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Ramos, Sara

Coelho, Maria Manuela Martins Saraiva Sarmiento,
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Coelho, Pedro Saraiva Sarmiento, 1977-

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INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH ON SUSTAINABILITY OF RURAL TOURISM

*Centro de Investigação em Gestão, Economia, Serviços e Turismo (CITIS)
da Universidade Lusíada*

**Sara Ramos
Manuela Sarmiento
Pedro Sarmiento**

Resumo: O objetivo desta pesquisa diz respeito à análise da satisfação com o serviço de turismo rural, através do estudo da relação entre os determinantes da satisfação e os atributos que afetam a qualidade percebida.

Os resultados desta investigação destinam-se a ajudar os gestores a melhorar a qualidade do serviço em áreas rurais.

Palavras-chave: turismo rural; qualidade; expectativas; satisfação; serviço.

Abstract: The aim of this research concerns the analysis of satisfaction with the service of rural tourism, through the study of the relationship between the determinants of satisfaction and the attributes that affect the perceived quality.

The results of this research intended to help managers improve the quality of service in rural areas.

Key-words: rural tourism; quality; expectations; satisfaction; service.

1. Introduction

Rural tourism is commonly understood as a way to meet and visit the rural environment, which allows tourists to integrate into daily practices of the property, turning them into tourist attractions.

Currently there are various forms of tourism in rural areas such as rural tourism, agro-tourism, tourist village and country houses. These methods often overlap, which will be adopted by the terminology of rural tourism (TER), to reflect the best of the breadth of opportunities in rural areas.

Rural tourism is, in some situations, viewed as a resource for landowners due to income from overnight stays, meals that market, and products produced in its infrastructure.

The revenue from overnight stays and meals is one of the main features of rural tourism entrepreneurs, with strong emphasis on service quality and guest satisfaction.

According to Tinoco and Ribeiro (2007), the determinants of guest satisfaction are different depending on the type of service, while for some, is that the corporate image is essential, for others it is the perceived quality and price. There is a need to investigate the determinants and the relationship established between them, leading to guest satisfaction for each particular service.

To assess the satisfaction of guest services, it is essential to identify the criteria that underpin and lead to service excellence (Tinoco, 2006). Thus, the service provider can define efforts to respond primarily to the attributes considered most important by guests.

2. Framework

In Portugal, in the seventies we watch to a breakdown of rural societies. In this sense there was a development of tourism and leisure activities in rural areas, given that it considered this type of tourism as a privileged means of promoting existing resources in rural areas, a factor of revitalizing the economic and social sector, and an opportunity to the development of these territories.

In this perspective, during the nineties, new guidelines for rural development, being designed and implemented a set of legislative and financial

support for diversification and development activities in rural areas.

In Portugal, these measures were, first by supporting the creation of responses at the level of tourist accommodation, based on the restoration of buildings of architectural heritage and undoubted value and subsequently support the establishment of a complete and diversified tourist product, which values the diversity of existing endogenous resources in rural areas.

In Portugal there are numerous types of which are approximately 1161 establishments distributed by islands and mainland Portugal (DGADR 2008).

The TER offers to guests:

Infrastructure such as:

- Swimming;
- golf / mini golf;
- tennis court;
- games room;
- gym;
- spa.

Services such as:

- Baby-sitting;
- meal delivery;
- keep pets.

Activities of animation, such as:

- Walking, cycling;
- jeep and motorcycle;
- watching animals;
- loud parties and meetings;
- equestrian activities;
- entertainment for children.

The guest type of tourism in rural areas, are aged between 25 and 44 years, have higher qualifications, favours the discovery of the region and contact with nature and, on average, enjoy a stay for two nights.

Currently, the service sector is a highly competitive industry, which occupies a leading role in the economy, which requires organizations need to win and retain customers to ensure their survival (Tinoco & Ribeiro 2007). This means, a relentless pursuit of quality of services and demand satisfaction of their guests.

3. Tourism sector

The tourism sector has an increasingly great importance in the Portuguese economy, representing about 11% of GDP and absorbs close to 10% of employment in Portugal (DGADR, 2008).

The rural tourism has gained some significance and importance in Portugal

which was due to an emerging appreciation of the territory, which has been shown to be an important tool for development of less developed regions in Portugal .

Rural tourism emerges in an attempt to answer some felt needs, in particular, the lack of rural development and change in tourism demand, but above all as a product of high natural potential, history and culture that had not been much explored and arose from the search of new experiences for tourists.

The development of tourism and quality of rural infrastructure is an important aspect, but tourists, actors involved in the process, are the basis of demand, is just around the needs of rural tourism which revolves, the attributes the local residents and local producers a role as or more important than the first. Because they are entrusted with the development of the process of promotion and conservation of the craft in order to take full advantage of the potential that their region and offer their expertise.

This is also one of the challenges of this type of tourism in Portugal, due to lack of strategies to promote the products by producers and local authorities has meant that the potential gains that come from tourism in rural areas are still not very significant. There is therefore to show the way forward by developing strategies for action, allowing not only meet the needs of demand, but above all improve the quality of life of local people and sustainable development in each region (Ribeiro, 2010).

