

STUDY ON THE POSSIBILITY OF APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES OF TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT TO THE RURAL TOURIST PENSION "FRAȚII JDERI", PASCOAIA VILLAGE, VÂLCEA COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract

The paper aimed to carry out a detailed and complex study on the possibility and opportunity of applying total management to the boarding house Frații Jderi in Păscoaia, Vâlcea County using a modern research methodology and perfectly adapted to the proposed topic. First of all, the tourist potential of the area, represented by the richness and beauty of the natural and anthropic tourist resources, was analyzed very well from all points of view. Also, data were collected on the position and accessibility in the area, the architectural style of the pension which is one adapted to the specifics of the area with a perfect fit in the beauty and harmony of the local landscape. At the same time, the main indicators that define the application of total quality management in the "Frații Jderi" holiday village and which reflect the evolution of the rural tourism activity as: accommodation capacity, number of arrivals in boarding house, number of overnight stays in boarding houses were realistically and pertinently analyzed. Along with them, other indicators were approached: indicators of tourist demand, indicators of tourist circulation, indicators of tourist offer, indicators of the quality of tourist activity. At the end of the research, it was found from the processing of all data, that the administrator and staff working in the pension apply a management that fully respects the principles of total quality, because almost all indicators analyzed have grown steadily from year to year, significantly exceeding average values national.

Key words: rural tourism, agrotourism, tourist resources, management, quality

INTRODUCTION

As is well known, a number of international bodies overseeing the economic development and social progress of humanity, such as the UN, or regional political bodies such as the European Union, have recognized the importance of tourism in the development process, due to its direct and indirect economic effects it has them over a territory [16, 33]. But the effects of tourism are not limited to its impact on the economic sector [31, 9]. The jobs thus created, the infrastructures made for tourism purposes, the investments made for the training and formation of a specialized workforce, for the encouragement of entrepreneurship, the actions of valorisation of the heritage and resources of a region through tourism contribute to the local development [7, 20]. Due to tourism, even declining rural or industrial regions have managed to find activity that has the power to recycle devalued

objects and give them new meanings and values [7, 41].

In the context of generalizing the model of sustainable development, which respects the environment, local specifics, protects and conserves resources to ensure the next generation the opportunity to meet their own needs, tourism has undergone a series of changes and transformations: from a mass phenomenon to a responsible activity, concerned with the environment in which it is implemented [39, 34]. Its relationship with the territory has also evolved: from an economic activity whose main function was the exploitation of the territory's resources, to an activity that has the capacity to organize and animate the territory, acting as a lever for development [37, 17]. This capacity results from the syncretic character of tourism, which, due to its multiple dimensions - geographical, economic, social, anthropological, ethnographic, political, technical (spatial planning) - is articulated

with the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development, offering and the tools needed to achieve such a development [25, 5]. In many cases, tensions are created between the local population and tourists, especially in destinations where the local population has been reduced to the role of service provider. This approach corresponds to Sen's theory, which considers that, in the development of a territory, the most important thing is what is achieved with the available resources [3, 19]. The differences in development between territories are, in the author's opinion, the result of the ability of individuals to convert resources into achievements [22, 35]. Our research starts from the finding of a low level of development of the area even if in the region there are resources that can be used for tourism, but which are the subject of a limited number of tourism development projects aspect also reported by [8, 1]. The main problems identified in the study region are: the low number of investment projects in both tourism and other economic activities, given the possibility of accessing European development aid funds; the underdeveloped entrepreneurial spirit of the local population and the interpersonal mistrust that does not allow the creation of partnership groups, effects of the planned economy from the communist period aspect also reported by [10, 23].

The scientific novelty of the paper is determined by the results of the complex analysis of rural tourism in the researched area and by the conclusions and recommendations resulting from the research conducted.

