The procedure was developed based on the assessment of Tunisia holiday packages purchased by Polish tourists, i.e. a relatively large group of clients in a dynamically changing geopolitical situation. The research procedure included the assumptions and principles of the SERVPERF method as well as a diagnostic survey using an appropriate questionnaire as a research tool with the use of descriptive statistics. Another objective was to compare the quality of transportation, hotel, and holiday rep services in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the offers.

2. TOURIST PACKAGES AND THEIR QUALITY IN THE TOURISM LITERATURE

Although the *Tourist Services Act* dated 29 August 1997, and its amendment dated 20 July 2017, do not define a tourist package, definitions can be found in tourism literature (e.g. MEDLIK 1995, MIDDLETON 1996, KONIECZNA-DOMAŃSKA 2007, KACZMAREK, STASIAK & WŁODARCZYK 2010, STEC 2015). The tourist package is often referred to as *all-inclusive* (KACZMAREK *et al.* 2010). It is defined by B. MEYER (2006) as "a compilation of partial tourism services, which are combined by the tour operator into one package and offered at one price. The package must include at least transport and accommodation, but other services such as transfer, holiday rep's supervision, car rental, and tour and sightseeing services are also included as a rule". The most general definition is provided by A. KONIECZNA-DOMAŃSKA (2007), who describes a tourist package as "services that are appropriately compiled, centred on the consumer in both space and time, and assigned a common price". As suggested by S. MEDLIK (1995), a tourist package is a combination of "two or more items sold as a single product at an all-inclusive price without specification of individual costs". A similar definition was formulated by A. STEC (2015), i.e. a tourist package may consist of only two services (e.g. accommodation and transport) or can have multiple components (accommodation, transport, catering, and sightseeing). Additionally, tour

operators selling packages offer tourists complementary services if needed. A slightly different approach is proposed by V.T.C. MIDDLETON (1996). The author defines tourist packages as "standard, quality-controlled, repeatable products combining two or more of the following elements: transport, accommodation, catering, tourist attractions, and other facilities and services (e.g. travel insurance). Packages sold to general clients are presented in promotional publications or other media and offered to potential buyers at a published total price with no specification of the costs of the individual components."

According to these definitions, a tourist package can include several or more goods and services with some of them (additional) regarded as optional. Taking into account the characteristics of the tourist package and the possibilities of a tourist's decision, J. KACZMAREK *et al.* (2010) have distinguished basic, extended, and optional tourist packages.

An important role in the attractiveness of a tourist package is played by its quality. This is confirmed by the findings of the Institute for Internal Market and Consumption. The greatest importance is assigned to quality – 72%, with price – 61%, level of service – 55%, and other determinants – 50% (DĄBROWSKA 1998). Therefore, the problem of defining 'quality' in tourism has been addressed in many studies (e.g. KACHNIEWSKA 2002, GRYSZEL 2004, JAREMEN 2004, WĄSOWICZ 2004, PANASIUK 2004, RAPACZ 2004, WAJDA 2005, MACIĄG 2010, 2015, BIELAWA 2011). One of the broadest definitions of quality has been formulated by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) as "satisfaction of all requirements and expectations of the consumer at an established and acceptable price and conformity with quality requirements related to safety, hygiene, and accessibility of tourism services and harmony of the human and natural environment" (PANASIUK 2004). The definitions of quality available in the literature are multidirectional and diverse (KACHNIEWSKA 2006). This is associated with many markers of quality mentioned by A. PAYNE (1994), e.g. material infrastructure of services, reliability of services, service providers' responsiveness, security, and knowledge of a client's needs (BATYK 2012).

Another issue is the measurement of quality. Typically, quality is assessed in three dimensions, i.e. technical, functional, and marketing (LEHTINEN & LEHTINEN 1991). In the case of tourism services, the marketing dimension is important. In this approach, J. MACIĄG (2010, 2015) emphasises three features: 1) a comparison of client expectations with the actual quality level (PARASURAMAN, ZEITHAML & BERRY 1988); 2) excellence of services (MALLEN & ADAMS 2011); and 3) value perceived by the client in terms of cost (DAHLGAARD, KRISTENSEN & KANJI 2000). The present study focuses on the first two aspects.

In tourism services, meeting quality requirements is more complex than in other service-related sectors. This is associated with the expectations of the client who is transferred from his/her place of residence to a place known perhaps exclusively from photographs available in a travel agency catalogue or on websites. Therefore, the tourist expects an ideal from the services included in the tourist package, as it influences the level of satisfaction from the purchased product.

