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Contents

QUALITY MANAGEMENT AS A TOOL TO ENSURE THE COMPETITIVENESS OF TOURISM SERVICE PROVIDERS

Novotná, J.

Abstract

The presented paper deals with the topic of increasing the quality of services provided the in the field of tourism. It is especially focused on the Czech Service Quality System (CSQS), which represents such a quality management tool in the market environment of the Czech Republic. This system has been operating as a quality management tool for ensuring competitiveness in the conditions of the Czech Republic since 2010. After a 10 year period, it is therefore appropriate to verify and evaluate its current use in practice. The main goal of the paper is to analyse the current level of implementation of this tool and its practical use. The research verifies the use of the Czech system of service quality among the managers of the selected tourism organizations certified in the system. For this purpose, qualitative research is used, specifically the form of guided interviews with these leading representatives of selected certified organizations. Partial goals of the paper are the detailed description of the Czech Service Quality System, including the reasons that led to the implementation of this system and the description of its operation. To determine the current level of implementation of the system, a quantitative research and statistical evaluation of the total number of certified organizations was performed, including a detailed procedure in various stages of certification, as well as performing interregional analysis or compiling the structure of certified organizations. Furthermore, a comparison was made with analogous systems operating in Germany (ServiceQualität Deutschland) and in Switzerland (Quality Programme of Swiss Tourism). In the light of the findings, it turns out that certification in the system can be considered a positive and responsive step towards customers, as well as an effective tool for increasing competitiveness.

Keywords: competitiveness, Czech Service Quality System, quality, service, tourism

JEL Classification: O22, O15, M11

1 Introduction

Tourism is an important part of the economy, and it is even one of the most important sectors of the national economy. Its importance lies mainly in the multiplier effect, with the ability to positively influence many other sectors of the national economy, which makes it an important factor in the development of destinations. Tourism also forms a significant part of the population´s consumption, offering them the satisfaction of their needs – such as rest and leisure, sports, business or work reasons, or learning about new destinations and new cultures. The share of the country ´s population in tourism is an important measure of living standards in this country.

A large part of the world´s population is involved in tourism. Every year, the total number of people participating in tourism even increases. The growing need for travel and the related relocation of the population have gradually made tourism a highly competitive environment. One of the key factors that determines whether an organization will be successful in this competitive struggle is not only tourism products quality, but especially the quality level related to the products and services provided by tourism participants. In view of the above, it is essential that services and associated tourism products should be provided to customers at the highest possible level. Cause this is the quality of services that make a customer revisit again and maintain loyalty to the "favourite" companies or tourism destinations. For those entities implementing quality management tools into their day-to-day activities, quality represents a significant competitive advantage.

This article is focused on one of the tools for increasing competitiveness in service provision in tourism. This is a system implemented on the Czech market environment in 2010, so it is already possible to verify the effectiveness of this tool in practice. The aim of this paper is the verification of the current implementation of the Czech Service Quality System (CSQS) in practice, as well as to determine the degree of adaptation of service providers in tourism facilities to this analysed system.

2 The impact of tourism on economic systems

As mentioned above, tourism is currently one of the most important sectors of the national economy. Its importance lies mainly in the ability to positively affect and influence many other industries. It has a direct impact, for example, on activities and services provided in the field of hospitality and gastronomy, accommodation, travel agency services, and tourist information centres. It affects indirectly, for example, construction or banking. Revenues from the tourism sector go to different areas of the economy and are thus connected with multiplier effects. Some sectors that have close links with other economic sectors also have a higher multiplier effect, while others have limited links and multiplication. Thus, connections will be stronger, and income will be greatly multiplied if resorts and tourist areas absorb local labour and use goods produced in the area (Serban, 2018). The overlap of tourism in many sectors of the national economy causes tourism to make a significant contribution to job creation and employment growth (Novotná, 2018). In particular, tourism development can contribute to a country´s economic growth by improving the country´s GDP, which in turn facilitates the financing of capital goods imports, and increases government tax revenues (Sinclair, 1998). Tourism supports socio-economic development by stimulating job creation, reducing unemployment and generating new tax revenues (Dogru, Sirakaya-Turk, & Crouch, 2017). In other words, tourism not only creates new jobs through investment in tangible assets, but also helps to create work for educated and skilled people (Dogru & Bulut, 2018). The tourist sector is important as a sector that supports regional economic growth. This is because tourism activities have a multiplier effect on the activities that occur in the economic sector (Fafurida, Shanty, Sucihatiningsih, & Yoris, 2020). The multiplier effect of tourism thus becomes a key factor in the development of regions. However, it should be noted that the multiplier effect of tourism depends to a large extent on local and regional tourism policies (Huse, Gustavsen, & Almedal, 1998). The ability to keep a visitor in the region for a longer period of time depends on the economic isolation of the area, and the independence of the local economy. Thus, if the local economy is able to produce goods and services that are in demand among tourists, then the multiplier effect will be very significant (Baiburiev, David, Abdreyeva, Zhakupova, & Artemyev, 2018). The multiplier effect can also be seen as a natural part of tourism activity with some authors including it in the definition of tourism. For example, Goeldner and Ritchie (2003) define tourism as "the sum of the phenomena and relationships resulting from the interaction of tourists, business suppliers, host governments, and host communities in the process of gaining interest and care for these tourists and other visitors." Pascariu and Ibănescu (2018) look at the multiplier effect from another perspective, according to which the multiplier potential depends on a number of endogenous and exogenous factors. In their study to identify macroeconomic indicators responsible for higher values of the multiplier effect of tourism, they found that the multiplier effect of tourism on GDP predicts the business environment, international openness, land and port infrastructure and the Gini coefficient, while the multiplier effect of labour on tourism is determined by international openness and GDP per capita. Both types of multiplier effects are then highly sensitive to international openness, income externalization, and the distribution of wealth among the population. Suryanata (2019) examines the multiplier effect from the point of view of investment in his research on the impact of these investments on unemployment. These are entrepreneurs who, through their role in creating new jobs, overcome all economic problems. Support for new business projects and enterprises is precisely the opportunity to suppress unemployment and thus start the development of the territory. Realizing value in the tourism industry is based on mutual "co-creation" between customers, tourism companies, governments and other stakeholders (Malone, McKechnie, & Tynan, 2018). To achieve results that benefit both customers and service providers, many companies in the tourism and hospitality industry create opportunities for customers to participate in value creation (Busser & Shulga, 2018). This interaction makes tourism a highly contacted service industry, which brings with it many points of contact between the various actors (tourist and service providers) (Guan, Gong, Xie, & Huan, 2020). Travel decisions differ from the daily purchase of tangible products in that they are largely focused on experiences and pleasures. In other words, it is a matter of satisfying dispensable needs, which is the reason it is essential for tourist destinations and tourism service providers positively influence the psychological aspects of the consumer related to the perception of quality. It is the effects of social, cognitive, and emotional factors on economic decision-making that behavioral economics examines.

2.1 Behavioral economics as a premise for the perception of the tourism industry

This study is focused on the Czech Service Quality System. In the Czech market environment, it represents a voluntary tool, with the main purpose of contributing to the improvement of the quality of services in tourism companies and related services. In essence, it is thus focused on improving provided services. In this context, however, it is necessary to clarify when we can talk about the quality of the provided service, or how such service is defined in practice.

The key to finding answers lies in knowing the needs and expectations of customers. If the organization knows the requirements of its clients, then it can focus on meeting these needs, and what is more, these needs can not only be met, but could be even be surpassed.

The very essence of providing services is therefore to meet the expectations and wishes of customers. There is no product or specific "thing" that the customer would include in this satisfaction, but after the "use" of the service he/she takes away an experience and a feeling. This means that the consumer takes their emotions, mood, or current state of mind into account when making his/her decision – these are psychological factors. The subsequent behavior is then far removed from the rational behavior of the consumer, which is primarily assumed by economic theory. Neoclassical theory, for example, completely beyond psychological motives, assumes that the consumer is able to define their own needs, is able to rank them based on his/her preferences, and is able to satisfy them to maximize his/her benefits (Jurečka & kolektiv, 2018). The view of neoclassical consumer decision-making is therefore strictly rational, and despite the fact that since laying the foundations of economics as an independent scientific discipline, economists have realized that one does not always and under all circumstances have to behave completely rationally. In contradiction to this awareness, however, classical economists ignored the role of the "irrational" in economic decisions and explained all economic phenomena only as the rational result or the failure of people pursuing their own interests (Akerlof & Shiller, 2010).

However, emotions have a very strong position in economic decision-making. Their influence, and the influence of psychology in general on human behavior and decision-making, was also realized by the father of economics, Adam Smith, when he devoted himself to psychological influence in his Theory of Moral Sentiment before writing the famous Wealth of Nations. In this book, he already draws attention to the importance of taking the human mind into account in explaining economic decisions when referring to situations that are difficult to cope with human nature, in which even the highest levels of human self-control cannot fully supress the human weakness or reduce the strength of emotions (Pavlík, 2005). Furthermore, for example, stating that "if our situation changes from better to worse, the level of suffering is higher than the level of pleasure, if our situation changes from worse to better" (Baláž, 2009).

Moreover, with this statement, he unknowingly described a state that was much later defined in economic terminology as a loss aversion.

Over time, however, the view of the fully rational behavior of an individual, defined in classical economic theory, has changed. John Maynard Keynes was one of many authors who questioned the notion of human behavior and decision-making only in accordance with the principles of mathematical logic. Already in his General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money, he drew attention to the fact that the economy is not only governed by rational factors, but as well as by the "invisible hand" present in all transactions determining the mutual benefit of individuals, but also by psychological factors, which according to Keynes forms a substantial part of economic activities. He calls these psychological factors "animal spirits". The term "animal spirits" is a metaphor originating in Latin and covering a history of over 2 000 years. For many centuries, animal spirits have been believed to mean a kind of "nervous fluid" that allows people to feel and move like "spiritual blood" – what we might probably call "psycho-emotional factors of motivation" (Marinescu, 2019).

The gradual adoption and incorporation of psychological factors into patterns of consumer behavior and decision-making gave rise to a special field of economics – so called behavioral economics.