The customer first, is one of the most commonly heard phrases in tourism, because it expresses an attitude essential to the success of organizations whose aim is related to providing solutions to the needs of its customers. The success of these measures is the result of application of ISO 9000:2000, which tells us that “quality means meeting the requirements combined with the customer” to make that happen is to identify what the requirements are desired by customers and then use this information to take actions to improve their satisfaction.

The satisfied customer will continue to purchase services and also recommend his acquaintances. It’s a proven fact that costs 10 times more to get a new customer to retain a current customer (Joos, 2007). Customer satisfaction, along with the continuous improvement of quality, become the most important objectives of an organization.

4. Research questions, objectives and hypothesis

The research problem is to find the answer of the following question: The service of rural tourism has quality standards that meets customer expectations?

This research has as main objective to analyse the determinants of satisfaction and the attributes affecting the perception of the quality of customer services in areas of rural tourism.

The specific objectives are:

- Analyse the personal desires, expectations and emotions experienced when influencing customer satisfaction
- Analyse the service that generates more satisfaction
- Analyse the behaviour of employees is a quality factor
- Analyse the expectations for the quarter are a factor influencing the satisfaction of guests

We present four hypotheses that we will try to prove:

- The image of the enterprise influences customer satisfaction
- The price of the service influence customer expectations
- The location of the project can influence the quality of service
- The cleanliness and comfort of the enterprise influence the quality of service.

5. Methodology

For better work development, we will perform a literature search, which will cover the entire bibliography published in relation to the subject under study, which may include publications, newsletters, newspapers, magazines, surveys, monographs, dissertations, cartographic material, among other.

We will also opt for a quantitative approach using the deductive method.

The search is performed with an exploratory, with the aim of design issues in the development and to increase chances of familiarity with the environment and that in the study.

6. Literature review

In Portugal, rural tourism, it is a regulated tourist product, which includes various forms of accommodation, but increasingly want to develop as an integrated tourism product. In accordance with the law dates from 1986 and came up with three main objectives: stimulating the recovery of historical and cultural heritage, the combination of tourist accommodation provision to the traditions of rural accommodation and increased economic performance and living conditions of populations (Valente and Figueiredo, 2003).

Under the general direction of tourism, rural tourism "is the set of activities, accommodation and entertainment for tourists, in enterprises of family, made and provided for remuneration, in rural areas." (Art. 1. ° Decree-Law no. No. 55/2002 of April 2), which are considered as "areas with significant and traditional connection to agriculture or the environment and landscape of distinctly rural character" (Art. 3. thereof, Decree-Law no. No. 55/2002 of April 2).

As for Cavaco (2001), rural tourism is a tourism and natural spaces, especially spaces humanized, active or contemplative only, which ensures a return to the

past culture.

The rural tourism has been seen as a solution to regional desertification and increased environmental protection, as well as a way of conservation of natural features and historical properties (Mendonça and Santos and Battle, 2011).

Currently, this type of tourism is an activity generates economic development for rural areas, either individually or through the stimulation of other economic activities that interact with it, such as diversification of agricultural activities, job creation, development new services, encouragement of cultural initiatives, encouragement of rural crafts and restoration of historic heritage (White, Ribeiro and Tinoco, 2010).

The variety of attractions available in rural areas, such as interests landscaped varieties of flora and fauna, conditions for sports activities or recreation (hunting, fishing, mountain biking, hiking, etc.), Cultural interests (festivities, monuments and historic sites, etc.) and good facilities, and determine attract customers (DGADR, 2008). However, not only that the enterprise can offer is sufficient to attract and retain customers is also necessary to take into account the satisfaction gained and quality of service perceived.

Satisfaction may thus be defined as the sensation of pleasure from the client to compare the perceived performance of a product to your expectations. Considering that the performance meets their expectations, the customer is satisfied, if not answers, are dissatisfied, excels, is very pleased. (Kotler and Keller, 2006).

In view of Hoffman (2003), customer satisfaction comes from life experiences, such as positive experiences, take the client to become partner of the generating company loyalty is a vicious circle positive, because you get more satisfaction, greater the relationship, ie, more faithfully. A loyal customer, in addition to satisfied customer is one who identifies himself with the venture and its products, disseminating them whenever possible and defending them when criticized.

For authors such as Martin and (2008), Vlachos (2008) and Andreu (2008) satisfaction is a key determinant of the future intentions of customers for high levels of satisfaction generate many benefits for companies, resulting in higher fidelity, which in the long term, it is more profitable, because keeping good customers is more profitable than to constantly attract new ones.

Literature presents several models of customer satisfaction, with many determinants of satisfaction. However, confirmation of expectations or not is presented by the authors as a very direct determinant of satisfaction (Andreu, 2008; Bigne, 2008). Other determinants are also presented such as the perceived quality (Jiang, Wang, 2006), the value (Vlachos, 2008; Lai, 2009), emotions (Martin and such; Andreu 2008), the corporate image (Lai, 2009), among others.