Measurement of the quality of services in tourism is therefore highly important. For over 20 years, many researchers have tried to develop both theoretical and methodical approaches for the measurement of satisfaction of a tourism client (e.g. MENG, TEPANON & UYSAL 2008).

3. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES OF DATA

Attempts at assessing the quality of tourism and recreation services being only variably successful led to the development of a research protocol for evaluating a tourist package. Another reason for designing the procedure was the need to present results avoiding complex statistics and obscure language by using clear figures and the basic statistical tools that are commonly used in tourism and recreation. The third reason for proposing the methodical approach is the need for the acquisition of comparable results of assessing tourism products targeted at improvement.

The adopted research procedure comprised the following stages: 1) meta-analysis (literature-based discovery) of the definition of tourist services (and what they include) and methods for evaluating their quality; 2) screening – critical elimination of methods that do not serve the adopted objective; 3) choice of the SERVPERF (*Service Performance*) method for evaluating Tunisia tourist packages; 4) development of a research tool – a survey questionnaire; 5) analysis of the product offered by tour operators in the SECURE and MerlinX reservation systems; 6) choice of hotels for analysis using a diagnostic survey and an environmental survey; 7) survey and verification of research tools followed by appropriate analyses; 8) compilation of the results to evaluate the quality of Tunisia tourist packages; 9) calculation of selected measures (arithmetic mean, median, dominant) using the tools of descriptive statistics; analysis of the results with emphasis on weaknesses and strengths.

The literature presenting methods for assessing service quality (e.g. CARRILLAT, JARAMILLO & MULKI 2007, NOWACKI 2007, URBANIAK 2014, RAMEZANI GHOTBABADI, FEIZ & BAHARUN 2015) indicates that the following models are the best-known: Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (BERRY, PARASURAMAN & ZEITHAML 1990), Grönroos, Gummesson, integrated (4Q), Lethinen & Lethinen three-dimensional, the Moore quality improvement, and the Nash perceived and expected quality (e.g. URBANIAK 2014, MACIĄG 2015). Research on quality in tourism and recreation is most often conducted using SERVQUAL (e.g. BABAKUS & BOLLER 1992, JUWAHEER 2004), SERVPERF (e.g. CRONIN & TAYLOR 1994, FOGARTY, CATTS & FORLIN 2000, JAIN & GUPTA 2004, INGALDI 2015), and Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) (e.g. HUDSON, HUDSON & MILLER 2004). After an analysis of opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of these methods, expressed by some of the researchers mentioned above, the evaluation of the basic offer in Tunisia proposed for Polish tourists was carried out using the SERVPERF (*Service Perfomance*) method. Two factors determined this choice rather than the more popular SERVQUAL approach: 1) the belief of many researchers (e.g. BABAKUS & BOLLER 1992, CRONIN & TAYLOR 1992, 1994, BRADY, CRONIN & BRAND 2002) that subjective assessment of service quality, i.e. expected and experienced by the client, is comparable; and 2) difficulties in surveying the same tourist before and after utilising the tourist product.

The latter factor was important when investigating the quality of Tunisia tourist packages by Polish tourists. In accordance with SERVQUAL principles, two questionnaires were delivered to the respondents during a pilot survey (in 2013): the first for assessing expectations prior to use of the services (at the airport, before transfer to the hotel); and the second for evaluating the service experienced (at the hotel, before the transfer back to the airport). In the first case, it turned out that the respondents had too little time to complete the questionnaire. Between receiving the survey forms at the airport and the beginning of the transfer to the hotel, the respondents were mainly focused on collecting baggage, finding the right coach belonging to the tour operator, and early completion of hotel registration cards. In the second case, the respondents also turned out to be concentrating on such issues. As a result, the respondents returned only 35 of the 400 survey forms (less than 9% of all questionnaires). These results prompted choosing the SERVPERF method rather than the SERVQUAL approach.

The basic assumption of the SERVPERF is an understanding of 'quality' by the tourist in terms of service excellence. Unlike in the SERVQUAL method, SERVPERF takes into account only the subjective evaluation of the service after receiving the tourism product. Expectations from the service are excluded (JAIN & GUPTA 2004). Subsequently, the subjective assessment obtained is compared to the level of excellence of its delivery, which in the analysed case is 5.00.

A survey questionnaire was used to evaluate the quality of the basic tourist package. It comprised questions related to assessing the quality of three components of the package: transport (airport-hotel and hotel-airport transfer), hotel, and holiday rep's supervision services (Tables 1–4).