There is no precise definition that clearly defines what belongs to this scientific discipline and what does not. There are many economic directions and in each of them the influence of psychology is different. While some of these directions reject psychology outright, the others take into account that man is not an infallible, rational machine, and that the influence of psychology is more pronounced in them. However, no direction counts on psychology as much as behavioral economics (Bodešínská, 2015).

In general, behavioral economics differs from traditional theory in that it does not rely on mathematical and statistical models, nor does it favor rationality and logic, but examines the effects of social, cognitive, and emotional factors on consumers´ economic decisions; it primarily deals with the limits of the rationality of economic factors. It is based on psychological examination methods and concepts to understand and predict the economic behavior of people. It focuses on the analysis of systematic ways of human decision-making and the influence of these factors on human behavior, assuming limited rationality. Simply put, in his theories he counts on irrational man and thus purely accepts the fact that we are only human beings – emotional, fallible, irrational, and erroneous. Behavioral economics also does not determine how people should act on a theory, but how they really behave (Behavioral economics, 2019).

According to Matějů et al. (2017) behavioral economics as a scientific discipline includes psychology, sociology, anthropology, or even neuroscience and applies knowledge from these fields to create a picture of human thinking and behavior, the state of society, companies and national economies. The core of behavioral economics is the belief that a stronger realism of the psychological foundations of an economy will improve the economy, and provide a new perspective on a number of important phenomena.

Dan Ariely (2009) used another, very apt and concise description of behavioral economics in his work, The End of Rational Economics, in which he states that if our company has so far operated on the assumption, then people – consumers, employees and managers make logical decisions, then it is time to abandon this assumption. In addition to the need to consider the approach of behavioral economics in everyday corporate practice, he also says in his work that we are now paying a terrible price for our even naive belief in the power of the invisible hand of the market. According to the author, we are also painfully awakening from the errors of standard economic theory – that people are always able to make rational decisions and that markets and institutions are generally self-regulating, and we are finally beginning to understand that the real invisible hand that controls human decision-making is irrationality. Behavioral economics as a newly emerging field offers a radically different view of how people and organizations work.

2.1.1 The Bounded Rationality Concept

The concept of bounded rationality can be considered as the main defining feature of behavioral economics. The author of this theory is the psychologist Herbert A. Simon, who first came up with the idea of suboptimal behavior and this despite the claim that a consumer is "preset" to make effective decision. This can be caused, for example, by lack of information, time, uniqueness of a certain situation, but also by limited will, insufficient reasoning, or emotions in all their forms – feelings, fears, expectations, trust, compassion, resistance, or anger. According to Herbert A. Simon, all these aspects represent forms of limited rationality- i.e. rationality, mathematics, and logic are important, but they have their own limitations in their ability to explain people´s behavior and choices. Rational thinking does not in itself correspond to how people actually make economic decisions. Individual knowledge, which includes not only emotions but also feelings, intuition, passion, or zeal, plays an important role in every person´s life, and dealing with these forms of limited rationality is the key to understanding and anticipating human behavior. At the same time, he admitted, these limitations are not in the slightest obvious, and it is not possible to predict in advance where they lie (Simon, 1985).

The idea of bounded rationality and irrational motives for decision-making was elaborated in detail by Nobel laureate in economics, Daniel Kahneman in his book Thinking Fast and Slow. In this book, he introduced two decision-making systems and how people can make decisions based on logic, emotion, and instinct. System 1 is an automatic, fast, and intuitive way of thinking. It is autonomous and efficient, requires little energy or attention, but is prone to errors and systematic errors. The core of this system is formed by associative memory, which continuously constructs logical interpretations of what is happening around us. System 2 is an intense, slow, and controlled way of thinking, and requires energy, and cannot work without attention, but once involved, it can filter the instincts of system 1. In short: most of what you, resp. Your system 2 thinks and does has its origins in system 1, but system 2 takes control when the situation becomes complicated and usually has the last word (Kahneman, 2012).

In general, Kahneman criticizes neoclassical theories for ignoring a wide range of anomalies in people´s behavior, and emphasizes the role of people´s emotions in decision-making. On the other hand, he is aware of the difficulty of incorporating intellectual psychology into economic models. The role of optimism in risk-taking, the influence of emotions on decision-making, the role of fear in predicting harm, and the role of sympathy and resistance to factual prediction – all these aspects show that the traditional separation of choice and preference in decision analysis are psychologically unrealistic (Kahneman, 2003).

Classical, resp. Neoclassical economists believe everyone will make the same basic decision in similar circumstances, because consumers are equally rational and pursue their own interests. However, actual decisions may differ because each individual has a different taste, and it is this fact that can change and influence each person´s behavior (Dowling & Yap, 2007). In addition to the analysis of psychological factors influencing an individual´s economic decisions, behavioral economics should also have a political overlap – it should not only provide more psychologically credible descriptions and patterns of actual behavior, but it also should be a guide for regulation and rules to help ”bounded” rational consumers to choose their best decisions (Muramatsu & Flavia, 2017).

According to Camerer, Loewenstein, and Rabin (2004), the behavioral approach increases the telling power of economics by providing it with a more realistic psychological foundation. At the core of behavioral economics is the belief that increasing the reality of the psychological basis of economic analysis will improve the economic area in terms of generating theoretical knowledge, making better predictions about political phenomena, and proposing better strategies. At the same time, however, this belief does not mean rejecting neoclassical approaches based on maximizing utility, balance, and efficiency, as these neoclassical models provide economists with a theoretical framework that can be applied to almost any form of economic behavior and make rebuttable predictions.

The work of the above authors is followed by Pesendorfer (2006), according to which behavioral economics has reached the state of an established discipline. At the same time, behavioral economics remains a discipline associated with the failure of theories of classical economics. According to this author, a behavioral approach explains the failure of a common economic assumption, and in certain circumstances, evidence of consumer behavior may indeed be an impetus for changes in standard models. In some cases, however, this is not the case – as in the case of the economic model of individual behavior, as a result of limited rationality, which cannot be used to describe an individual´s erroneous or biased behavior. Behavioral economics emphasizes the contextual dependence of decision-making. Based on this finding, it is therefore misleading to draw conclusions from the research environment in general economic models. Because not all variables that are shown to be important in a particular experiment are useful or relevant in the application of classical economic theory.

Burham (2013) goes even further in his work, according to which the economy is divided into two competing schools based on different views of human nature. Neoclassical economists assume that people make optimal decisions. In sharp contrast is the view of behavioral economists who believe in people´s systematic mistake making. Thus, according to Burham, behavioral economics represents a contradictory approach to classical economics. However, current behavioral economics in no way seeks to be “superior” or “opposed” to classical economic theory. What he is really trying to do by introducing psychological (irrational) factors (anomalies) is only to supplement classical economics and thus refine its economic models.

2.1.2 The Prospect Theory

The authors of The Prospect Theory are Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky. These authors are considered the founders of behavioral economics and their theory as its cornerstone. The Prospect theory is a theory of the psychology of choice, and is based on the classical (and therefore rational) theory of expected utility, but the authors have modified it so that its results better reflect the actual decisions of consumers. This created a new theory that combined the principles of operation of the classical theory of expected utility with the psychological aspects of probability weighting. This connection not only extended the framework of the original theory but also extended its validity to areas that could not be clarified by the original classical theory. The aim of The Prospect Theory should not only be to capture, but also to try to explain the systematic transgressions of the axioms of rationality in choices between risky alternatives (Kahneman, 2012).

As mentioned above, the classical theory of utility in decision-making does not consider psychological aspects, as it assumes that people make decisions based on expected benefits and probability that means rationally. Compared to this original theory, The Prospect Theory works with three principles essential for human decision-making:

- Reference dependence – it is related to the perception of benefit in terms of decision-making. While classical theory derives the magnitude of utility from the amount (volume) of utility, according to The Prospect Theory, utility is derived from some reference point; in general, results below the reference point are perceived as a loss, while the results above it are perceived as a gain;
- The principle of diminishing sensitivity – relates to the assessment of changes and to some extent confirms the law of diminishing utility;
- The principle of loss aversion – is based on the findings of people´s reacting more sensitive to loss than to gains. The situation where people can lose a specific amount is a much greater threat to them than the pleasure of getting the same amount.

A major milestone prior to the compilation of The Prospect Theory was the publication of the article, Judgement under uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases. This article presents the results of research focused on the phenomena present in consumer decision-making and brings a revolutionary finding that human judgement and decision-making is not based solely on mathematical logic, but also takes into account a wide range of intuitive and thought processes. These systematic deviations from rationality are closely related to heuristics and its procedures. Heuristics means experimental solutions to problems for which we do not know an algorithm or a more accurate method. These are thought (mental) abbreviations and formulas that allow people to solve problems and make decisions quickly and efficiently. They shorten the decision-making time and allow people to function without constantly stopping and thinking about what to do next (Cherry, 2019). Heuristic procedures are often approximate, based on informed judgement, intuition, experience, or simply common sense (Heuristika, 2019).

Specifically, three heuristics used in decision making under uncertainty were described in the mentioned article Judgement under uncertainty. These are (i) representativeness, which is commonly used in situations where people are asked to assess the probability that an object or event A belongs to class B or process; (ii) the availability of cases or scenarios often used when people are asked to assess the frequency or plausibility of a particular development; (iii) anchoring, which is commonly used in numerical prediction, provided that appropriate numerical information is available (Kahneman & Tversky, 1974).

The publication of the article provoked a great response in economic and psychological circles. The reactions of the scientific community were positive, but also negative. It was the criticism of the published statements which forced the authors to take an even more detailed approach to models of human decision making. Gradually, they completely abandoned the idea of rationality and compiled preferences that actually captured real human reasoning in descriptive theory. And that descriptive theory is the Prospect Theory.

2.2 Services in economic systems

Kotler (1992) defines service as an activity that one party can offer to another, which is completely intangible, and does not constitute any acquired property. Its realization may or may not be associated with a physical product. Over time, this original definition was modified by Kotler and Armstrong (2003) and services were defined as intangible assets in the form of various activities or the provision of other benefits by one entity to another that do not transfer ownership upon purchase or sale. This means that the provision of services may in some cases also contain material elements, but the transfer of ownership will not occur. If the services are seen as nonphysical satisfaction of the customer´s needs, then they can not only be described as intangible, but they are also a sign that consumers cannot own them after the purchase.