The theoretical importance and applicative value of the paper consists in mapping the rural tourism activity of the area, in order to address the methodical aspects of total quality in rural tourism from the perspective of the two principles and propose solutions that can help ensure the efficient functioning of rural tourism structures, phenomenon also observed by [36, 38].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to outline a research methodology specific to the study, you must first know very well the area and location of the tourist destination. Păscoaia is located in the north of Vâlcea County, Romania, over 35 km north of Râmnicu Vâlcea and 66 km south of Sibiu, at the confluence of the Lotru River with the Olt River, in the largest inter-Carpathian depression, known as Loviștei Country [2, 42]. The access to the area can be made through the branch DN7A (Brezoi – Voineasa – Petroșani) of the national road 7 (European road E81) or on the railway, the afferent station bearing the name of Lotru [18, 40, 4]. Frații Jderi Holiday Village is located in a charming natural area, at an altitude of 500 meters, between Lotrului and Căpățâanii Mountains, only 6 km from Cozia Natural Park and 27 km from Voineasa, 46 km from Râmnicu Vâlcea, 90 km from Sibiu airport, 60 km to Transalpina road and ski domain, 190 km from Brasov, 100 km to Transfagarasan route, close to a few Nature Reserves, Cozia and Buila Vanturarita, in the middle of southern Carpathian Mountains. It is picturesquely named after the activities of the shepherds in the area "Jderi Brothers-Green Utopia" being isolated from civilization, hidden among the mountains in the heart of the country [12, 18, 40].

The principles that govern the place are: respect for nature, simplicity and concern for people. Utopia Verde can accommodate about 55 guests, in 3-star conditions (daisies). The holiday village has 23 double rooms, 1 triple room and 2 quadruple rooms. The destination is signalled by a 0 km terminal called "Jderi Brothers-Green Utopia", which marks the beginning of a journey into another world - green, clean and with special energies, and a large wooden gate allows access to the area of 20,000 sqm [12, 18, 40].

Ways to obtain processed data and information - Data were collected from the National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism - Vâlcea branch, from the owner of boarding houses, staff employed and from tourists, method used and by [6, 14, 4]. Following our own research, we obtained a

series of fairly complete data on the physical and economic side of rural tourism in the area. In order to characterize rural tourism from an economic, natural and social point of view, bibliographic sources such as geography studies, monographs, local public administration publications, web pages were used [4, 12, 18, 40]. The normative acts and the laws in force elaborated by the relevant Ministry were studied, as well as numerous works from the country and abroad that refer to rural tourism, quality management and total quality management method also used by [13, 19]. In order to meet the proposed objectives, the following methods were used: statistical monograph, selective survey, statistical report, records, questionnaire, method of statistical indices and indicators, adjusted trends method, scalar method, methods used and [29, 38].

(1) Statistical monograph. In order to achieve this, information was obtained following the discussions with the "actors" who participate in the entire rural tourism activity (tourists, pension owners, ANTREC members, local authorities, etc.), directly observing the tourist reception structure, the neighboring localities or researching informative materials (flyers, tourist guides, magazines, etc.) [30, 15, 11].

(2) Selective surveys were conducted both in the tourist boarding house and in places frequented by tourists only for landscapes [38, 28, 11].

(3) Statistical reports. They were consulted statistical reports made by A.N.T.R.E.C. Valcea. Were used data collected by total registration, from all staff employed in the tourist reception structure, or by partial registration [32, 4, 11].

(4) Occasional recordings were made during events at the boarding house. The direct registration was used, through the direct contact of the team with the pension, the tourist, the owners of the pensions, the employed staff. Interrogation recording was also approached, based on the interrogation of A.N.T.R.E.C. Vâlcea members. [4, 38, 11].

(5) The questionnaire was designed to contain filter and control questions, to identify the interviewed subject with the representativeness requirements of the sample

(30 people). The purpose of the questionnaire was to detect the degree of satisfaction of the tourist regarding the quality of services offered in terms of comfort, at the Pension "Frații Jderi Utopia verde" in Păscoia, as a structure with accommodation, dining and leisure [2, 27].

(6) Method of statistical indices and indicators. For the processing and interpretation of information, the method of statistical indicators was used, respectively the comparative analysis of the researched phenomena based on them. The main indicators that reflect the evolution of the rural tourism activity are: accommodation capacity, number of arrivals in the pension, number of overnight stays in the pension. Along with them, other indicators were approached: indicators of tourist demand, indicators of tourist circulation, indicators of tourist supply, indicators of the quality of tourist activity [38, 30].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

First of all, in order to carry out a careful and pertinent analysis on the total quality management applied in the studied pension, we must aim in addition to the data presented in the introduction and the types of services and activities it offers. In the boarding house Frații Jderi - Utopia Verde, you will have real experiences in an enchanting environment. In addition to a comfortable sleeping place, which includes accommodation is also offered - a large, hearty and varied breakfast; - access to all holiday village facilities, except the meeting room; - daily dose of hydration, vitamins and minerals - with spring water and seasonal fruits throughout the stay; - more than the typical bed & breakfast - here you will also have a beautiful landscape, so: bed & breakfast & beautiful nature [18, 21].