Each of these three was described in terms of the five areas proposed by the team of PARASURAMAN (1988) and adapted by the developers of the SERVPERF method (CRONIN & TAYLOR 1992). These include *tangibles,* in the sense of the exterior and interior appearance of the service facility, equipment, promotional materials, as well as the dress code, behaviour, and appearance of the staff; *reliability,* i.e. the ability of the service provider to perform the service accurately, reliably, and punctually; *empathy* manifested in a personalised approach to the client; *assurance,* i.e. a combination of knowledge, qualifications and credibility of employees; and *responsiveness* defined as quickness of response to clients' expectations (BERRY *et al.* 1990).

Next, each of the five areas was described by relevant variables (Tables 2–4), as suggested by G. FOGARTY, R. CATTS & C. FORLIN (2000) and developed in accordance with the traits proposed by P. GAJEWSKA & J. KUROWSKA-PYSZ (2012) and M. JOHANN (2014). While specifying the parameters for assessing hotel service, its heterogeneity was taken into account (e.g. GAWORECKI 1997 distinguishes three aspects: accommodation, catering and additional). Therefore, the questionnaire included variables related to catering and SPA services.

Each variable was assigned a 5-point semantic scale as used in the most recent studies (e.g. BATYK 2012). In earlier tourism literature (e.g. PARASURAMAN *et al.* 1988, FOGARTY *et al.* 2000), 5- or 7-point scales referring to the original Likert scale were employed.

In the next stage, offers from tour operators were analysed based on the SECURE and MerlinX reservation systems. An offer that proposed an accommodation standard preferred by Polish tourists (46.27%, *Raport podróżnika* 2013) was selected for the study. Consequently, evaluating hotel services was undertaken in standardised 4- and 5-star hotels belonging to the *El Mouradi* chain (www.elmouradi.com).

The study was carried out using diagnostic and environmental surveys, and undertaken among Polish tourists in Tunisia between May and July 2013, allowing verification of the research tools. Next, appropriate research was conducted among Polish visitors to Tunisia between May and September 2014. In total, 460 correctly completed questionnaires were returned from the following hotels: El Mouradi Gammarth (*Tunis* Governorate[1], *n* = 52), El Mouradi Beach (in Nabul, *n* = 74), El Mouradi Port El Kantaoui (in Susa,

n = 85), El Mouradi Skanes (in *Monastur*, *n* = 112), El Mouradi Mahdia (in Al-Mahdijja, *n* = 89), and El Mouradi Djerba Menzel (in Madanin, n = 48). The respondents evaluated the individual variables by marking a score on a 5-point semantic scale, where 1 – means 'very bad', and 5 – 'very good (excellent)'.

In the tourism literature, compilation of questionnaire responses concerning assessment of tourism services is usually based on just the arithmetic mean (e.g. BHAT & QADIR 2013), the arithmetic mean and median (e.g. BATYK 2012), or the arithmetic mean and standard deviation (e.g. AL KHATTAB & ALDEHAYYAT 2011). The classic parameter, i.e. the arithmetic mean, is used most frequently. However, since the quality of services as a component of the tourist package is a category of attractiveness, the positional characteristic, i.e. the median (the middle value in the analysed data set), is a more appropriate measure from the statistical point of view while for values deviating widely from the data set, it provides a more accurate measure of the central value (SOBCZYK 2007). On the other hand, at a relatively narrow rating scale, e.g. 5- or 7-point, the arithmetic mean provides wider possibilities of interpretation than the median (PIKKEMAAT & WEIERMAIR 2003). In turn, the standard deviation is a measure of the scatter of values around the mean (SOBCZYK 2007). Therefore, in describing the results of empirical studies, the arithmetic mean and median should be used for narrower scales, whereas the mean and standard deviation are advisable in the case of broader, e.g. 10-point, scales. Additionally, the interpretative capabilities of another positional characteristic, i.e. the dominant (mode, modal value), in assessing tourist services were analysed. The dominant, i.e. the most frequent value in the data set, proved to be appropriate for the evaluation.

Therefore, the empirical data obtained in this study were characterised by the arithmetic mean, median, and dominant along with the use of descriptive statistics. Despite the subjectivity of the respondents, the results reveal a large discrepancy in each case between the quality experienced by the tourist and the ideal value (5.00) for a given variable.

Next, the results were analysed in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of the tourist package in order to formulate recommendations for a tour operator.

The sources of data in the first stage of the research were the SECURE and MerlinX reservation systems. Based on this data, hotels suitable for the 2013 study were selected and the tourism offer was analysed in terms of the variability of the packages proposed for Polish tourists in 2013–17. The main source of data in the second stage of the research was the survey results.