For example, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines services as the result of a production activity that changes the conditions of the consuming units or facilitates the exchange of products or financial assets. They cannot be traded separately from their production. By the time their production is completed, they must have been provided to the consumers (2021).

The issue of service characteristics is usually referred to as the so-called HIPI principle: Heterogeneity, Intangibility, Perishability, and Inseparability.

The heterogeneity of services is based on the different results of service providers and on customer´s experience. The critical factor is the human factor, the performance of which may vary, even if the same person provides the same service, due to different factors such as fatigue, pain, mood, etc. In addition, the evaluation of a service is the subjective opinion of the person receiving the service; different customers may rate the same service differently (Katona, 2012). Intangibility is the primary source of difficulty in offering services. Unlike tangible products, services cannot be touched or tasted, so it is not possible to gather information about the service with our senses. For this reason, it is difficult to estimate their quality. For the customer to know the service, he must “consume” it without any prior comparison (“product sample”). The perishability of services is related to the fact that it is not possible to “store” service for later, because the service is “consumed” by the customer at the moment when it is provided. The time aspect is also related to the use of services – if the service is not consumed at a given time, it is lost (eg, hotel room, theatre tickets, concert tickets, etc.). However, the advantage in the form of zero storage and transport costs represents a significant disadvantage in real life. In the case of tangible products, the ability of products in stock can overcome sudden changes in demand. However, as this option is not available for services, part of the demand is unsatisfied in times of high demand for services, and conversely, in times of very low demand, the capacity will remain unused (Veres, 2009). Inseparability means that for most services, the provision and consumption of the service occur simultaneously, at the same time and in the same place. The customer is thus involved in the production process and the person of the customer (as an input to a service that cannot be standardized) influences the final quality of the service (Löke, Kovács, & Bacsi, 2018).

In addition to these described characteristics, another factor comes into play. And this factor is represented by employees of the organization. Their role is essential – they must know exactly the provided services as well as being able to provide professional information about the offered services. Special attention is paid to front-line employees, who are becoming a key component, acting as the face of the service provider. To achieve customer satisfaction and no less important high-quality service provision, careful selection of staff, their constant motivation, and satisfaction are essential.

2.2.1 Services in tourism

The importance of the services sector in modern economies is growing. Over the years, tourism has grown and become one of the fastest growing industries in the world. It is currently one of the most important sectors of national economies, in most developed countries, it even holds the dominant position. However, the growth of the services sector goes hand in hand with the increase in competition, so quality assurance in services is understood as the basis for the operation of service companies. At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize the ability of companies to understand their customers and ensure their satisfaction with the services received. The customer is the most important part of every activity in the service sector. Quality is therefore the basis for the functioning of the service sector, as service is an undeniable act of the process, and is thus closely linked to client satisfaction (Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė, Aranskis, & Litvinenko, 2019). This is particularly complex, as customers are constantly changing, and the need to adapt to them seems to be the only way to enable companies to operate stably in a market with such a changing environment (Nowacki, Szopiński, & Bachnik, 2019).

According to Jakubíková (2012), services in tourism are comprehensive. In relation to this complexity, it is also necessary to realize, according to the author, that services in tourism are provided by many business and non-business entities not only in the recreational area itself, but also in the place of demand. In order for visitors to be satisfied, cooperation between individual subjects is necessary, as well as coordination of an area and, at a given time, coordination in terms of the functions of tourism services.

Tourism services include a range of "core" and "ancillary" services, which complement each other and form a single functional system. Beránek (2016) divides a wide range of tourism services from the point of view of usability for the visitor into:

- target tourism services – services typical for a specific place, the use of which is the motive for participation in tourism;
- infrastructure tourism services – services provided by the infrastructure complex, i.e. commonly extended and necessary to ensure the living conditions of the population.

In addition to the said above, tourism services are characterized by the following specific properties (Ryglová, Burian, & Vajčnerová, 2011):

- short exposure – limited time reserved for the service offer (e.g. only when visiting a travel agency);
- the great importance of "word of mouth" – positive references – the experience of others with the use of the service;
- the importance of psychological factors – the intangible nature of services enhances the emotional, irrational decisions of customers, which is aided by an appropriate style and level of communication with the customer (machine contact vs. human e.g. telephone contact);
- the importance of the external side of the offer – which is the colour and clarity of the website, the level of office equipment, staff uniforms, etc.;
- dependence on suppliers – it is related to the complexity of the offer of services including transport, accommodation, catering, guide services, the offer of trips, etc. – it is the combination of services of several suppliers; "relationship management" between companies comes to the fore, as the selling company and the satisfaction of their customers depend to a large extent on the performance of foreign companies, with the seller being responsible for quality from the customer´s point of view;
- reproducibility of innovation – complexity or even impossibility to protect services by patent; on the contrary, services can be easily copied – an innovative and successful combination of services will be imitated much faster than that it would be for goods;
- timing – the need to offer tourism services long in advance of their use (limited capacity of the seller, impossibility to store the product, payment of a deposit for the correct corporate cash flow); first minute, last minute.

2.2.2 Quality management tools in tourism services

The significant role of quality in tourism services was described in the previous subchapter. To achieve quality at the highest possible level, it is necessary to effectively manage quality in the processes of the organization. Quality management can thus be seen as one of the key factors increasing competitiveness. The quality management process itself is a long-term process and from the point of view of a sustainable strategy, it is necessary to understand the concept of customer satisfaction and proceed from the assumption that the company can fulfil its goals only through satisfied customers (Rašovská & Ryglová, 2017).

The importance of quality management is also perceived by Andreeva, Zhulina, Popova, and Yashin (2018) who consider as the main sources of company growth the implementation of quality management as well as an increased role of process approach and strategy improvement. According to the authors, quality management is not only the requirements of ISO (International Standard Organisation) standards, but the overall business philosophy interconnected with the company´s strategy. Strategy implementation and quality management integration are direct ways to create long-term competitive advantages for the company.

The vast majority of domestic and foreign authors agree with the importance of quality management in all sectors of the national economy. However, in relation to tourism and leisure, according to Williams and Buswell (2003), a special approach is required, based on the nature of the leisure product as such. This special approach is not given by the consistent fulfilment of the requirements of its customers, nor by the ability and willingness of its employees to provide quality services. It is given by the provision of such services, which are based on experience, and the success of such services is given by increasing that experience and the emotional responsibility of the individual to the attributes of the offer of services.

Kaspar et al. also consider the organization´s employees to be a key element of the quality management system, and according to the authors, employee management and personnel policy in particular are crucial. At the heart of every process that is designed to provide a particular service is the person. Therefore, the basic goal of the company should be to satisfy the needs of its own employees (Haedrich, Kaspar, Klemm, & Kreilkamp, 1998).

The highest possible level of providing services is, in addition to quality management as a process, another of the key elements of success and competitiveness. At this point, it is appropriate to mention what quality is, or how it is defined by major authors and experts in the field of quality management. Defining the concept of quality is very difficult, because this concept means something different for each person – everybody imagines different things with this word. Very generally, quality can be defined as the ability of a product / service to satisfy or even exceed the needs and expectations of the customer. Therefore, we can talk about quality whenever the customer is satisfied.

Czech authors Křížek and Neufus summarize the concept of quality into a very simple, comprehensive definition – quality is the satisfaction of customer expectations (Křížek & Neufus, 2014). According to Kapiki (2012), quality in the tourism and hospitality industry includes the consistent delivery of products and services to guests according to expected standards.

The authors Katanić, Todosijević, Lazović, and Todosijević (2017) argue that professional literature defines the term quality in very different ways, but even these different definitions can be summarized in two approaches. According to the first concept, based on an internal point of view, quality is measured by internal requirements set out in predefined specifications. All activities in this context are thus focused on meeting these internal requirements, defined by the specifications. For this reason, this approach to quality is often considered an internal view of quality. The second approach defining quality is the so-called external perception of quality. This concept is based on the attitude of the consumer to the perception of the value of the product. In other words, the quality of a product or service is determined by the degree of its ability to satisfy the needs for which it was produced and offered.

In order for an organization to meet or exceed customer expectations, it must fully understand the attributes of services that contribute to customer value and lead to satisfaction and loyalty (Evans & Lindsay, 2017).

For example, according to the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), quality management includes all activities of the overall management function that determine the quality policy, objectives and responsibilities, and implement them by means such as quality planning, quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement within the quality system (Quality Management, 2018).

2.2.3 Quality of services in tourism

As follows from the above, quality is based on the sensory perception of the consumer. It is this circumstance of assessing quality by sensory perception complicates the possibility of quantifying quality in a uniform way.

The term "quality" or also "grade" designations are for the generally positive characteristics of products (goods or services). Products are considered of good quality if they comply with customer requirements or quality standards or norms. In other words, if quality means satisfying the customer´s expectations, then quality cannot be perceived as a luxury. Quality can be provided not only in a five-star hotel, but also, for example, in a country guest house – where luxury cannot be talked about, but nevertheless the services provided in this environment can be high quality and at a very good level.

According to Rašovská and Ryglová (2017), the first official definition of quality was introduced in 1978 by two American companies (ANSI – American national Standards Institute and ASQ – American Society for Quality). Quality was defined as a set of product or service characteristics based on the ability to meet a given need. One of the most used definitions of quality is the definition of the ISO 9000:2005 standard, defining quality as the degree of fulfilment of requirements by a set of inherent characteristics. Over time, a consumer-oriented definition has been introduced according to which quality is achieved when we provide goods and services that meet or exceed customer requirements (Pekar, 1995).

Other definitions of the quality of important personalities are used by Ross and Perry (1999) in their book, for example:

Fitness for use (Joseph M. Juran).

Compliance with requirements (Philip B. Crosby).

Quality means the best fulfilment of specific customer conditions. These conditions are a) the actual use and b) the selling price of the product (Armand Vallin Feigenbaum).

Quality means giving customers what they want (Sam Walton).

