**METHODS OF ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF SERVICE IN CATERING FACILITIES IN KOSOVO**

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**Abstract**

Hospitality, and especially restaurants, appear as a very important growing segment of the overall economic life. Globalization, which is now more and more emphasized as a phenomenon and a reality, has influenced a more intense encounter between different cultures, habits and consumer needs. This practically means that there are dynamic and constant changes in the market that require adapting to customer requirements by creating new services and finding appropriate models for improving quality.

Quality is a key element of service value based on which companies position themselves in the market, provide greater market share, higher revenues and contribute to employee and consumer satisfaction. The essence of the orientation towards the quality of restaurant products or services makes sense only if all aspects of quality are taken into account, that is, if the activities are based on total quality management (TQM).

In order to provide quality services in the field of restaurants, it is no longer enough to know how to serve and prepare food. Today, it is necessary to master many other disciplines and knowledge.Knowledge of the elements of nutrition, medicine, microbiology, marketing and psychology contribute to improving the quality of restaurant services.

**Keywords:** globalization, assessing, quality, requirements, hospitality, habits

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Kosovo, as a relatively new country, is still in the early stages of development of catering and restaurants. This paper aims to analyze the methodologies for determining service quality in the gastronomy sector in Kosovo. Precisely for this reason, guided by the general postulates expressed in the above text, the subject of research in this paper will be the quality of services in the restaurant, the management of the quality of the restaurant product and the satisfaction of consumers, that is, the users of the restaurant services.

To work well, you need to think well. Quality must first be understood and accepted, and only then can it be applied to expect good results. Therefore, one should first learn or know about quality, because quality is based on knowledge. The word quality (quality) comes from the Latin word "qualifications" and represents a property, quality, feature, ability, value. Quality can be defined in several ways and the basic definition is "Quality is customer satisfaction". Everything starts with customer satisfaction and he is the one who decides what quality is. Quality strives for constant improvement and advancement. The definition of quality according to ISO 9000 is "Quality is the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics meets requirements". The quality of the product or service is determined by the relationship between the wishes and needs of the users and their realization by the manufacturer.

Quality is a complex concept, composed of several elements or criteria. Quality elements or criteria derive from the essence of the quality of different types of products, services, activities, depending on their use, usefulness, importance for the customer - consumer. The measurement of quality elements does not have a generally accepted model, nor are there methods for its measurement, but it can be seen according to the user's perception of the quality of services. This follows the ten main features:

- Reliability in the provision of the service (fulfillment of the promise given to the user, good provision of services at the first attempt, consistency in the provision of the service);

- Business responsibility (timely action, readiness and availability of employees to provide the requested service);

- Competence (level of knowledge and skills needed to provide services, expertise of contact staff);

- Accessibility (availability of the service - appropriate working hours, location);

- Friendship (kindness, respect, understanding, cordiality of employees);

- Communication with the user (informing the user in an understandable way, collecting and taking into account the opinions, comments and suggestions of the user);

- Credibility (honesty, professionalism, reputation and trust enjoyed by the company);

- Security (elimination of the possibility of danger, risk reduction, financial security, guarantees);

- Tangible elements (exterior and interior).

**1.2. THE PERCEPTION OF QUALITY IN THE RESTAURANTS**

The modern approach to quality implies the need and obligation to define the quality of food and beverages based on objective and precisely determined data. On the one hand, using the term "quality factors" should harmonize the objective presentation in considering and defining the quality of food and beverages, and on the other hand, it precisely does not indicate that quality is not a mechanical sum of individual (partly) the established state of "properties" or characteristics, appearance of employees, promotional materials (Berry, L. L., Zcithaml, V. A. 1988) rather, quality is already an integral entity formed by a specific structure and numerous interrelationships of individual factors within and among all groups of quality factors. Considering that one of the main reasons for going to the restaurant is the consumption of food, this term needs to be defined. All substances of vegetable, animal, mineral or synthetic origin, which can serve to realize certain functions in the human organism, are called food.

**ELEMENTS OF QUALITY**

Food ingredients in their composition may contain various substances added to improve individual properties or preserve quality. The composition analysis includes quality parameters from technical-technological, microbiological, health-safety, nutritional and sensory aspects, both in the production process and during distribution and sales. A special aspect of the quality of food parameters consists of market and consumer factors, which are not the essence of product quality, but their influence can be indirect. A gastronomic product is a specific type of food product that consists of several foods integrated into the final product. It is launched using different processing methods in special conditions for production (kitchen block) and sale (restaurant hall).