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF BASIC PACKAGES IN TUNISIA OFFERED TO POLISH TOURISTS IN 2013–17

In 2017, Tunisia holidays were offered by eight tour operators. Three were the leaders in this respect i.e. Sun&Fun (42 offers), Exim Tours (34), and TUI (27). In terms of the number of offers they were followed by Oasis Tours (23 offers), Best Reisen Group (21), Rainbow Tours (19), Prima Holiday (18), and Itaka (17). In total, the operators offered 201 basic packages (at different dates and prices) in 93 hotels. Besides the basic package, additional offers with self-drive were available in the season of 2017 from three tour operators: Der Tour (27 hotels), SpaDreams (6), and Der Tour Polska (1).

The most popular in the Polish tourism offer for Tunisia is the basic package as defined by KACZMAREK *et al.* (2002). It comprises accommodation with catering (depending on the form purchased), transport (flight and airport-hotel-airport transfer), holiday rep supervision, and insurance in case of 'Costs of Medical Treatment' (CMT) and 'Unfortunate Accidents' (UA). There is also optional luggage insurance, travel cancellation insurance, and a guarantee of price stability.

The basic component of the package is the **accommodation** provided by the hotels. Analysis of basic packages for Tunisia indicates that the number of hotels proposed for Polish tourists changed considerably between 2013 and 2017.
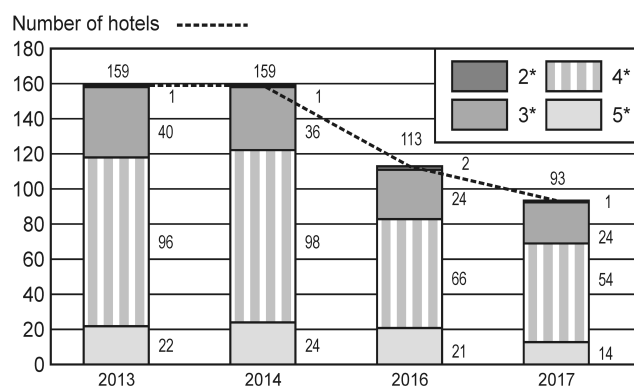

Fig. 1. Number of hotels in basic packages for Tunisia in 2013–17 according to category
Source: authors, based on the SECURE and MerlinX reservation systems

The accommodation offer in the basic packages analysed was dominated by 4-star hotels whose number dropped from 96 in 2013 to 54 in 2017. In second and third places were 3- and 5-star hotels. Only two 2-star hotels were available in the tourism offer in 2016 and one such was offered in 2013, 2014, and 2017 (Fig. 1).

The category of hotel is an important element in the evaluation of service quality. A 5-star categorisation is used in Tunisia. However, its hotel star rating does not always correspond to that used in other countries. For instance, the standard of a 5-star hotel in Tunisia is equivalent to a 4- or sometimes 3-star hotel in Poland. The most transparent accommodation classification system in Tunisia is used by hotel chains, recognised by name and logo and by specified characteristics such as uniform location, the same organisational structure, operating documentation, accommodation and catering standards, a uniform computer system, and a central service reservation system (ŁABUZ 2017).

The tourism offer dedicated to Polish tourists comprises 14 hotel chains: Tunisian (*El Mouradi, Marhaba, Thalassa, Houda, One Resort, Sensimar, Magic Life*) and international (*Caribbean World, Vincci, Iberostar, Lti, Sentido, Riu, Concorde*).

The Tunisian facilities most often proposed for Polish tourists are hotels from the *El Mouradi* chain. In 2013, the chain offered 16 000 accommodation places in 18 hotels (3-, 4-, and 5-star). Its hotels are located in the towns of Susa (Fr. Sousse), Mina al-Kantawi (Fr. Port El Kantaoui), Al-Hammamat (Fr. Hammamet), Tunis, Kamart (Fr. Gammarth), Al-Mahdijja (Fr. Mahdia), Monastur (Fr. Monastir), Duz (Fr. Douz), and Hammam Bu Rukajba (Fr. Hammam Bourguiba) and on Djerba Island (Fr. Île de Djerba) (www.elmouradi.com). Additionally, all facilities belonging to the *Marhaba* and *Thalassa* chains are offered. Six hotels from the *Marhaba* chain are located in only two governorates – Nabul (Fr. Nabeul) and Susa. Four *Thalassa* hotels offering extensive spa services, e.g. thalassotherapy, are located in four governorates – Nabul, Susa, Monastur, and Al-Mahdijja (www.thalassa-hotels.com). In addition, the basic package comprises two hotels belonging to each of the *Houda* and *One Resort* chains and one from each of the *Sensimar* and *Magic Life* chains.

Among the international chains, six hotels belonging to *Caribbean World* are available in nearly all governorates analysed apart from the Susa region. The *Sentido, Iberostar*, and *Lti* chains offer three hotels each and the lowest, only two are offered to Polish tourists, by the *Riu* and *Concorde* chains.