The authors themselves point out, if the strategic management system and competitive advantage are to be based on quality, it is essential for each member of the organization to have a clear idea of its own concepts, definitions and controls applying to his/her work.

According to Kan (2003), the definition of quality consists of two levels. The first level represents the internal quality of the product, often operationally limited to the degree of defects and reliability of the product. The second level includes product quality, process quality, and customer satisfaction. According to the author, the use of this two-level approach to defining quality is the domain of many industries. Several research studies have also been conducted with the aim to define quality. For example, Evans (2008) focused on defining quality among the managers of 86 American companies. In his research, he found out these most common statements related to quality: excellence, consistency, elimination of waste, speed of delivery, compliance with policies and procedures, delivery of a good usable product, proper implementation, customer pleasure or enjoyment, overall customer service and satisfaction.

Czech author Vaštíková (2008) has a different point of view on the concept of quality. She perceives the quality of services as one of the key issues in marketing management of services. According to the author, the importance of the quality of services is growing together with the growing requirements of consumers. It determines the degree of customer satisfaction, increases their loyalty, and thus affects the profitability of service provided organizations. Taking into account the heterogeneity and intangibility of services, quality is a factor representing a significant competitive advantage of a particular service and distinguishes it from the product of competition.

Kotler et al. (2007) believe that to meet quality objectives, the service provider must first determine what expectations target customers have about service quality. Unfortunately, quality is more difficult to define, assess, and quantify in services than in the case of products. Quantifying the quality of services is difficult because intangibility means that they rarely have physical dimensions such as performance, functional characteristics, or maintenance costs that can be used as reference points and measured. As an example of the above mentioned, the authors state that it is more difficult to agree on the quality of the hairstyle than on the quality of the hair dryer.

Křížek and Neufus (Křížek & Neufus, 2014) describe quality as the ability of a service to satisfy not only spoken, but also unspoken or unconscious customer requirements.

From these definitions, there is a clear diversity in approaches to the concept of quality. Despite its diversity, however, all these definitions have the same factors – the customer and the fulfilment of his expectations.

In a highly competitive tourism environment, quality is a complex concept involving the cooperation of all tourism stakeholders – from a suitably compiled offer of tours, through the perfect implementation of all main and additional services to the safe return home. It is a whole sequence of specific activities and events that will satisfy a customer´s needs or even bring the feeling that he/she has gained some extra value and the experience has exceeded his expectations.

2.2.4 New trends in the concept of quality

Among the new trends related to quality in tourism service, it is clear to rank safety. Both in the sense of the absence or the threat of terrorist or other attacks, or other risks associated with loss of property as well as in the sense of protecting the life and health of individuals, especially in the context of the current development of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nowadays, tourism is a global and highly competitive industry and, for this reason, it is highly sensitive to perceptions of danger and lack of safety (Brondoni, 2016). Traveling is the most fun way to meet strangers and explore new places if the destination is free of disease, crime and disasters (Uğur & Akbıyık, 2020). In the context of complex global relations, freedom of movement for people, especially in connection with travel for tourism, raises new safety and security issues and puts tourist destinations around the world at the forefront of new challenges, including terrorism (Stankova, Tsvetkov, & Ivanova, 2019). The impact of terrorism in tourist destinations thus has a potentially negative impact on the tourism sector and the development of tourism-dependent economies in general (Asongu, Nnanna, Biekpe, & Acha-Anyi, 2018).

To develop tourism successfully, three basic conditions must be met: a sufficient amount of free time, available resources, but above all safety in the destination. Safety has been and will continue to be a critical condition for tourists and travellers in their destination. The term security covers many aspects of the topic – whether it is security in terms of threat (caused by human or natural forces), hygiene regulations, the level of medical care, safety in transport, on the internet or the issue of personal data protection in tourism. All these aspects enter into decision-making on the choice of destination and thus co-create its attractiveness. However, security is also a situation where the local tourism industry, host communities and tourist destinations directly and indirectly dependent on tourism feel safe, and their income, employment, and livelihoods are protected (Chhetri, 2018).

In relation to various current threats and risks, it can be stated that to increase security in the territory, it is in the interest not only of national economies, but also tourism companies themselves to take preventive measures to reduce the harmful effects of security and reduce these effects in the territory, by taking preventive and proactive measures which can prevent tourists from being exposed to these risks. Such measures include, for example, increasing safety in higher-risk areas, reducing or eliminating travel of tourists to risk areas, strengthening the impact of insurance that could be paid by both tourism companies and potential tourists themselves, and assessing risk factors, associated with entities horizontally and vertically integrated into the tourism industry (Asongu, Nnanna, Biekpe, & Acha-Anyi, 2018). At the same time, however, the growing risk of terrorism is provoking new policy decisions that lead to increased security measures and more sophisticated security methods. This interaction between government policy solutions, larger and more sophisticated security, and rational management measures leads to the creation of more competitive tourist destinations that attract more visitors to the area (Stankova, Tsvetkov, & Ivanova, 2019).

Taking into account the various dangers, it is necessary to mention one, this time a very current danger – risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyses focused on traveller behavior during this global crisis have found that visitors´ responses to adverse news in the area are almost immediate. As a rule, on the same day, visitors are willing to cancel or postpone their trips. In response to this phenomenon, reinsurance travel insurance appears to be the solution, which may be a way to revitalize the industry by offering travel packages, including travel insurance services (Uğur & Akbıyık, 2020).

There is no doubt about the negative effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic in all possible perspectives. On the other hand, even this negative, sad and unhappy experience can be an opportunity for change. Nepal (2020), for example, sees the dangers associated with the COVID-19 epidemic in a completely different light, seeing the pandemic as an opportunity to change the approach to tourism towards sustainable and conscious travel, and to learn from past mistakes where quantity was prioritized over quality and an irresponsible approach to sensible developments that can positively affect the quality of life and environment for tourism-dependent communities. Similarly, Niewiadomski, who argues that the price the world pays for the COVID-19 pandemic is enormous, the temporary process of de-globalization offers the tourism industry an unprecedented opportunity to reintroduce – a unique chance to re-develop in line with sustainability principles and get rid of various "dark sides" of tourism growth, such as environmental degradation, economic exploitation or overcrowding in selected areas (Niewiadomski, 2020).

New trends in the perception of quality in tourism services include another aspect. And this aspect is trust. Trust between the visitor and individual actors in tourism, but also, for example, tourist destinations themselves, and in this context, a constant effort to build its strong and unwavering position. Trust in the brand, in other words, brand loyalty, is a two-way process, in this mutual relationship arises from the involvement of both parties – the customer and the company, while the key factor of trust is quality services. In services, especially tourism services, it is, for example, essential that service providers carefully select their suppliers to ensure that the price of each tourism product offered corresponds to the expected quality of service (Ming-Way, Hsiu-Yu, & Chien-Yu, 2020).

According to Bhattacherjee (2002), trust includes three components – competence (perceived skills and abilities related to performance), integrity (honesty and fulfilment of promise / commitments), and benevolence (well-meaning interest in others).

The issue of the role of customer confidence in the tourism market has received great academic and practical attention (Brun, Rajaobelina, Ricard, & Amiot, 2020). Many studies have examined the psychological processes by which customer involvement affects brand loyalty in many areas, such as the relationship with hotels, national parks, and retail. The results of these studies found that customer involvement positively affects brand loyalty (Bergel, Frank, & Brock, 2019), and this interaction has been even recognized as a key determinant of brand loyalty (Ming-Way, Hsiu-Yu, & Chien-Yu, 2020). Another finding was that brand consolidation and customer confidence are crucial factors in developing consumer-brand relationships, especially in the field of tourism (Filieri, Alguezaui, & McLeay, 2015).

Trust in a brand can be viewed from two perspectives – from the perspective of a behavioral component and an attitude component. While behavioral loyalty refers to the repeat purchase of a brand, attitude loyalty is a situation where the consumer´s approach to the brand is generally preferred (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973).

Loyal customers have a strong connection with the brand and show a tendency not only to make repeat purchases (Šerić & Praničević, 2018), but also consumers with high loyalty are most likely to recommend a preferred brand to their friends or others. This brand loyalty is also crucial in increasing a company´s market share and sustainability in the tourism industry (Yoo & Bai, 2013). Many studies confirm that trust is a key attribute of many tourism decisions. If tourists trust a destination, they will most likely visit it. Traveler trust significantly affects not only their perception of risk, but also their emotional attachment to the destination (Kim, Kim, & Shin, 2009; Chen & Phou, 2013). Tourists can even develop this personal relationship with a destination in the long run (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park , 2005).

The authors Liu, Wang, Fang and Tingting (2019), deal in detail with the issue of tourist confidence towards the tourist destination in their study. They used both quantitative and qualitative methods in their research. The results showed that tourist confidence in the destination consists of five aspects. They are trust in authorities (local authorities), in other tourists, in residents, trust in staff, and agencies, which shows that each of these elements in the overall system of a tourist destination plays a key role in the process of achieving a long-term trust. At the same time, it is essential to create a network of trust linking all these stakeholders. It is building a credible image of the destination that is the primary goal that must be achieved to successfully create a positive image of the destination (Liu, Wang, Fang, & Tingting, 2019).

It follows that it is essential for companies to devote extraordinary energy to building tourist confidence. Cause the confidence of tourists in the destination significantly helps to build a positive image of this destination.

3 Goals and Methodology

This article deals with the research issue of adaptation and implementation of the Czech Service Quality System (CSQS) to the Czech market environment. The aim of the paper is to describe the CSQS system and to verify its applicability and the level of implementation in practice. For these purposes both qualitative and quantitative research will be used. Quantitative research is focused on analysis of the current level of implementation of this tool in practice. Specifically to find out the total number of certified companies, and the subsequent evaluation of identified level of application, including performing an analysis of the structure of these certified organizations, mapping the development of the number of issued certificates in a time series, as well as performing an interregional analysis of certified organizations. Next goal of this article is to conduct qualitative research, where interviews are conducted with leading representatives of certified organizations, to verify the usability of the tool in the functionin of the organization and to learn from the implementation of the tool in practice. The outputs of both selected methods will help answer both the research question whether and to what extent did companies in the field of tourism adapt to the Czech Service Quality System, thus also help to evaluate the defined hypothesis. A partial goal of the article is also to describe analogous systems operating in the market environments of Germany and Switzerland and to make a comparison of the CSQS with these systems.

