

Comparative Evaluation of Service Quality Perceptions in Rural Tourism among Different Tourist Groups

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Rural tourism is a dynamically evolving sector showing both a rising number of tourists as well as an increasing variety of touristic offer. As in other sectors, service quality can be considered a key determinant for creating a competitive rural tourism environment. In order to offer a high level of service quality, we must first understand how different groups of tourists perceive service quality. While existing literature points towards the existence of differences across socio-demographic groups, the results vary across sectors. The purpose of this paper is to examine differences in perception of service quality in rural tourism between different socio-demographic groups.

The research is based on a survey with a sample of 306 rural tourists in Croatia. A modified RURALQUAL model was used as the main research instrument. Following the data collection, a descriptive statistical analysis has been carried out to describe the sample as well as a bivariate statistical analysis using Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests. The research focused on four socio-demographic characteristics: gender, age, level of education and country of origin. The comparison of service quality perceptions across socio-demographic groups was carried out on the level of 29 service quality attributes grouped into 8 service quality dimensions.

The results of the bivariate statistical analysis indicate that statistically significant differences mainly exist for service quality perceptions of tourists with different levels of education. The findings also show that there is some difference in the perception of service quality between domestic and foreign tourists as well as across different age groups. Lastly, the results suggest that, in general, male and female tourists have similar perceptions of service quality provided in rural tourism. A post hoc test was performed for statistically significant results to identify the specific groups where the difference exists.

The results of this research can be useful to rural tourism managers in fulfilling the expectations of tourists and increasing the level of service quality in rural tourism. The results allow for market segmentation and can enable rural tourism managers to tailor their offer to different types of visitors.

Keywords: service quality, RURALQUAL, rural tourism, quantitative analysis, socio-demographic profile