In terms of location, basic packages for Tunisia comprise accommodation facilities situated on the east coast and Djerba Island. The greatest number of hotels are located in the Nabul governorate, i.e. Al-Hammamat and Nabul. Approximately 60 hotels were offered in 2013–14 and 30 were available in 2016–17 (Fig. 2), i.e. the accommodation offer decreased by half.

Susa governorate with Susa and Mina al-Kantawi is another region with the highest number of hotels available in basic packages. In 2017, the offer comprised

27 hotels located, i.e. 16 hotels less than in 2014 (Fig. 2). Many available in the basic packages offered to Polish tourists are located in Madanin, Monastur, and the Al-Mahdijja governorates.
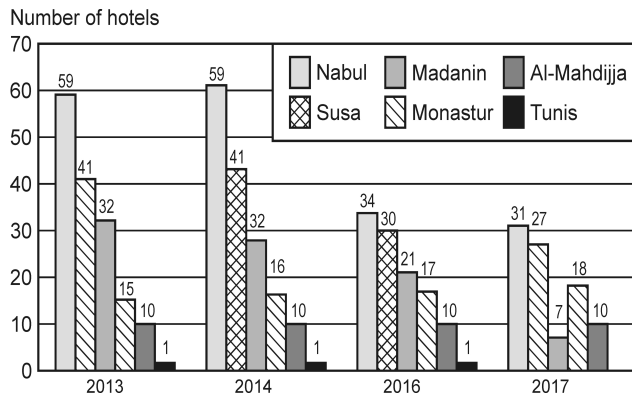

Fig. 2. Number of hotels offered to Polish tourists on basic packages for Tunisia by governorate: 2013–17 (excluding 2015)
Source: authors, based on the SECURE and MerlinX reservation systems

The lowest number of hotels in the offer of Polish tour operators was in the Tunis governorate. In 2013, there were two: El Mouradi *Gammarth* and Carribean *World Gammarth*. In subsequent years, only one, the Caribbean *World Gammarth*, was available. There were none in the 2017 offer (Fig. 2).

In terms of **catering**, tourist packages recommended to Polish tourists are dominated by the all-inclusive accommodation option. Approximately 75% of all tourists choose this (*Raport Podróżnika* 2016). In Tunisia, this form of catering includes unlimited access to meals and snacks as well as non-alcoholic and local alcoholic drinks. In a majority of cases, this option proves to be cheaper than self-catering outside the hotel and is especially attractive to families with children.

Transport services to Tunisia are provided for Polish tourists by charter airlines e.g. Enter Air, Nouvelair, and Tunisair. Transfer of tourists from the airport to the hotel and from the hotel back to the airport is usually provided by carriers belonging to tour operators, e.g. Itaka, TUI, and Sun&Fun. This service is also available from Tunisian carrier companies e.g. Service Holiday and Tunisian Travel Club.

Holiday reps, i.e. Polish representatives of tour operators in Tunisia, look after tourists and supervise the services in the tourist package. As indicated by the Voivodship Labour Office in Kraków (WUP 2011), holiday representatives are usually young, 22-32-years old.

The scope of duties and the list of qualifications and skills required from a holiday rep are not uniform and depend on the tour operator's regulations. Many of the tasks to be fulfilled by a holiday rep are identical to those of a tour guide, as specified by the *Tourist Services Act* dated 29 August 1997. This is associated with a lack of precise legal outlines of the profession of holiday rep and the deregulation of occupational tour guide requirements. Therefore, tour operators are increasingly offering internal occupational training programmes (SZAFRANOWICZ-MAŁOZIĘĆ 2013, plus the personal experience of one of the present authors). Consequently, assessing the quality of holiday reps' work by tourists is indispensable for improving tourist packages offered by tour operators.

5. ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES EXPERIENCED BY POLISH TOURISTS IN BASIC PACKAGES IN TUNISIA

The survey respondents were residents of nine provinces with the greatest proportion, 28%, from Śląskie. There were significant shares from Mazowieckie – 23%, Lubelskie – 16%, and Małopolskie – 13%, while others came from Wielkopolskie – 9%, Podkarpackie – 5%, Pomorskie – 3%, Łódzkie – 2%, and Warmińsko-Mazurskie – 1%.

In terms of the age of the 460 respondents, two groups dominated: 25-44 (49%) and 45-64 (31%). Generally, they can be characterised by being occupationally active and physically fit. Over 65-year-olds accounted for 13% and those aged 18-24, mainly school and university students, 7%. In terms of gender, the proportions were nearly equal, i.e. women accounted for 52% and men for 48%.