Food and beverages, unlike all other products, have specific properties. Other products must meet certain quality standards, but unlike food and drink, they are not consumed or taken into the body, so they do not necessarily possess properties to satisfy the physiological needs and senses of humans. The technical-technological aspect of quality includes a large number of properties of raw materials, procedures in preparation, standards and way of serving prepared foods and drinks. This aspect of quality defines the possibilities of preparing the desired food or drink from the available food (input raw materials). Some authors believe that the technical and technological aspect of quality implies the equipment of the catering facility, i.e. the possibility of producing a quality desired product of side. Catering workers and managers are very familiar with this aspect of the quality of the restorative (gastronomic) product. The microbiological aspect of quality indicates whether there is a higher number of total microorganisms than allowed in food and drink and that there are no pathogenic and conditionally pathogenic microorganisms that cause food spoilage or food poisoning. When receiving raw materials in a catering facility, there is practically no food that is sterile, but there is always a certain microflora on or in it. Depending on the origin of food, cultivation, processing, storage and transport, the amount of microorganisms varies, which further determines the acceptability or unacceptability for further use. Foods that are microbiologically sound, once received at the facility, must be properly stored and stored under this side. Catering workers and managers are very familiar with this aspect of the quality of the restorative (gastronomic) product. The microbiological aspect of quality indicates whether there is a higher number of total microorganisms than allowed in food and drink and that there are no pathogenic and conditionally pathogenic microorganisms that cause food spoilage or food poisoning. When receiving raw materials in a catering facility, there is practically no food that is sterile, but there is always a certain microflora on or in it. Depending on the origin of food, cultivation, processing, storage and transport, the amount of microorganisms varies, which further determines the acceptability or unacceptability for further use. Foods that are microbiologically sound, once received at the facility, must be properly stored and stored under illegal amounts of heavy metals, pesticides, radionuclides and other harmful chemical substances must not be found in food products. Chemical causes of food spoilage for consumer health are more difficult to detect than physical ones (insects, parts of packaging, hair, etc.), but can still be identified and removed. The influence of restaurant managers in this domain is slightly less, since there is no influence on the use of pesticides, antibiotics or other chemicals during the cultivation of plants and animals. The importance of quality management from the aspect of health care is reflected in the observance of good hygiene practices, i.e. prevention of contact between food products and chemicals (correct storage, use and washing of work surfaces, equipment and devices, as well as handling by employees). The basic objectives of food safety control are to ensure that a product does not endanger human health and that in case of defects appropriate legal measures are taken. These measures should be aimed not only at establishing the facts (whether the food is safe or not), but also, if the product is defective, determine and eliminate the cause that led to the production of unsafe food.

Restaurant employees, especially in the food and beverage sector, are directly responsible for the health of their customers - guests, due to aspects related to food health and safety. In order to realize it successfully, the introduction of the highest hygiene standards and the HACCP system for food safety control is necessary. The Ministry of Health adopts regulations regarding the permitted amounts of heavy metals, metalloids, pesticide residues, veterinary drugs, mycotoxins and other substances that are harmful to human health, as well as the permitted concentrations of radionuclides in food. The nutritional aspect of quality refers to the composition of the food. Food is made up of ingredients, chemical compounds that have a certain role inthe functioning of the human organism - physical and mental work, cell renewal, growth and development, maintaining heat, etc. Some of these compounds are essential, they cannot be madein the bodyand must be ingested through food. Examples of essential ingredients are minerals such as iron and calcium, vitamins and certain amino acids. The nutritional quality of food means thepresence of nutrients and materials that are necessary for the normal functioning of the human organism. Proper nutrition is a complex of principles and ways of eating that correspond to the needs of the human organism - different categories of people respond to their diet, as well as certain quantities, structure and quality of food. In accordance with the above, restaurants should serve high-quality dishes with certain nutritional and sensory properties, which can have a beneficial effect on the health of consumers.

