THE CONCEPTUAL ISSUES OF RURAL TOURISM
SERVICE SYSTEM QUALITY

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Abstract
Paper presents the analysis about the conceptual issues of developing tourism service system at rural areas. The efficiency of service management covers the implications about the demand of tourism services and their quality measurements. Regional products become the important issue to enlarge the services content and to create originated supply for modern tourists. The regional derivatives of local products which are the object of cultural heritage serve to implement marketing concept oriented to target market with customers’ needs variety.

Tourism service management effectiveness covers interdisciplinary perspective with implementation of special resources with their impact complexity to selected region. Business entities with specific structure of human resources, special managerial decisions try to stimulate effectiveness of their adoption to environmental peculiarities, operational and strategic business management and decisions upon space marketing.

Key words: tourism sector, tourism service system quality, regional products, rural tourism, service marketing, marketing concept.

Introduction
Controversial understanding appears that countryside with the lower capacity of enterprising can’t independently develop its economical or social infrastructure. The space theories about urbanization level and peculiarities of regional development changed the understanding that each country with specific natural, economical, social and other type of features, have to select its own way to create the competitiveness. Sometimes regional products can provide new interest to tourists, and such regions can appropriate new economical impetus from increase of tourists’ flows. For this situation the intensive promotion and special references can help. The service sector is the main issue which can create the additional value for rural residents.

The task of research is to identify the conceptual issues concerning rural tourism service system. The objectives of research:
1) to identify the determinants for tourism service system quality;
2) to identify the possibilities to ground the diversification strategy by implementing modern marketing tools of rural tourism services and regional products;
3) to define the opportunities for developing rural tourism service system.

The object of research – economical and social issues of rural tourism service system.
Methodology

Cohesion between regional tourism and regional products, and the development of services for tourism stipulates the consequences of business diversifications strategies at rural areas. Rural tourism is the most popular business in Lithuania, and tourism service system of special quality and scope is obligatory. Most of entrepreneurs are acting independently in tourism sector, and their efforts to create high quality services for tourists have to be conducted with local authority’s strategic decisions or the policy of regional development. Marketing concept becomes a tool to produce relevant marketing strategy and to identify the strategic options for each attractive district in developing rural tourism and tourism service system.

Nowadays, important factor for developing tourism in far distant regions is diversified tourism service system. Diversification of service system is available under globalization of tourism products (special services and regional products), service market in developing regions with specific regional attractiveness and hospitality. Service management effectiveness covers the implications of activities’ diversification in unfavorable rural areas when low effective agricultural productivity can’t warrant appropriate income for rural residents.

Rural tourism serves for elimination of vulnerability in developing countryside with higher efficiency of services. The development of tourism sector is more service-oriented, and the changes in tourism sector are matched to the focus of a service orientation. Conceptualization of services bridges the adverse determinants as service quality and service success. Service quality closely connected with output in service sector, and service success – with service scale and quality.

Robert W. Fogel (Fogel, 1999) highlights “the difficulty in measuring output in the service sector”. There is the difficulty to define the implication of tourism service sector development, but this sector at the moment helps to change positively the development of service business at rural areas, and service sector is functioning as dominant utilizing local resources with high capacity of power to infuse external sources of modern resources such as IT, communication nets, information search systems (terminals), consulting, and etc.

Rural tourism sector development closely depends upon the service delivering quality at rural areas. The quality of services for tourists depends upon some determinants: human resources issues for service, service quality issues, communication skills, and training. Tourism and regional products are oriented to development of high productivity activities in rural areas according rural development policy, and is assigned to implement diversification strategies for rural businesses.

Human resources issues for high-contact service are strongly related to customers’ evaluation when their service receive become real intensions to use it repeatedly. The interaction between attendants and customers underscores the fact that customers become close to service attendants during the service performance period. This fact helps to understand this interaction as a tool to influence the customers. Chase and Tansik (1983) noted that the hosts of homesteads could be involved in “three-way” interactions: 1) between themselves (as partners or
competitors); 2) with customers (as their service users); and 3) production process or technology (for provision service effectively) (Fig. 1).