3.1 Main and Partial Goals of Paper

Achieving the set goal, which is the research of the Czech Service Quality System as a tool for quality management to ensure the competitiveness of service providers in tourism, will gradually occur in the following partial steps:

- studying of literature and formulation of literary research related to quality issues in tourism services;
- the detailed description of the CSQS system;
- analysis of the current state of implementation of the Czech Service Quality System in the Czech market environment (quantitative research, statistical evaluation), focusing on obtaining data on the number of certified organizations, including determining the level of certification of these organizations, performing an analysis of the structure of

certified organizations, compiling an inter-regional analysis, mapping the development of the number of issued certificates in a time series;

- a brief description of the Swiss and German quality systems and their mutual comparison with the CSQS;
- conducting a questionnaire survey (qualitative research) among leading representatives of certified organizations;
- querying for key information specification;
- specification of key knowledge and information in relation to the set objective.

The synthesis of the findings will then make it possible to evaluate the current practical use of the Czech Service Quality System among the effected tourism stakeholders. The detailed schedule of the research is shown in the following figure (Fig.1):

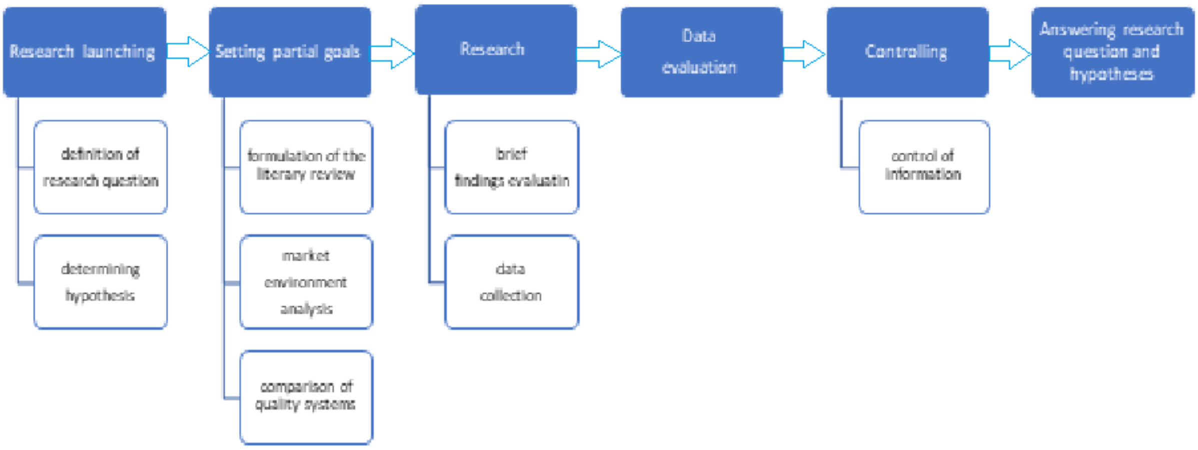

Figure 1: Research schedule (author´s own elaboration)

The start of the research consisted in setting specific goals, defining the research question, and formulating hypothesis. This was followed by a study of professional literature, foreign quality improvement systems in tourism, and an analysis of the market environment. The next step was the collection of data among the managers of selected accommodation capacities control and evaluation of the obtained data, as well as data collection for quantitative research to analyse the number or certified companies. The result of the chosen procedures was the answer to a research question, and the evaluation of determined hypothesis, as well as the definition of new recommendations.

3.2 Determining of Hypothesis

In accordance with the set goals of this paper, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1: Czech companies actively use the certification in the Czech Service Quality System.

3.3 Methodology of Paper, Research Techniques

To fulfil the defined goal, a systematic approach to the formulation of literary research was chosen. For the purposes of elaborating this paper, both the quantitative and qualitative research were chosen as the research methods. In the case of qualitative research, the method of individual interviews was chosen as the data collection technique. The reason for this is the fact that the quality of the provision of services is verified. The research approach is based on the definition of a research problem, which is to what extend did companies in the field of tourism adapt to the CSQS – significantly in selected accommodation capacities. Quantitative research is focused on determining the degree of application of the Czech Service Quality System in practice and provides an answer to the defined hypothesis. Other methods used in this article were description and comparison. The first step of the work was the collection of information and data on the current implementation of the system in the conditions of the Czech Republic. The data were drawn mainly from the public website of the Czech Service Quality System and from documents provided directly from the CzechTourism Agency, which is responsible for implementing this system.

3.3.1 Qualitative research

The method of a case study was used within the qualitative research design solved by this paper. The method of individual interviews was chosen as the data collection technique. In relation to the size of the research sample, the paper is based on Eisenhardt (2020), according to her a number between 4 and 10 usually gives good results. For less than four cases, it is difficult to determine a theory whose empirical evidence would be convincing. Thus, a total of 6 accommodation capacities of the same category across the Czech Republic were selected for the sample for quantitative research. Specifically, there were selected hotels belonging to the 4* category according to the Hotelstars Union methodology and simultaneously certified in the

Czech Service Quality System (while the achieved level of the system was not decisive in the selection of the sample). For data collection, the method of controlled interview was chosen. In the first phase, the managers of these selected facilities were contacted by telephone – the subject of the research was outlined to them, and they were asked to cooperate in completing a guided interview of 9 research questions related to the topic. Any other observations of comments on the functioning of the CSQS system resulting from the practice, which would not be supported by research questions, were also welcomed. The acquired knowledge was analysed and generalized to analogous cases in the market environment of the Czech Republic.

3.3.2 Quantitative research

First, an analysis of the Czech market environment was performed, with special regard to determining the current state and number of certified organizations within the Czech Service Quality System. The data were drawn from the publicly available website of the system (www.csks.cz), another collection of data was also provided directly from the system operator of the CzechTourism Agency. Data and information from the Czech Service Quality System websites were collected on a specific date, as their number changes over time. This decisive date was November 23, 2018.

Specifically, the foal of this type of research was to obtain a sufficient amount of data on the current number of certified organizations, determining the level of certification of these organizations, processing and evaluation of information obtained not only in terms of the level of certification, but also in terms of distribution of certified organizations (collectively for the 1st and 2nd level of the system) according to individual regions of the Czech Republic (compiled at the level of NUTS3 territorial units). From the obtained data, a statistical evaluation was performed – namely the compilation of the structure of certified organizations, which took into account the division of certified organizations into relevant categories according to the CSQS methodology, mapping the development of the total number of certificates in time series, as well as determining the share of new certifications and recertifications of this total for the years concerned.

3.3.3 Description

The essence of the description is the researcher´s effort to record the entire observed event in all its manifestations and natural sequences. It is a faithful reproduction, and therefore there is no place for interpretation (Vědecké metody ve společenských vědách (pro doktorandy), 2021).

The description of the Czech Service Quality System, as well as the analysis and determination of the current level of implementation of this tool in the Czech market environment is the main goal of this paper. A partial goal is then a detailed description of this two-stage system and the processes of its operation, including the specific steps leading to the successful granting of the certificate. An integral part of the paper is also the description of quality management systems used in Germany (ServiceQualität Deutschland) and Switzerland (Quality Programme of Swiss Tourism) and the mutual comparison of the CSQS with these systems.

3.4 Data Sources

To answer the research question and the hypothesis defined in this paper, data were drawn from several sources. These sources were:

- data related to the implementation of the CSQS obtained from the system´s website available at www.csks.cz, supplemented by data from the system operator of the CzechTourism Agency – specifically data on the total number of issued certificates at the decisive moment, and in the time series, as well as a set of information on the achieved level of certification, on new certifications and recertifications (quantitative research and statistical evaluation);
- data obtained on the basis of interviews with managers of selected certified organizations – focused at finding out the general benefit of the implementation of the tool in the functioning of the organization, eg in relation to administrative complexity of in relation to the recorded preferences of customers, etc. (qualitative research).

4 History of the implementation of the Czech Service Quality System

Quality management systems in services have been in place for a long time in many European countries. Switzerland is one of the pioneers in this area. The local system was subsequently inspiration for other countries – such as Germany, Austria, Great Britain, and Spain.

In the Czech Republic, the Government adopted the document the "National Quality Support Policy" in 2000, which was created as a summary of intension, goals, and methods for influencing the quality of services, products, and activities. Simultaneously it formulated the state´s relationship to quality development needs on world markets. This document was followed by the "Strategy of the national Quality Policy in the Czech Republic for the period 2008-2013". The strategy represented the starting material for further development, implementation, and concretization of the quality support policy in the Czech Republic. It was on this strategy that the programme for the implementation of the National Service Quality System was based, with the aim of introducing a quality system in the tourism sector.

The need to implement a control management system in tourism organizations began to be discussed in 2009, when the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic launched several projects in cooperation with professional associations, the output of which was the aforementioned National Quality System of Tourism Services in the Czech Republic. In the period from April to December 2010, within the project surveys of customer needs and analysis of quality of services were conducted in selected tourism sectors. Their goal was to thoroughly map the state and level of quality with which services are provided to customers, gain relevant experience from abroad and design operating models within which the quality of services in the Czech Republic could be solved in a systematic way (Analýzy kvality poskytovaných služeb, 2018).

The Czech Service Quality System is an output of the National Quality System of Tourism Services in the Czech Republic project and in the Czech market environment it represents a systemic tool of the state tourism policy ensuring an increase in quality in the process of providing services. This tool was primarily intended for tourism organizations, as services in this area have long been perceived as insufficient which was one of the reasons for the long-term stagnation of the tourism industry in the Czech Republic (Smrčka, Arltová, & Schönfeld, 2011). Subsequently, however, the criteria were set so that it can be used in almost all sectors of the national economy. The main philosophy of the whole concept is based on the needs of customers (tourists, visitors, guest, etc.) and on the continuous improvement of the services offered (Škodová Parmová, Líšková Dvořáková, & Kain, 2018).