The sensory aspect of quality or product quality assessed by human senses is one of the most important when evaluating the quality of a gastronomic product and usually precedes all other quality assessments. In order for that sensory analysis, as a science that measures and evaluates the properties of food with one or more senses, to give adequate objective results, knowledge of: terminology, anatomy and physiology of the human senses, sensory evaluation techniques, tasks and procedures is required. for assessment with basic characteristics and abilities. Sensory quality represents the overall sensory impression of a sample that is evaluated using the following sensory evaluation techniques:

• Visual technique - sense of sight,

• Olfactory technique - sense of smell,

• Gustatory or oral technique - sense of taste,

• Palpatory technique - sense of touch and

• Sound technique - sense of hearing.

The use of sensory analyzes is actually a result of the fact that food products are very complex organic complexes with numerous and diverseproperties that cannot be measured, analyzed and evaluated simultaneously with available instrumental analytical techniques.So, sensory analysis allows us to evaluate properties, such as appearance, texture, smell and taste, and based on observation we evaluate the product with sensory acceptance or rejection due to the existence of non-characteristic sensory properties. This is a very important aspect of product quality review, which must be respected in increasingly simple market conditions.

1. **RESEARCH RESULTS - APPLICATION OF QUALITY STANDARDS ACROSS RESTAURANTS IN KOSOVO**

Kosovo is a continental country located in Southeast Europe, that is, in the center of the Balkan Peninsula. With an area of ​​10,908 km2, it is one of the smallest countries in Europe by area with a population of 1,859,203 (according to the 2014 census). Kosovo is one of the most densely populated places with 159 inhabitants per square kilometer. Given its small size, Kosovo has a wide variety of topographical features. It is surrounded by mountains: Shar Mountain, which is located in the southern and southeastern part, on the border with Macedonia, while the mountains of Kopaonik extend to its northern part. The northwestern part of the border with Montenegro and Albania is also mountainous, and there is the highest peak in the country, Gjeravica, which is 2656 meters high. The central region is mostly hilly, but there are two large plains that spread throughout the eastern and western parts of Kosovo, that is, they are Dugagjini and Kosovo field. There are thousands of restaurants in Kosovo with different cuisines: traditional, Mediterranean, Italian, French, Asian and generally international. A survey conducted in 2016 said that in the list of 18 aspects related to tourism, foreign tourists have ranked "restaurants" in the first three places, with an average of 4.42 points out of 5, which is the maximum. In general, Kosovo performs satisfactorily in this regard.

**3.1. BASIS CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH**

The research was conducted in two phases - field data collection and data analysis in Microsoft Office Excel. The questionnaires were sent electronically due to the protocols and restrictions related to the COVID – 19 pandemic. After all, this is the biggest drawback of the entire research, considering that the entire interview was conducted in electronic form. Restaurants and thus closed or with limited opening hours were a huge barrier to the research itself. The survey was conducted in November and December in 21 restaurants on the territory of Kosovo. Most of them were in Pristina, i.e. 13, and there were also 3 in Prizren, 2 in Uroševac, 1 in Gnjilanje, 1 in Pec and 1 in Gjakovica. The questionnaires used for research among restaurant managers and employees are original: SERVQUAL. The managers of the restaurants filled in which belongs to the SERVQUAL instrument and consists of four parts: the first part is related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and the basic characteristics of the restaurant (type, capacity, additional selection, etc.); the other part is related to the perception of the importance of the individual elements of the restaurant product. Based on the third part, the existence of formal or informal standards of the restaurant is assessed, and the fourth part consists of 20 questions (which are components that indicate the potential reasons for the first two gaps).

The tabular overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents was divided into managers only. An overview is given in terms of gender, age structure, experience in catering, level of education and education in the field of catering.

**3.1.1. SOCIO-DEPOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANAGEMENT STAFF**

Table 1. shows the gender structure of people employed in managerial positions in restaurants.

Table 1. The gender structure of the managers of the work positions

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Gender | Management position | % |
| Restaurant manager |
| Маle | 19 | 88.89 |
| Female | 2 | 11.11 |
| In total | 21 | 100 |

The relationship between men and women is very unfavorable, because only 2 women are in management positions. On the other hand, the management positions are mainly men with a participation of 88.89%, while women are represented by 11.11%. This relationship is even less favorable when management positions are viewed separately. Since education, in addition to experience, is essential for providing quality services, this socio-demographic dimension is included in the Table 2 questionnaire.