Meals are served as a varied buffet of the day's menu, set by Grandmothers Jder, at a convenient schedule for all guests. Tourists choose what they want from the prepared dishes and eat to their heart's content, but without leaving anything on the plate. The menus are created according to the season, using the freshest vegetables, fruits and

seasonal ingredients - one of the secrets of the perfect taste of kitchen dishes [18].

The activities are organized for groups of at least 20 tourists. They run for half a day or days. For optimal performance, they need to be requested in advance. In Green Utopia are organized: - Campfire for 2 hours with seats, stories and laughter. Optionally, a snack with fire on the spikes, browned over the flame; - Games and competitions with team trials, extremely fun and entertaining; - Refreshment sessions, energetic gymnastics and stretching, barefoot walking through the grass for natural acupressure: - Jumping on the stunt mattress, zip lines, archery, climbing on a climbing tower and ice bathing [18].

Nearby: Rafting & kayaking on the Olt River for a maximum of 32 adventurers, in favorable weather and water levels. Hiking and trekking: at Scoruș and Lotrișor waterfalls, where you can take an invigorating swim, at Stânișoara Monastery, where the landscape is very picturesque, or on the slope that shelters Utopia Verde, following a wild route, up to the height of expectations - above, pictures with the background of the holiday village. Excursion on the Latorița mountains, starting from Curmătura Vidruței, from 1,600 to 2,000 m altitude, with a superb panorama over the high surroundings, which take your breath away. Optionally, a light lunch can be prepared on the top of the mountain, with traditional food in a cauldron for everyone [18].

Educational, socialization and imagination activities, at the temple in utopia or in the shelter of weather: Seminars on nutrition and healthy living; Seminar on the philosophy of the pension - The Mechanical Path; Motivational and inspirational documentation sessions; Discussion sessions on stress and career attitudes; Drawing sessions - life map; Discussion sessions, jokes and stories between group members; Cartoon workshops; Team improvisation workshops - theatre stage [18].

Camps for children: Through these camps, children are offered a complex education, interactive and at the same time complementary to school or family education, following the aspects as: - development of

tenacity, fighting spirit; - increasing self-confidence; - formation of (self) discipline; - improving communication and judgment; - formation of the principles of healthy eating; - increase of immunity; - development of motor skills; - developing curiosity and knowledge of the world; - inoculating respect for nature; - learning the ABCs of the techniques and skills necessary for life in the middle of nature; - discovering simple pleasures; - discovering real life at the expense of virtual life [18].

Based on the methodology presented above, statistical indicators were analyzed and characterized that define the rural tourism activity in the "Frații Jderi" pension, from the perspective of total quality.

The period subject to research was 2018-2019, and the approached indicators are:

(a)Accommodation capacity: The pension has an accommodation capacity of 55 seats, equipped with the comfort category for which it received classification (minibar, TV).

(b)Arrivals: As can be seen from Table 1, the number of arrivals at the Frații Jderi boarding house has constantly increased year by year, so in 2017 it was 305, in 2018 it is higher, 320 arrivals, the evolution is still upward in 2019, reaching at 336 arrivals. Viewed from the perspective of the total quality management, tourists preferred accommodation at a pension classified only with 3 stars, but with a very good quality/price ratio, to the detriment of other pensions in the area classified with 4 stars.

Table 1. Number of arrivals at the boarding house "Frații Jderi" in 2017-2019

Year	Number of arrivals
2017	305
2018	320
2019	336

Source: after processing the field survey, 2020.

(c)Overnight stays: Regarding this indicator at the pension level, the same phenomenon of slight growth is observed from year to year, from 735 in 2017 to 845 in 2019, with the constant improvement of the quality of services offered to tourists (Table 2).

A higher number of overnight stays was directly influenced by the number of arrivals

and indirectly by the offer, respectively by the quality and diversity of the services offered.

Table 2. Number of overnight stays at the „Frații Jderi pension in 2017-2019

Year	Overnight stays
2017	735
2018	768
2019	845

Source: after processing the field survey, 2020.

(d) Tourism demand indicators: Comparing the tourist demand with another pension in Păscoaia, it is found that it was higher at Frații Jderi pension by about 8 percent (Table 3).