The project was financed from the EU structural funds, specifically from the Integrated Operational Programme. Its implementation occurred from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2015. Until December 31, 2020, the project was in a period of sustainability. Throughout this period, the operation of the project was ensured by the Czech Tourist Board – the CzechTourism Agency. The system is owned by the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic. Number of professional organizations participate in the cooperation in the project as well.

4.1 Quality Programme of Swiss Tourism

Tourism is an important source of income for Switzerland. To effectively manage quality in tourism, the so-called Q system (Quality Programme of Swiss tourism) has been operating for a long time in the country.

It is a national quality management system in tourism, which is made up of Swiss associations together with the University of Bern. The aim of the system is to maintain the high quality of tourism in Switzerland. In addition to the mandatory requirements, the basic elements of the system are also the quality label and the institution of the Swiss Tourism Federation (STF – Swiss Tourism Federation), which acts as a managing institution and is also the owner of the "Q" label. STF´s activities consist mainly in setting criteria for individual levels, coordinating accreditation and certification processes and awarding quality labels, organizing courses and training and marketing quality labels. The quality system is fully controlled by the business sector and the state plays only a marginal role in it. The system is fully respected by business associations and the public and has the potential for further growth.

The strengths of the system are mainly financial support from trade unions and associations, professional and financial availability to small organizations, institutional security as well as professional and practical methodology, which is the result of mutual cooperation between tourism professionals and academics. On the contrary, weaknesses represent the obligation of organization associated with the completion of the relevant type of education in the first and second level of the system as well as the absence of independent evaluation in both, of these levels.

The system is based on the principles of voluntary participation, transparency, mutual compatibility with international standards and, last but not least, acceptability by all types of Swiss tourism organizations. It is set up as a three-stage system, with each stage assuming a greater complexity of requirements. Thus, the higher the degree, the higher the difficulty in meeting the criteria. Depending on the level of the system achieved, the organization will receive a quality mark "Q", which documents the fulfilment of requirements at a given level of the system. The quality mark is awarded conditionally for 3 years, while the fulfilment of the set criteria is verified every year.

The first stage of the system is associated with raising awareness of quality. It focuses on the development of quality, and especially on the quality of services, on the motivation of employees and their preparation for comprehensive quality management and on the optimization of internal processes to eliminate weaknesses. At this stage, a key employee of the organizations is trained for the "Quality Coach" qualification. Guests perceive quality directly via improved services – and the label (Raise awareness for quality with level I, 2021).

Businesses, which have obtained the quality label I and are willing to improve further, can acquire level II. This level improves the leadership quality. Higher management staff members are important for safeguarding and developing the quality in the company. The condition for this level is the training of a key manager ("Quality Trainer"), who is responsible for ensuring and developing the quality of the company – consistent management and support of employees. The aim of the second state is mainly to motivate employees through active involvement in the company, as well as comparisons within the industry, based on the analysis of specific quality tools.

Organizations having established a comprehensive recognised quality management system, can apply for the quality label level III. In this stage, a comprehensive quality management system at the level of ISO 9000 is required, or participation in the evaluation according to the EFQM model (Quality Programme, 2021).

Organizations successfully certified in the system are marked with the "Q" quality logo, shown on the following Figure 2.

Figure 2: Logo of the system Quality Programme of Swiss Tourism (Quality Labels at a glance, 2021)

4.2 ServiceQuality Germany

The ServiceQuality Germany (SQD - ServiceQualität Deutschland) has been operating since 2001 as a certification system for small and medium-sized enterprises in the gastronomy, hotel industry and tourism. This is a national quality system that is applied in all federal states. The initiative for the creation of the system came from the institutions of the German Tourism Association DTV (Deutsche Tourismusverband), which is also the umbrella institution, as well as DEHOGA (Deutsche hotel- und Gaststättenverband) and IHA (Hotelvebband Deutschland).

The system is based on the Swiss model, but it is adapted to the needs of the German market. It is also a three-tier system with the possibility of direct access to one of the levels depending on how intensively the organization wants to improve its services. It is therefore not a system in which the achievement of a higher degree would be conditioned by the successful "mastering" of a lower degree. It was this German quality management system that served as a model and basis for the Czech Service Quality System.

Like the Swiss system, this system is based on the principles of openness, transparency, and compatibility with international standards. In its current practice, the system works more in the form of an educational system. The advantages of the system lie mainly in its integrity in all federal states of Germany, in high respect from trade unions and associations, accessibility to small organizations, in institutional security, as well as in compatibility with international quality standards. The disadvantages are, in particular the lower prevalence of the system in the field of tourism, as well as the high disproportion between the number of trained system professionals and the number of tourism organizations that have actually applied the system.

The “Q” quality mark is conditionally assigned to the organization for a period of 3 years, and even in this case the fulfilment of the criteria is verified annually.

In the first stage, one of the leading employees of the organization is trained. This employee attends a Q-seminar, where they get acquainted with the whole system and suitable tools and becomes a key figure for the organization in relation to services and quality. The purpose of the system is to work and improve every contact that occur between the customer and the company. All measures taken and results achieved are processed in an online tool, through which they are then evaluated by the certification body.

The second stage presupposes the same approach to quality and services, but with greater intensity. At this level, there is also a hidden quality control of services, the so-called Q-Mystery Check – a visit to a hidden customer, whose mission is to assess the quality of the service provided. It will prepare a detailed report on the performed inspection, which it will supplement with advice and impulses on the basis of which the provided services will be further improved.

The third stage is characterized by the implementation of the so-called Q-audit, the essence of which is to provide constructive feedback. In connection with the audit, a quality management expert is sent to the organization who can detect all weaknesses in the company´s operations. Suggestions and recommendations of this expert will help the organization to further improve (System, 2021).

The logo of the system can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Logo of the system ServiceQuality German (ServiceQualität Deutschland, 2021)

4.3 Czech Service Quality System

The basis for the establishment of the Czech Service Quality System was the German quality system - ServiceQualität Deutschland. The original German system was analysed in cooperation with experts in the field of service quality and tourism, and subsequently adapted for use in the Czech environment. The concept of the system is based on simple principles of quality management, while the philosophy of the system is knowledge of customer needs and continuous improvement of the quality of services provided in organizations. The system is thus suitable for all organizations that care about their further development and that are interested in strengthening their position in the market, providing services of the highest quality, and meeting the expectations of their customers (O Českém systému kvality služeb, 2021).

The implementation of the quality assessment system is related to the strengthening of management authority and the stabilization of employees. It mainly contributes to the creation of corporate culture, as well as to the quality management of work activities and processes of the organization. Although the approach to quality assessment can be enforced, in this case it is usually not fully accepted, as in the case when it is driven by the initiative and voluntary approach of employees. Volunteering increases the feeling of belonging to the company and responsibility for the results achieved.

The Czech Service Quality System was set up as a two-tier system. The main reason for this lies in the wide range of target groups, including both small and medium-sized organizations or large chains from the private sector, as well as companies from the public sector. By successfully certifying, system participants gain free professional and practical know-how in the field of quality management. They can develop so-called soft skills, i.e. communication and other skills useful for management and employees. Every company will determine its own vision and the measures they will take to fulfil it. In addition, deliberate quality control reduces the cost and risk of stress situations, not least the fluctuation of staff. For the customer, the internationally comparable brand is a good guide for service quality expectation (Škodová Parmová, Líšková Dvořáková, & Kain, 2018).

While for some organizations the goal will be the introduction of the idea of quality into the daily activities associated with the first level of certification, for others the target will be up to the second level of certification, associated with the deepening of established tools for service quality. The organizations themselves are involved in the certification process, as well as the Certification Body and the Evaluation Center.

4.3.1 The I. Level of CSQS

This level of certification presupposes an awareness of the importance of providing quality services and, in particular, the organization´s interest in implementing quality into its operation as well as the desire to constantly improve. The cornerstone of the process is the self-assessment of each employee of the organization in the quality of services provision and comparison of achieved results with customer expectations.

The first step of certification to this level is the decision to enter the system, and the subsequent registration of the organization on the web portal www.csks.cz. During the registration process, the administrator (the person responsible for registration) fills in the basic data about the organization and about themselves. At the same time, in this step, one employee of the organization has to be selected – the so-called "Quality Coach", who completes the mandatory training of the first degree on the basis of which he will be responsible for implementing elements of the system into the functioning of the organization. After training the "Quality coach", it is necessary to send a binding application to the certification body, including the necessary documentation - vision, quality commitment, proof of compliance with technical requirements, description of processes and action plan. The certification body will formally evaluate the submitted documents in terms of form and submit them to the independent Evaluation Center for a factual assessment. In a case of a positive evaluation, the organization will receive a certificate of the Czech Service Quality System of the 1st level. At all times, the organization and the "Quality Coach" are provided with the methodological support of the CSQS by the regional coordinator (Certifikace I. stupně, 2021).

4.3.2 The II. Level of CSQS

The main goal of this level of the CSQS is the development of the system introduced in the first degree. It includes the implementation of more advanced quality tools and, in addition checks the achieved quality level through a questionnaire survey and field survey.

To submit an application to II. level the organization must be a holder of the I. level certificate for at least 6 months, and must also prove that it has successfully implemented the quality of services in its activities, which it wants to further deepen. Another condition is the presence of the "Quality Coach" trained in the II. level, who follows the training for the first level of the system. After successful training for a higher level, this "Quality Coach" asks to start the process of transition of the organization to a higher level of the CSQS. In response to this request, the Certification Body submits all the organization´s documentation from the first level for assessment to a professional Evaluation Centre. This centre then submits the forms for a questionnaire survey for customers and managers to the applicant organization. It also carries out mystery shopping under its own direction. Completed questionnaires from clients and organization´s employees will be sent back to the Evaluation Centre for assessment. After evaluation it prepares a final report in accordance with the field survey. Based on this final report, the organization will prepare a plan of measures, which will then be sent to the Certification Centre - which will carry out a formal inspection of the submitted documents, as in the first instance, and will be forwarded to the Evaluation Centre for evaluation. In case of a positive evaluation, the organization will receive a quality certificate of II. level (Certifikace II. stupně, 2020).