In terms of education, those with secondary education accounted for 45% and those with higher education 31%. The group with basic vocational education represented 17% while the lowest were those with further education – 4%, lower secondary – 2%, and primary – 1%.

As for the household size, respondents from three-, two-, and four-person families dominated and represented 38%, 29%, and 22%, respectively. Approximately 8% were single while the smallest group (3%) were from households with more than five.

The respondents were characterised by large discrepancies in monthly household income. The minimum was 850 PLN and the maximum was as large as 150,000 PLN. A majority were in the range of 2,400-4,000 PLN and the median was 3,000 PLN per household.

The results of the survey (Table 1) revealed that the basic package in Tunisia recommended to Polish tourists received a slightly higher score than 'satisfactory', as indicated by the statistical mean (3.56). In

Table 1. Assessment by Polish tourists of the components of Tunisia tourist packages

Assessment of the holiday package quality			Package components – services:	Assessment of components – services		
mean	median	dominant		mean	median	dominant
3.56	3.00	3.00	transport	3.63	3.50	**4.00**
			accommodation with catering	3.53	3.00	3.00
			holiday rep's supervision	3.53	3.00	3.00

Source: authors, based on survey results; *n* = 460.

turn, the values of the median and dominant (3.00) indicate a 'satisfactory' level. This implies a large discrepancy between the rating and the assumed quality excellence (5.00).

Taking into account the arithmetic means, the three package components that were ranked the highest were transport (M 3.63) and the hotel and holiday rep services which both received M 3.53 (Table 1). This is confirmed by the values of the median and dominant for transport services (Me 3.50; D 4.00) with the other two services having the same values again (Me 3.00; D 3.00).

In terms of **transport**, the values of the mean and median for the quality of basic package categories show the highest ranking for 'responsiveness' (M 3.86; Me 3.50; D 4.00) and the worst for 'tangibles' (M 3.37; Me 3.00; D 3.00) (Table 2). Despite the high evaluation of these services, there is a large difference between levels between the quality experienced and overall quality excellence (5.00).

In terms of 'responsiveness', both variables, i.e. the *ability to help the tourist* and *ease in establishing contact with the participants*, were graded relatively high, M 4.00 (Me 4.00; D 4.00) and M 3.72 (Me 3.50; D 4.00), respectively (Table 2). 'Assurance' was graded lower (M 3.72; Me 3.50; D 4.00), which was influenced by the value obtained for the *providing a feeling of safety* variable (M 3.20; Me 3.00, D 3.00).

The lowest scores in transport were for 'tangibles' (M 3.37; Me 3.00; D 3.00) (Table 2). The *coach appearance* variable received the lowest value (M 3.26; Me 3.00; D 3.00).

In terms of **hotel services** in the basic package, the arithmetic means, medians and dominants for the quality experienced by the Polish tourists 'assurance' exhibited the highest values (M 3.98; Me 3.50; D 4.00) and the lowest values for 'empathy' (M 3.00; Me 3.00; D 3.00) (Table 3).

Table 2. Assessment by Polish tourists of the transport services in Tunisia tourist packages

Aspects	Variables	Mean (M)		Median (Me)		Dominant (D)	
		Q.E.V.	Q.E.A.	Q.E.V.	Q.E.A.	Q.E.V.	Q.E.A.
Tangibles	coach appearance	3.26	3.37	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
	visible number and logo of the tour operator on the coach	**3.43**		3.00		**4.00**	
	driver's appearance	3.41		3.00		3.00	
Reliability	cleanliness of the coach	3.50	3.54	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
	comfort of journey	3.52		3.00		3.00	
	punctual arrival of the coach at the assembly area	**3.70**		3.50		**4.00**	
	driver's sensitivity to tourists' opinions	3.46		3.00		3.00	
Empathy	understanding tourists' needs and problems	3.34	3.63	3.00	**4.00**	3.00	**4.00**
	appropriate representation of the organiser	**3.93**		**4.00**		**4.00**	
Assurance	knowledge of the route	**4.07**	3.72	**4.00**	3.50	**4.00**	**4.00**
	arousing sympathy and trust	3.90		**4.00**		**4.00**	
	providing a feeling of safety	3.20		3.00		3.00	
Responsiveness	ease in establishing contact with the participants	3.72	**3.86**	3.50	3.50	**4.00**	**4.00**
	ability to help the tourist	**4.00**		**4.00**		**4.00**	

M Q.E.V. – mean for the quality experienced for the variables; M Q.E.A. – mean for the quality experienced for each aspect; Me Q.E.V. – median for the quality experienced for the variables; Me Q.E.A. – median for the quality experienced for each aspect; D Q.E.V. – dominant for the quality experienced for the variables; D Q.E.A. – dominant for the quality experienced for each aspect.