![Figure 1. The interactions in tourism service system.](source)

In developing regional economies at rural areas these interactions are more primitive, and are constructed of two levels – service providers and technology. This fact shows that the tourism service quality can be evaluated by technological level, but not highly equipped according the customers needs and want awareness. The tourism services system needs highly developed quality of provided service, and this dimension is leading to higher productivity and income. Implications for human resource to tourism service provision activities as high-contact involve people (workers) with special qualification and great communication skills. These people are able to implement marketing tools to attract and retain customers. Tourism sector requires specific standard technologies and special technical abilities to manage communication process with different cultured customers.

Hogan J., Hogan R. and Busch C.M. in 1984 (Tansik, 1990) developed special measure and called *the service orientation scale*, which can measure the qualitative elements of behaviour in communication process between service provider and customer as predisposition to help, consideration, cooperation. This scale can’t measure technical competence, and is based on personal features as good adjustment, likeability, social skills and willingness to follow rules.

*Service quality issues* was suggested by Mills, Chase and Margulies in 1983. They suggested that cohesion between service providers and customers could influence the productivity of service organization (Tansik, 1990). The productivity of tourism services could be measured by hospitality of services provider, and by generated greater trust of customers. As consequence the individual features and hospitality of services provider creates the additional attitude for services customer. Tansik A. (Tansik, 1990) presented the basic orientation to service quality issues. He explained basic concepts about how a service organization provides a service help explain why defining service quality is so complex and difficult management task.
Tourism service system has the specific and complex structure. It can be defined as a package of explicit and implicit benefits performed with a supporting facility and facilitating goods. The tourism service system possesses tangible (high products content) and intangible attributes (no products content). Sometimes the quality of tourism service depends on products, especially when products are not typical for customer (they are called regional products), can create the feeling for him about the specificity of tourism service. Rural tourism services have such a potentiality, by the help of non-typical products to create additional value. Then customers can evaluate complementary, peripheral and supporting services at once. Service quality helps to gain a competitive advantage for service provider. There is some evidence that tourism service quality performance is directly related to tourism firm’s profitability.

P. Thompson, P. DeSouza and B.T. Gale analyzed various services of different organizations and made the consequence about the service quality: “in only 15 percent of the markets is service irrelevant in the customer perception of quality” (Colier, 1990). They conclude, that “service quality is a key to profitability and growth …” (Thompson, DeSouza, Gale, 1985).

Communication and interpersonal skills are actually important in tourism service system. As Bell described about “industrial society” (Bell, 1973) communication skills he raised idea about a “game between persons” how game people involve themselves to service-related activities, ex., service provider and customer. Interpersonal skills are important as they relate to the communication process involved to obtain appropriate feeling about service quality or hospitality.
Table 1

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<th>Determinants</th>
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<th>Delivery and service performance standards</th>
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| Reliability        | Consistency of performance and dependability                                | Excellent means
|                    |                                                                             | Customers’ identity
|                    |                                                                             | Service providence type as complementary, peripheral, supporting
|                    |                                                                             | Quality as tangible or intangible
|                    |                                                                             | Levels of services for measurement service quantity and quality
| Responsiveness     | The willingness or readiness of employees to provide service                 | Consistent means for service performance as low or no variability
|                    |                                                                             | Service package as a set of services with (in)tangible attributes
|                    |                                                                             | Specified means by service management
| Competence         | Possession of required skills and knowledge to perform the service          | External standards of service performance focused on marketing criteria          |
| Access             | Approachability and easy of contacts                                        |                                                                                |
| Courtesy           | Politeness, respectability, friendly communication                           |                                                                                |
| Communication      | Prime information to customer about language skills and communication quality to customers |                                                                                |
| Credibility        | Honesty                                                                     |                                                                                |
| Security           | Freedom from dangers, risks, doubts                                         |                                                                                |
| Understanding the customer | Making efforts to understand customers                                     |                                                                                |
| Tangibles          | Physical evidence of service                                                |                                                                                |


High-contact interactions can create high quality of service, as the system “technology-service provider-customer” covers interrelations with great hospitality, good emotions and pleasure for customers (see Hochschild, 1983).