4.3.3 Logo

Branding, with the Standard of the Czech Service Quality System, representing the methodological basis for the certification process itself and the institutional environment ensuring the implementation and successful operation of the Czech Service Quality System, from the basic pillars of the entire system. The system logo consists of the capital letter "Q" and is supplemented by the number of the achieved level of the system. It is a registered combined trademark of the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic and the Industrial Property Office of the Czech Republic. It is awarded to successful organizations only for the period of validity of the CSQS certificate. The graphic representation of the logo can be seen in Figure 4.

Český systém kvality služeb
Czech service quality system

Figure 4: Logo of the CSQS (Struktura systému, 2018)

4.4 Comparison of quality systems

The systems implemented in the market environments of Switzerland, Germany and of the Czech Republic have been described in this paper. The main goal of these systems is to achieve quality improvement primarily in tourism entities. In addition to clients who receive services according to their expectations, but for example suppliers also benefit secondarily from the system – their customer, awarded the "Q" mark, is more reliable for them. The benefits for organizations certified in the system represent an increase in credibility and prestige, but also a difference from the competition of a strengthening of the market position. For participating organization, the "Q" brand is considered a matter of honour, it is a sign of a positive attitude towards the customer.

By comparing quality management systems, several differences can be revealed. While the Swiss and German systems are both three-tiered, the Czech modification of the system was set up as two-tiered. Another difference is entering a higher level of the system. For the Czech and Swiss systems, it is the same that the entry into the next stage of the system is conditioned by reaching and remaining in a lower stage for a given period of time. In the case of the CSQS, it is necessary to be in the first stage of the system for at least 6 months; in the Swiss system, the transition to a higher level is associated with the end of the 3-year validity period of the certificate. In contrast, the German model allows organizations interested in using the system to enter directly into any of the three levels of the system - it depends only on the level that the organization wants to achieve and the tools that best suit the organization´s needs. The involvement of the German system is also broader as it allows entry to public and local governments.

For the German and Swiss systems entering to these systems is associated with certain fees. In the case of the Swiss system, the financial complexity of the implementation is associated with the achieved level. In the case of the German system, evaluation and certification are paid for by the company itself, but the training of quality managers is free. Certification in the Czech Service Quality System is free of charge. The common feature of all systems is they are voluntary, the system has been introduced at a national level, as well as a 3-year period of validity of the granted certificate.

The comparison of selected criteria according to individual quality system is also evident from the following Table 1.

Quality management system	***Levels of system***	***Voluntary entering the system***	***Period of certificate validity***	***Level of system implementation***	***Fees***	***Higher level achieving***
ServiceQuality German	3	yes	3 years	national	partially charged	-
Quality Our Passion	3	yes	3 years	national	yes	after 3 years
Czech Service Quality System	2	yes	3 years	national	no	after 6 months

Table 1: Comparison of selected criteria according to individual quality systems
Authors´ own processing

5 Czech Service Quality System in practice

According to statistics published on the project´s website, 1 057 establishments have been certified since the launch of this tool, of which 3 certificates have been terminated and a total of 2 529 quality trainers have been trained. At the same time, a total of 3 776 establishments were registered in the system. As the certificate of the achieved quality level is issued for a limited period of time (specifically for 3 years), the number of currently certified organizations changes over time depending on the date of issue of the certificate and its validity.

The analysis focused on the use of the tool in practice showed that in most cases, the certified organizations are companies belonging to the category of small and medium-sized enterprises, with a total number of employees between 0-249. The number of organizations certified according to level I. and II. the Czech Service Quality System is evident in Table 2 below. Certified organizations are divided into several groups in accordance with the system settings. The obtained data are as of November 23, 2018.

Group	*I. degree*	*II. degree*	*Total*
Accommodation	16	5	21
Gastronomy	6	0	6
Tourist Information Centres	38	6	44
Attractivities	30	3	33
Travel offices and agencies	44	2	46
Winter sports	1	0	1
Golf	3	0	3
Public and non-profit sector organization	46	3	49
Other services	22	0	22
Total	206	19	225

Table 2: Overview of valid certificates by group
Authors´ own construction based on data from November 23, 2018

It can be seen from Table 2, that most of the total number of certified organizations hold I. level certification. This means that these are mostly organizations that are just beginning to implement quality management tools in their daily activities. They are aware of the need to provide quality services as a key tool of quality management, and they want to use modern quality management systems so that they could measure on their own and systematically work to improve the quality of their services to meet the expectations of their customers.

The highest number of valid certificates is in the lower level of CSQS and in the group of Public and Non-Profit Sector Organizations, including for example historical monuments, cultural centres as well as destination managements or destination companies. The other most numerous groups are travel agencies and Tourist Information Centres. On the contrary, the smallest number of certifications at this level is in the Winter Sports group – only 1 certification at this level was registered as of the date of data collection, and further in the Golf group, where 3 organizations are registered. The low number of companies in both, of these groups is due to their very narrow focus.

Extension to II. level was most often used by Tourist Information Centres – in this group there are 6 valid certifications, and 5 certificates in the group including Accommodation.

Further processing of the obtained data was performed in relation to regions of the Czech Republic (NUTS3 regions level – i. e. 14 higher territorial self-governing units). Individual levels of the CSQS were not taken into account for the purpose of this analysis, and only the total number of certified companies was used. In case of this analysis the issued certificates are also divided into groups. The resulting inter-regional distribution within the Czech Republic can be seen in Table 3.

	Regions of the Czech Republic													
Groups	***City of Prague***	***South Bohemian***	***Southern Moravia***	***Karlovy Vary***	***Vysočina***	***Hradec Králové***	***Liberec***	***Moravian-Silesian***	***The Olomouc***	***The Pardubice***	***The Pilsen***	***Central Bohemia***	***The Ústí***	***Zlin***
Accommodation	-	5	-	1	2	1	1	5	2	2	1	-	-	1
Gastronomy	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	1	-
Tourist Information Centres	-	6	-	3	4	7	4	3	1	3	5	3	5	-
Attractivities	1	5	1	-	7	5	-	3	1	-	4	3	2	1
Travel offices and agencies	7	2	4	1	2	1	2	12	2	-	5	2	5	1
Winter sports	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Golf	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Public and non-profit sector organizations	1	13	3	2	2	6	1	1	2	6	6	-	6	-
Other services	6	-	-	-	4	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1
Total	***15***	***32***	***10***	***7***	***21***	***23***	***9***	***28***	***10***	***14***	***23***	***9***	***20***	***4***

Table 3: Distribution of certified organizations by NUTS3 regions of the Czech Republic
Authors´ own construction based on data from November 23, 2018

Significant inter-regional disparities are evident from Table 3 showing the distribution of granted certificates. While the highest number or certified establishments (32) is in the South Bohemian Region, on the contrary, the least certified organizations (4) are in the Zlín Region.

The highest number of certified companies in the South Bohemian Region may be due to the fact that this region has long been one of the most visited regions in the Czech Republic, both by foreign and domestic visitors, who consider certification in the CSQS system to their decision-making. The popularity of the region can also be a reflection of a unique way of tourism management, through the South Bohemian Tourist Board, acting at the regional level as a tourism coordinator. The second highest number of certified organizations is in the Moravian-Silesian Region (28) followed by the Pilsen and Hradec Králové Regions with the same number of a total of 23 certified establishments.

The lowest number of granted certificates was achieved in the Zlín Region (4), the Karlovy Vary Region (7) and, also in the Central Bohemia and Liberec Regions, which both have the same number of 9 certified organizations. Although the Karlovy Vary Region is also one of the most visited regions in the Czech Republic, the trend of a high number of certified organizations cannot be confirmed in this case. This may be due to the region´s focus on providing spa services, which are used mainly by foreign clients, for whom certification according to the CSQS is not a decisive criterion for their selection. For this reason, local tourism companies are not motivated to participate in the system.

By analogy, the City of Prague Region, belonging to the absolute top among individual regions in relation to the number of visits of foreign tourists has only 15 certificates. Even in this case, the reason for the low number of certified organizations could be the fact that foreign visitors decide according to other criteria than certification in the Czech Service Quality System.

The first valid certificates of the CSQS system were granted to successful organizations in 2013. An overview of the total number of issued certificates (together I. and II. level) from the beginning of the system to its completion in 2020 can be seen for individual years in the time frame below.

Number of certified organizations in CSQS:

- as at December 31, 2013: 12
- as at December 31, 2014: 161
- as at December 31, 2015: 683
- as at December 31, 2016: 707
- as at December 31, 2017: 790
- as at December 31, 2018: 926
- as at December 31, 2019: 993

- as at December 31, 2020: 1 057

The same data are also shown in the time-series graphical expression in the Chart 1.

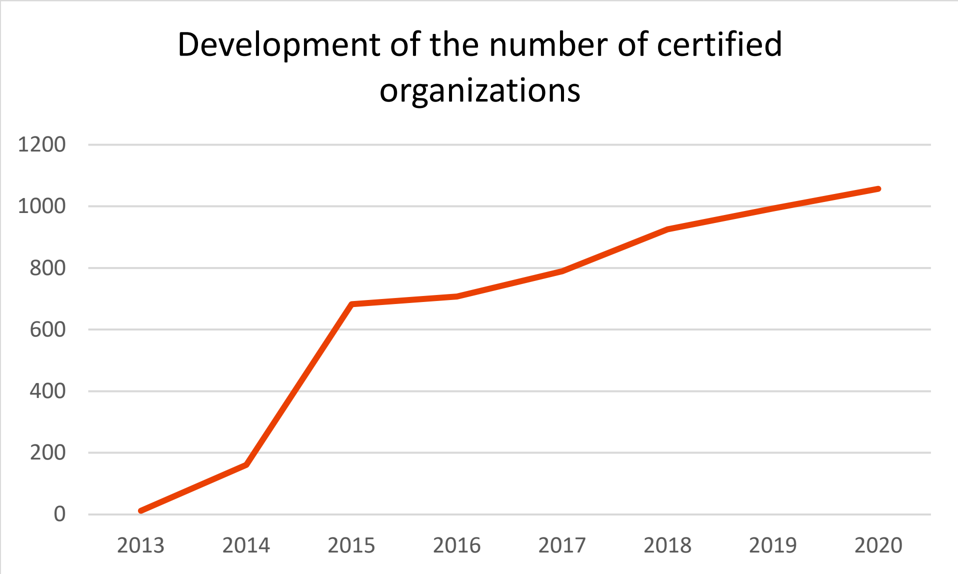

Chart 1:Development of the number of certified organizations in time-series
Author´s own processing

The total number of certificates issued for individual years is always stated as of December 31 of the given year. The small number (12) of certified organizations in 2013 is due to the fact that the real launch of the system did not occur until December of that year. The largest year-on-year increase was recorded in 2015, when a total of 522 organizations were certified in a single year. The following year, 24 certificates were granted, in 2017 it was already 83 certificates and in 2018 the number increased again to a total of 136 valid certificates. In the following years, the year-on-year increase was 63, resp. 61 certificates issued.