For Tinoco and Ribeiro (2007) model of customer satisfaction is more complex and consists of the desires, expectations, emotions, perceived quality, price, perceived value, or not confirm the expectations and corporate image.

The perceived quality is also an important factor in satisfaction and a variable crucial for customer loyalty. According to Kotler and Armstrong (1999), a good quality program services / products is a crucial factor in winning and retaining customers. Several investigations point to the evidence that two of the most effective ways to generate customer loyalty is customer delight (Oliver, 1999; Lee, Lee and Feick, 2001) and deliver superior value derived from excellent service and quality products (Parasuraman and Grewal, 2000).

In view of Nguyen and LeBlanc (1998), service quality and customer satisfaction exert more influence on the value of the service, than on customer satisfaction. Bolton and Drew (1991) service quality and experience of satisfaction / dissatisfaction are the determinants of customer loyalty.

Dabholkar et al. (2000) and Caruana (2002) believe that satisfaction acts as a mediator of correlations between quality and loyalty. Suggesting that the correlation between performance quality and loyalty is weaker than that of satisfaction and loyalty.

6.1 Data analysis

In order to find out whether the hypotheses are viable we carried out a questionnaire to twenty guest cottages. The questionnaire is divided into nine questions, which can be divided into three major groups, the socio-demographic attributes of perceived quality and the determinants that affect the satisfaction of the guests. Then we present the results obtained.

6.2 Socio-demographic of respondents

By treating the data obtained from the survey, we can conclude that the owners of rural tourism in the west of Portugal, are mostly women (60%), are in the age group below 30 years (35%), are married (45%) and have a son (35%).

6.3 Attributes which affect the perceived quality

The analysis of attributes that affects the perceived quality, shows us that the majority of respondents consider that, room and food services with the factors that most influence the perceived quality, (95% and 85% of the responses, respectively). For the service, the internal aspects of quality are very important (90%). Table 1 shows the results of quality attributes.

Table 1 - Results of quality attributes

Group	Perceived quality (%)		
	Indifferent	Very important	Fully important
External aspects	-	5%	95%
Room	-	5%	95%
Food service	-	15%	85%
Treatment	-	100%	-
Internal aspects	10%	90%	-
Products tours	-	80%	20%

For the quality attributes the tourists consider the room cleanliness, the security room, the room comfort, the quality of food, the atmosphere, the accuracy of reserves, the quality of service restoration, the most important attributes of perception of quality, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Attributes considered most important quality

Attribute	Perceived quality (%)	
	Very important	Fully important
Clean cottage	5%	95%
Security cottage	5%	95%
Comfort room	5%	95%
Clean room	5%	95%
Security room	5%	95%
Quality of meals	10%	90%
Outside	15%	85%
Location	20%	80%
Accuracy of reserves	35%	65%
Quality of the catering service	40%	60%

6.4 Determinants affecting guest satisfaction

Catering, personal desires, expectations, emotions felt, perceived quality, service price, are the determinants that better explain customer satisfaction.

Analyzing the results, of table 3 we verified the existence of a relationship between perceived quality, and the expectations of customers. An increase in perceived quality, for example, gives further confirmation of expectations and increases customer satisfaction.

We can conclude that these determinants are the basis of the model of satisfaction for services in the areas of rural tourism. Tinoco and Ribeiro (2007), arrive to the same conclusion.

There is also the image of the hotel service, expectations and customer

satisfaction also relate positively, ie, the image of the organization creates expectations that customer can confirm in service delivery. This satisfaction, influences the corporate image and the perceived quality.

Table 3 - Determinants of satisfaction with utmost importance

Determinants of satisfaction	Indifferent	Very important	Fully important
1. The image of hotel service			
Customer satisfaction	-	20%	80%
Expectations	-	80%	20%
2. The desires of customers			
Expectations	-	10%	90%
3. Customer expectations			
Customer satisfaction	10%	70%	20%
Hospitality service	25%	70%	5%
4. The emotions experienced			
Service value	10%	70%	20%
5. Quality of service perceived by the customer			
Customer satisfaction	-	25%	75%
6. The price of the service			
Quality	-	10%	90%
Emotions experience	15%	80%	5%
Expectations	15%	75%	10%
7. The value the customer attaches to service			
Customer satisfaction	5%	15%	80%
Personal desires	-	25%	75%
8. The satisfaction generated by the service			
Personal desires	-	30%	70%
Hospitality services	-	30%	70%
9. Expectations			
Expectations	-	5%	95%
Emotion experienced	10%	80%	10%
Hospitality service	25%	15%	-
Quality	20%	70%	10%

7. Conclusions

The present study aimed to investigate the determinants that influence guest satisfaction, through the study of the relationship between them and establish the quality attributes perceived by guests of rural tourism.

To achieve the objectives of the study, a survey was carried out to tourists of cottages where they were questioned about some aspects of quality and satisfaction that they considered the most important at the rural tourism.

The main results of the study in terms of quality attributes which are

perceived by guests are cleaning, security room, room comfort, quality of food, atmosphere, accuracy of reserves and quality of catering service.

Regarding guest satisfaction we find that there is a strong relationship between guest satisfaction, and the perceived quality which influences the corporate image.

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