Source: authors, based on survey results; *n* = 460.

Table 3. Assessment by Polish tourists of hotel services in Tunisia tourist packages

Aspects	Variables	Mean (M)		Median (Me)		Dominant (D)	
		Q.E.V.	Q.E.A.	Q.E.V.	Q.E.A.	Q.E.V.	Q.E.A.
Tangibles	exterior appearance of the building	3.31	3.60	3.00	3.50	3.00	3.00
	interior design/aesthetics (lobby, reception, corridors)	3.42		3.00		3.00	
	interior design/aesthetics (room)	3.15		3.00		3.00	
	interior design/aesthetics (restaurant)	3.09		3.00		3.00	
	leisure-time animation – availability at the hotel	3.90		**4.00**		**4,00**	
	SPA – availability, labelling	3.38		3.00		3.00	
	swimming pool – availability, location, aesthetics	3.83		**4.00**		3.00	
	beach – accessibility and distance	**4.18**		**4.00**		**4.00**	
	hotel location (surroundings, landscape, transport accessibility)	3.91		**4.00**		**4.00**	
	staff appearance, dress code	3.86		**4.00**		**4.00**	
Reliability	variety and taste of meals	3.99	3.37	**4.00**	3.00	**4.00**	3.00
	rich leisure-time animation program	3.86		**4.00**		**4,00**	
	condition and quality of the hotel equipment	2.98		3.00		3.00	
	condition and quality of the room equipment	2.89		3.00		3.00	
	Cleanliness of the hotel	3.07		3.00		3.00	
	Cleanliness of the room	2.98		3.00		3.00	
	Cleanliness of the restaurant	3.11		3.00		3.00	
	Cleanliness of the swimming pool	3.29		3.00		3.00	
	Cleanliness of the beach	**4.09**		**4.00**		**4.00**	
	efficient and fast service	3.49		**4.00**		3.00	
Empathy	understanding tourists' needs and problems	3.08	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
	Appropriate attention to a complaint	2.65		3.00		3.00	
	individual approach to the tourist	**3.29**		3.00		3.00	
Assurance	providing expert general and tourism information	3.84	**3.98**	**4.00**	4.00	3.00	**4.00**
	arousing sympathy and trust by the hotel staff	**4.08**		**4.00**		**4.00**	
	providing a feeling of safety	4.03		**4.00**		**4.00**	
Responsive-ness	ease in establishing contact with the participants	**4.05**	3.70	**4.00**	3.50	**4.00**	3.00
	ability to help the tourist	3.35		3.00		3.00	

Abbreviations as in Table 2

Source: authors, based on survey results; *n* = 460.

It should be emphasised that all three variables in 'assurance' received relatively high scores. The *arousing sympathy and trust by the hotel staff* variable received the highest score (M 4.08; Me 4.00; D 4.00) (Table 3).

Other single variables that fulfilled expectations were *beach – accessibility and distance* (in 'tangibles') and *cleanliness of the beach* (in 'reliability'). This result confirms the common opinion that beaches are a great asset in Tunisia. Their natural value makes them an excellent place of relaxation for families with small children. Hence, the '3S' type of tourism (Sea, Sun, and Sand) is still very popular.

The lowest values were noted in the 'empathy' area. The results indicate a 'satisfactory' level (M 3.00; Me 3.00; D 3.00), with the lowest value for the *appropriate attention to a complaint* variable (M 2.65; Me 3.00; D 3.00) (Table 3).

The poor evaluation of the **holiday rep's** service resulted from the merely 'satisfactory' level of the 'empathy' variables (M 3.07; Me 3.00; D 3.00). Two variables were ranked especially low, i.e. *appropriate*

attention to a complaint (M 2.51; Me 3.00, D 3.00) and the *individual approach to the tourist* (M 2.67; Me 3.00; D 3.00) (Table 4).

The best score was noted in for 'tangibles', in particular *holiday rep's appearance* (M 3.80; Me 4.00; D 4.00) (Table 4).

The results of the assessments in the tables allow formulation of comments on the statistical measures employed. Despite its sensitivity to extreme values, the arithmetic mean provides information about the lowest and highest values and facilitates organisation of the results on a 5-point scale. On the other hand, given the large number of variables adopted to assess the quality of Tunisia tourist packages, the arithmetic mean does not provide authoritative relative positioning of the aspects and variables assessed. Medians and dominants however facilitate such positioning. Therefore, the application of more than one quality measure is advisable for a large number of analysed variables.