From the data obtained from the system operator the CzechTourism Agency, it is also possible to evaluate data on both the number of newly certified organizations and the number of so-called recertifications (i. e. repeated issuance of a certificate of a previously certified organization). An overview of issued new certifications and recertifications is evident from the following Table 4.

year	***New certifications***	***Recertifications***
2018	26	104
2019	19	44
2020	20	41

Table 4: Overview of granted certifications and recertifications in selected years
Authors´ own processing

This complete data was further processed to an overall overview of certified organizations after the whole period of implementation. Data were divided into specific categories according to the system methodology. The structure of the overall organizations certified in the CSQS system (according to specific categories) is shown in the following Chart 2.

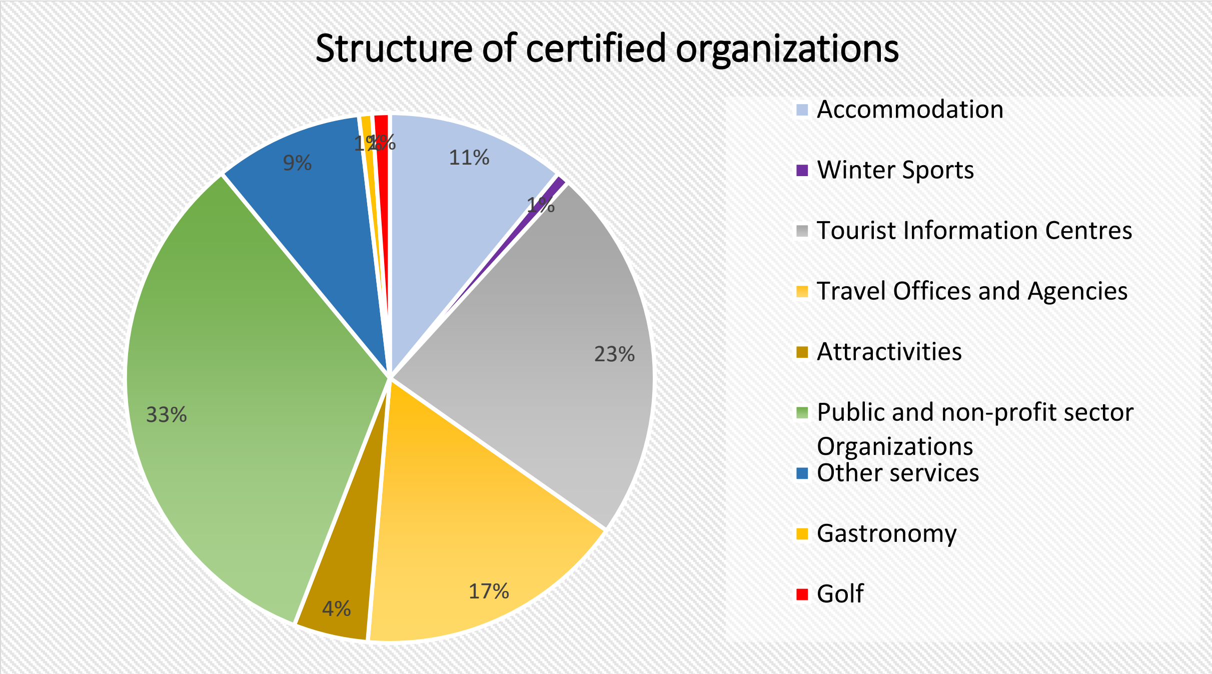

Chart 2: The Structure of the certified organizations according to specific groups
Author´s own processing

5.1 Qualitative and quantitative research evaluation

For the purposes of quantitative research, accommodation capacities certified in the Czech Service Quality System were selected. The managers of the facilities were asked to cooperate, consisting in the possibility of conducting a controlled interview with them, primarily to obtain answers to research questions, but also to find out the broader context resulting from their personal experience from previous practice. During the interview, the managers answered 9 open research questions related to the certification of accommodation facilities in the Czech Service Quality System. The defined research questions formed a kind of basic "skeleton" of the interviews, partial statements of the managers themselves, arose during the interview.

The interviews showed that the certification in the CSQS is generally perceived by the interviewed managers as a positive step both towards customers and in relation to improving their position in increasing competitiveness. According to their practical experience, it is possible to evaluate that a certain part of clients takes this certification into account and include in their decision-making. In relation to improving position in the market, certification cannot be "directly" quantified in any of the common economic indicators, but in certain situations (especially in marketing campaigns) it is possible to observe increased interest in accommodation, which will be positively reflected in higher sales. In a broader perspective, they perceive certification as a means to gain some insight into the provision of services. On the other hand, the interviews also revealed a certain "disadvantage" of certification, which according to managers lies in a high administrative burden associated with completing the mandatory annual agenda.

For the purposes of quantitative research and statistical evaluation, data from the public website of the system were used, supplemented by detailed data directly from the system operator of the CzechTourism Agency. The mentioned data contained mainly data of the total number of certified organizations, both at the decisive moment and the data collection in the time series, as well as data on the achieved level of certification and, last but not least, data on the number of new and repeated certifications. The obtained data were further processed into interregional analysis. At the same time, information on certified organizations was divided into appropriate categories in accordance with the CSQS methodology, where thanks to this division, it was then possible to compile the structure of all certified organizations.

In relation to the performer quantitative research and statistical evaluation, the obtained data suggest that the CSQS became known for tourism actors and became a popular tool for improving the quality of provided services, as evidenced not only by its active use, but in many cases by repeated recertification and implementation into the organization´s activities.

6 Conclusion

The implementation of the “Q” quality evaluation system is related to the strengthening of the management authority and the stabilization of employees. It is mainly about creating a corporate culture and quality management of work activities and thus processes, while its philosophy is to understand the needs of the customer and constantly improve the quality of services provided in organizations.

Systems in other European countries also build on analogous values. Although the approach to quality assessment can be enforced, in this case it does not meet with full acceptance, as when it is driven by initiative and voluntary approach of employees. Only in this case does the feeling of belonging to the company and responsibility for the achieved results increase. The benefits of participation in the system are indisputable. Better quality brings higher profits, lower costs, a competitive advantage, but also greater employee satisfaction and less turnover. The above list represents only some of the advantages of implementing the tool into the functioning of the company.

The main goal of this contribution was to introduce the Czech Service Quality System as a tool for increasing competitiveness in the Czech market environment and find out whether companies in the field of tourism adapt to this CSQS system. Partial objectives were the detailed description of the examined system, as well as description of the Swiss and German quality systems and their mutual comparison to CSQS. The next goal was to analyse the current state of implementation of the Czech Service Quality System in practice. Specifically, this means to analyse current number of organizations certified by this system, with a particular focus on the reached level of the system and structure of certified organizations as well as on the development of the total number of certified organizations in the time series. The research also included an interregional analysis of certified establishments.

One of the partial objectives of this paper was to compare managements´ system of quality used in Switzerland and Germany, with the CSQS. Although the Czech version is based on the German system, there are some differences among these systems. The most significant differences lie in the number of stages of the system, and as well for example, in the conditions necessary to enter a higher stage of the system. A detailed comparison of individual criteria was performed in a partial analysis.

One of the set goals for this work was to determine the degree of implementation of CSQS in the Czech market environment. From the results it can be stated, the highest interest in certification is primarily among smaller businesses. The most often granted certifications are in the group of Public and Non-Profit Sector, next the group of Travel offices and agencies and Tourist Information Centres. On the other hand, the smallest number of valid certificates are in groups, Winter sports and Golf activities. The reason for this is very narrow focus of these companies. Many certificates in II. degree were granted in a group of Tourist Information Centres.

According to the data as of the decisive date, another finding was that most of these certified organizations are significantly more interested in first-degree certification (206) than certification in the second stage of the system (19). Based on obtained data it can be stated that organizations they are mostly engaged in the implementation of the system are such ones having just begun to introduce quality into their activities.

Analysis of the total number of certified organizations from the interregional point of view of the Czech Republic identified significant disparities among individual regions. This research was performed among 14 territorial units of the Czech Republic of the NUTS3 level. Results of this survey brought the findings that the largest number of certified organizations are located in the territory of the South Bohemian Region (32). On the contrary, the least certified organizations are in the Zlín Region (4) and in the Karlovy Vary Region (7). Although the mentioned regions are among the most visited, the difference is in the composition of visitors. While the South Bohemian Region is also popular among tourists from the Czech Republic, who can take the CSQS into account in their decision-making, the Karlovy Vary Region, for example is focused on spa services, and the visitors are mainly from foreign countries. They do not know the CSQS system and therefore does not take this system into account in their decisions. Simultaneously, this fact does not motivate local operators to certify themselves in this quality management system.

From the obtained data can be stated that the Czech Service Quality System is known among tourism actors, and it is used by these stakeholders which is seen from the year-to-year time series. The interest in implementation in the system by tourism companies is also evident from the high number of granted recertifications. Findings obtained by the qualitative research among managers of selected accommodation capacities also confirm the interest in implementation in the system.

Based on the performed quantitative research and statistical evaluation, in can be assumed that the hypothesis H1: "Czech companies actively use the certification in the Czech Service Quality System" established in this article is fulfilled.

Based on existing data, it can be said that during the period of implementation of the Czech Service Quality System to Czech market conditions, analysed system created the potential of becoming a key instrument by increasing competitiveness in the field of tourism in the Czech Republic. It is in the interest of all parties (tourism organizations, customers etc.) involved to continue its operation beyond 2020.

7 Resources

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