Table 2. Educational structure of managers according to their jobs

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Level of education | Management position | % |
| Restaurant manager |
| Secondary education | 8 | 39.7 |
| Higher or higher | 12 | 58.7 |
| Postgraduate studies | 1 | 6.68 |
| Total | 21 | 100 |

Based on Table 2, almost half of the surveyed employees in management positions have a secondary education, and the other half have a higher or higher education. It is symptomatic of this research that there is no special high school for culinary arts in the educational system in Kosovo. Only one of the respondents has completed postgraduate studies. In addition to the educational structure of employees in managerial positions, it is important to determine whether employees in these positions have the appropriate type of education for the tourism industry.

Table 3 gives an overview of the structure by managers and their education in the field of catering, on the basis of which the following can be concluded: the structure is unfavorable for restaurant managers. In fact, about 70% of managers are uneducated in the hospitality industry.

Table 3. Structure of managers according to education in the field of hospitality

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Education in the field of catering | Management position | % |
| Restaurant manager |
| Yes | 8 | 38.09 |
| No | 13 | 61.91 |
| Total | 21 | 100 |

The experience of working in the hospitality sector (Table 4) is, in addition to education, of great importance for the quality of the service provided.In a sense, it can compensate for the lack of education in this area, if it comes to lower job positions, but not completely, especially for people in higher job positions.

Table 4. The structure of managers according to experience in the field of hospitality

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Education in the field of catering | Management position | % |
| Restaurant manager |
| 1-5 | 3 | 14.29 |
| 6-10 | 6 | 28.57 |
| 11-15 | 4 | 19.05 |
| 16-20 | 4 | 19.05 |
| above 20 | 4 | 19.05 |
| Total | 21 | 100 |

Source: Own calculations made from online survey

The structure of managers according to experience in the field of catering is somewhat more favorable than the presented structure according to education. This benefit is reflected in the small number of employees who have less than six years of experience in the hospitality industry.

**3.2. ANALYSIS OF MANAGERS' ATTITUDES**

As stated in the methodology section of the paper, managers (including hall and kitchen heads) completed two questionnaires, which resulted in significant results. Namely, based on the results, it can be seen whether the managers recognize the expectations of the guests and to what extent the working process in the restaurant is standardized. Also, based on the results shown in the Table, there is a more detailed insight into the field of work. In the part of the questionnaire, the managers gave ratings for the quality dimensions, that is, they expressed their perception of the importance of certain characteristics of the restaurant experience. Managers assigned 100 points to five qualities in order of importance, with the most important qualities being awarded the proportionally highest score. These results are shown in the table.

Table 5. Managers' perception of the importance of individual dimensions for consumers

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Characteristics of the restaurant experience | % | Rank |
| Appearance of restaurants, restaurant equipment, staff, material (tactility) | 22.60 | 1 |
| The ability of the restaurant to provide the promised services with dedication and precision (commitment) | 22. 19 | 2 |
| Willingness of the restaurant to help guests and provide them with quick service (responsibility) | 18.44 | 4 |
| Knowledge and friendliness of the restaurant staff and their ability to instill confidence (reliability) | 20.21 | 3 |
| The individual attention that the restaurant gives to its guests (empathy) | 16.66 | 5 |

The results clearly show that managers give the most importance to the first dimension - "touchability". Almost equally important was the evaluation of the "security" dimension, while a slightly lower rating was given to the "security" dimension. According to restaurant managers, the least important is the dimension of "empathy", that is, "responsibility". Based on the results presented, it can be concluded that managers and guests have similar views on the importance of the dimensions "responsibility" and "empathy", because they give them least importance. Gap 2 refers to the existence of standards in the organization. Since managers are most responsible for the implementation of standards and, in general, for improving service quality in this regard, managers filled out the questionnaire related to the existence of formal or informal standards in the restaurant. Formal standards are written, explicit standards that all employees are familiar with, e.g. ISO standards, etc. (explained in more detail in previous chapters). Informal standards are usually defined orally and assumed to be understood by employees. Managers were tasked with indicating on a scale of 1 to 5 the existence of standards within each dimension of service quality, with the number 1 representing informal standards and the number 5 representing formal standards. In other words, the higher the number in column (X), the more formal the standard and the smaller the gap.