High contact interaction is a complex (mix) of services performance and attitude which strongly influence customers’ perceptions even when the services provider has vexing issue to lower service quality. Some determinants as contact interaction and individual features or communication quality of service provider are the current dimensions for evaluation tourism service system at rural areas. The peculiarities of tourism service system are versatile upon market determinants. If tourism service market is stable, the evaluation of service system efficiency is totally complicated. Then, the services quality is compounded of ten facets of service provision determinants for broad range of services (Parasuraman, Zeithalm, and Berry, 1985) (1 table). In otherwise, when the services market is developing the customers attention is concentrated only to some determinants of service provision.

Results

The identification of determinants for tourism service system quality is compounded of service delivery and service performance standards according the tourism service content. The rural tourism service quality depends on the hosts of
homesteads involvement into “three-way” interactions: 1) between themselves (as partners or competitors); 2) with customers (as their service users); and 3) production process or technology (for providence service effectively). The communication level and quality impacts the rural tourism service quality directly, when the customers can directly percept the three level tourism service quality content.

Modern marketing tools of rural tourism services are oriented to create the originated demand by the help of regional products. The tourism service system possesses tangible and intangible attributes. The quality of tourism services depends on regional products, which have potentiality by the help of non-typical products brands to create additional value. Then customers evaluate complementary, peripheral and supporting services at once. Service quality helps to gain a competitive advantage for service provider. The tourism service system with different service package performs different profitability for service providers. This fact means, that the diversification of service package could become the basement for greater changes in developing rural tourism.

**Conclusions**

The tourism service system successfully creates the appropriate demand upon services quality and scale. In turn, the high income from tourism service system depends on diversified services. Service orientation scale measures the qualitative elements of behaviour in communication process between service provider and customer as predisposition to help, consideration and cooperation, and is based on personal features.

Tourism sector is more service-oriented and requires service variety in space. By the help of specific marketing issues tourists can find specialties of services and regional products in different countries rural areas and their option after experienced considerations are oriented to services variety. Local economic development surely requires well-considered actions from local authority and local producers, local action groups and customers. Only after effective use of the resources of the regional infrastructure, the cooperation and coordination between these entities could be used effectively.

**References**


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КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНЫЕ ВОПРОСЫ ИЗМЕРЕНИЯ КАЧЕСТВА СИСТЕМЫ СЕЛЬСКОГО ТУРИЗМА

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Аннотация
В статье представлен концептуальный анализ развития услуг туризма в сельских местностях. Эффективность управления услугами включает показатели спроса и качества туристических услуг. Региональные (локальные) продукты являются важным фактором для расширения содержания самих услуг туризма, кроме того, они формируют оптимальное предложение для современных туристов. Условия развития сельских регионов (предпринимательство, информационные технологии, разнообразность и качество туристических услуг) – это основа развития культуры и маркетинговых концепций, влияющая на структуру потребительского спроса. Эффективность управления системой туристических услуг ориентирована на функциональность туризма. В перспективе внедрение специальных ресурсов и создаст условия их использования в отдельных регионах. Туристические предприятия применяют современные технологии управления и для этих целей готовят специалистов, стараются найти новые управленческие подходы для решения стимулирования их внедрения в пространственном маркетинге.

Ключевые слова: туристический сектор, качество туристической системы обслуживания, местные изделия, сельский туризм, маркетинговое обслуживание, концепция маркетинга.