Results obtained with different measures are not always comparable and do not always clearly suggest

Table 4. Assessment by Polish tourists of the holiday rep's services in Tunisia tourist packages

Aspects	Variables	Mean (M)		Median (Me)		Dominant (D)	
		Q.E.V.	Q.E.A.	Q.E.V.	Q.E.A.	Q.E.V.	Q.E.A.
Tangibles	holiday rep's appearance	3.80	**3.80**	**4.00**	**4.00**	**4.00**	**4.00**
Reliability	sensitivity to tourists' opinions	3.10		3.00		3.00	
	involvement in occupational duties	3.30	3.48	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
	Punctuality	**4.05**		**4.00**		**4.00**	
Empathy	understanding tourists' needs and problems	2.81		3.00		3.00	
	appropriate attention to a complaint	2.51		3.00		3.00	
	individual approach to the tourist	2.67	3.07	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
	appropriate representation of the organiser	3.56		3.00		3.00	
	convenient rep's service hours in the hotel	**3.78**		**4.00**		**4.00**	
Assurance	fluency in a foreign language	**3.93**		**4.00**		**4.00**	
	participants' awareness of the presence of a holiday rep	3.64		3.50		3.00	
	providing expert general and tourism information	3.62	3.77	3.50	3.50	3.00	3.00
	arousing sympathy and	3.79		**4.00**		3.00	
	providing a feeling of safety	3.86		3.50		**4.00**	
Responsiveness	ease in establishing contact with the participants	3.66		3.00		3.00	
	ability to help the tourist	3.26	3.54	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
	ability to manage groups	**3.69**		3.50		3.00	

Abbreviations as in Table 2.
Source: authors, based on survey results; *n* = 460.

interpretation of the assessment. An example is the evaluation of the *efficient and fast service* variable under 'reliability' of the hotel service. According to the arithmetic mean, this service received a better score than 'satisfactory', while the median revealed a 'good' score and the dominant – only 'satisfactory' (Table 3). If there were more such examples, the use of an additional measure, for instance the degree of data scatter, should be considered. However, the results obtained in the research show clearly that the quality of this service diverges from the expected ideal.

It is also worth emphasising that the value of the arithmetic mean is influenced by the number of variables and scores, especially by the highest and lowest individual scores. The median value depends largely on the number of dominant-associated variables and their positioning in the frequency distribution.

6. SUMMARY

The results of assessing the quality of basic packages in Tunisia indicates a large discrepancy between the level reached and the ideal assumed in the SERVPERF model. Among the three services included in packages recommended for Polish tourists, the highest scores were for transport and lower were for holiday rep supervision and hotel services.

The strengths of transport comprise the *ability to help the tourist* and *ease in establishing contact with the* of this service is the *coach appearance* under 'tangibles'. Significant improvement is required for the *cleanliness of the coach*, *comfort of journey*, and *driver's sensitivity to tourists' opinions* under 'reliability'.

Although transport achieved the highest rating from Polish tourists, it is not crucial in the choice of the holiday package, as the airport-hotel-airport transfer is used only twice during the entire stay.

The strengths of the hotel services include all the analysed variables under 'assurance', whereas 'empathy' is a clear weakness. Further improvement is necessary in the case of nearly all variables with the exception of *variety and taste of meals*, *rich leisure-time animation program*, and *cleanliness of the beach* under 'reliability'.

A weakness of the package, both in the hotel and holiday rep's services, is *appropriate attention to a complaint*. This assessment suggests that tour operators should place more stress on responses to complaints and solutions to problems associated with them. They should take into consideration the fact that tourists whose complaints have been positively addressed often become marketing allies of the company. However, as emphasised by WANAGOS (2010), such situations are challenging and require appropriate skills from the tour operator and holiday reps.

In the generally poorly scored 'holiday rep supervision', Polish tourists appreciated *fluency in a foreign language*, *providing a feeling of safety*, and *rep's appearance* variables. These results partially confirm the observation made by SZAFRANOWICZ-MAŁOZIĘĆ (2013) who noted that these are the most socially exposed

employees. Therefore, tourists first evaluate the appearance, attitude, and behaviour and then knowledge or skills.

The statistical measures used in the study proved to be useful for developing a synthetic picture of quality assessment of a large number of variables characterising the components of a tourist package. The divergent quality scores in the case of some variables are an inspiration for finding other measures that will be useful in achieving an objective evaluation of the quality of tourism services.

ENDNOTE

[1] In the research, where possible, geographical names are used according to *the Geographical Nomenclature of the World. Issue 3. Africa.* Commission on Standardization of Geographical Names Outside the Republic of Poland at the Surveyor General of Poland. Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography, Warsaw, 2004.

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