Table 6. GAP 2 - Existence of formal or informal standards in the restaurant according to the service quality dimensions

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Characteristics of the restaurant experience | % | Rank |
| Appearance of restaurants, restaurant equipment, staff, material (tactility) | 3.0451 | 1 |
| The ability of the restaurant to provide the promised services with dedication and precision (commitment) | 2.2242 | 3 |
| Willingness of the restaurant to help guests and provide them with quick service (responsibility) | 1.845 | 4 |
| Knowledge and friendliness of the restaurant staff and their ability to instill trust (reliability) | 2.9846 | 2 |
| The individual attention that the restaurant gives to its guests (empathy) | 1.4877 | 5 |
| GAP 2 | 2.3216 | / |

Analyzing the mean values ​​from the previous table, it can be seen that there is generally a gap in all dimensions, as the mean values ​​are quite low. Therefore, the total gap is quite large (small mean). The smallest gap is in the "tangibility" dimension, followed by the "security" dimension. Through a conversation with the managers of the restaurants, it was concluded that this is due to the prescribed standards that primarily refer to employee hygiene and work uniforms, i.e. the defined conditions according to which personnel with the necessary education, qualifications, experience, etc. are employed. In other dimensions, the existence of standards is more limited to verbal instructions given to employees. The score obtained for gap 2 is 2.3216 (below average), which means insufficiently clear (informal) service quality standards. Other features noted in the research are that managers in communication should pay attention to gender, age, level of education, race and other socio-demographic factors and adjust the way they communicate, because employees will be more accepted and respected as their superiors. As part of the survey among hotel managers, three problems in vertical communication were identified: the difficulty of communication due to multiple levels of management, lack of feedback (from employees to managers) and cultural barriers. According to the research, this communication is mainly verbal and often consists of providing a small amount of feedback or giving suggestions for improving the quality of services. One of the reasons for this behavior is the lack of employee motivation, which is related to the lack of promotion, lack of evaluation and reward system. When there are not too many levels of restaurant management, customer expectations should be clear to managers. The most common problem of this kind occurs in larger catering facilities (hotels or fast food chains, etc.), and in addition to poor communication, the reason for this should also be found in the education and experience of people in managerial positions. In order to achieve managerial positions, a gradual progression of employees is required and in any case it should not skip multiple positions on a hierarchical basis. In this research, we found that about 60% of the restaurant managers and 70% of the heads of the room do not have education in the hospitality field. Why can it be suggested that it is necessary to respect the levels of management and the profile of the candidates (level and field of education, experience, communication and other skills, etc.) who can be employed in this position, because it is irreconcilable. Only in this way, it can be the correct basis for a successful restaurant and ensuring the desired quality of service. Standardization is commonly used in restaurants to help management control, predict, and minimize human error. In the previous part of the article there were more details about standardization and the importance of application. In the restaurant industry, unfortunately, the application of standardization is rarely met, although there are numerous benefits. It is usually about the application of information technologies in service work and business in accordance with the principles of the HACCP system in the production part of the restaurant. The conducted study shows that restaurants do not use programs to improve work procedures and to ensure quality and uniform (standardized) services. When there are not too many levels of restaurant management, customer expectations should be clear to managers. 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1. **CONCLUSIONS**

Management, as theory and practice, has been present for a long time and follows the development of human society. The essence of the work is the use of management skills in order to survive and prosper the company in the market. Company management refers to market research through planned marketing activities, organization of people's work (human resource management), management of financial, material and other resources, as well as the process of controlling all business operations. Service quality management is, therefore, possible if a unique experience is provided for guests, that is, through employee satisfaction. This satisfaction is provided through good horizontal (communication between employees) and vertical (communication between employees and managers) communication, teamwork, clear expectations and the existence of a reward system. The existence of formal or informal standards in a restaurant defines the existence and strength of the gap 2. Since managers are most responsible for setting standards in business, the research also covers this area. Based on the obtained results, it was found that there is a rather large gap 2, which indicates the absence of standards and/or their informal form. In other words, the standards in restaurants are not clear enough and are given orally. In contrast, defined standards given in writing provide clear guidelines for every aspect of business operations. In connection with the above, it is necessary to point out the rather low score given by the managers when assessing the possibilities of rewarding the employed managers who contribute to the improvement of the service quality. The results of the research undoubtedly represent a good starting point for service quality management in the restaurant industry. However, there are certainly some limitations. In this regard, in the next research, the sample should be expanded to a larger number of restaurants, and especially to include more restaurants in other major cities in the Republic of Kosovo.

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