Table 3. Tourist demand for rural tourist pensions in Păscoaia Village in the period 2017-2019 (%)

Specification	2017	2018	2019
"Valahia" tourist pension 4 daisies	53	56	59
"Frații Jderi" tourist pension 3 daisies	61	64	68

Source: after processing the field survey, 2020 and reference [27]

This result reinforces once again that the studied boarding house met the client's requirements in terms of comfort and thus the quality of services offered.

(e) Average number of tourists per day: The average number of tourists per day, in 2017 in Păscoaia, the boarding house "Frații Jderi" is 0.84, and the highest percentage was reached in 2019, when it approached the value of 1 (0.97). Highlighting the intensity of tourist traffic was done using the following indicators: number of days - tourists (ZT) and average length of stay (Ds) (Table 4.).

Table 4. The average number of tourists arriving daily at the Pension „Frații Jderi” in 2017-2019

Year	The average number of tourists arriving daily
2017	0.84
2018	0.88
2019	0.97

Source: after processing the field survey, 2020.

(f) Number of days – tourists: The number of days - tourists in 2017 was 224,175, in 2018 it increased by 21,585, and in 2019 they increased more than in 2017, by over 59,745, reaching 283,920 days-tourists (Table 5.).

Table 5. Number of tourist days at the „Frații Jderi” Pension in 2018-2019

Year	Number of tourists	Overnights	Number of tourist days
2017	305	735	224,175
2018	320	768	245,760
2019	336	845	283,920

Source: after processing the field survey, 2020.

Analyzing the data in Table 5, it was found that the number of tourist days was directly influenced by the number of arrivals and overnight stays and indirectly by the offer, respectively by the quality of services offered in terms of high comfort and quality of services.

(g) Average length of stay: During the analyzed period, the average duration of the stay experienced a slight increase (Table 6.) influenced by the increase in the number of tourists and overnight stays.

Table 6. Average length of stay at Pension „Frații Jderi” in 2017-2019

Year	Number of tourists	Overnights	Average length of stay
2017	305	735	2.41
2018	320	768	2.40
2019	336	845	2.51

Source: after processing the field survey, 2020.

(h) Accommodation capacity in operation: The increase of the number of tourists in 2019 determined the increase of the number of operating days and implicitly the accommodation capacity in operation (Table 7.), meeting the clients' requirements.

Table 7. Accommodation capacity in operation (places-days) of the Pension „Frații Jderi” in 2017-2019

Year	Number of operating days	Accommodation capacity in operation
2017	301	16,775
2018	324	17,600
2019	339	18,480

Source: after processing the field survey, 2020.

(i) The maximum theoretical offer at the Pension „Frații Jderi” is 365 units-days both in 2017 and in 2019. This demonstrates that the reception structure can operate at the level of the classified comfort category, satisfying customers' expectations.

(j) **The actual offer** is 324 units-days in 2018, respectively 339 units-days in 2019. In order to characterize the efficiency of using the technical-material accommodation base, the following indicators were taken into account: the index of use of accommodation capacity in function and occupancy of the accommodation unit (Occupancy Rate, OR, %).

The capacity utilization index in operation

Following the calculations performed, in 2018, the Pension „Frații Jderi” actually used 13.96% of the accommodation capacity in operation. In 2019, there was an increase in the actual use of accommodation capacity in operation, to 15.36%. The pension faces a short period of tourist stay in the area, reflected by the index of use of accommodation capacity in operation. The capacity utilization index is almost 5% higher than at the national level, and the average length of stay of tourists is 2.51, compared to about 2.35 nationally.

Occupancy rate of the accommodation unit (OR, %)

Table 8. Occupancy rate of the accommodation unit (%) at the boarding house „Frații Jderi” in 2017-2019

Year	Total number of tourists	Average length of stay of tourists	Total number of accommodation places	Occupancy Rate (%)
2017	305	2.41	55	36.61
2018	320	2.40	55	37.33
2019	336	2.51	55	38.93

Source: after processing the field survey, 2020.

The main factor that contributed to obtaining these values was first of all the satisfaction of the client's requirements regarding the degree of comfort and then the natural tourist factors existing in the area. The occupancy rate increased in 2019, reaching 38.93% (Table 8.) As a result of the improvement of the services offered following the conclusions from the surveys conducted among tourists. To these was added the promotion of the pension by "living speech" from those who stepped on the threshold of this tourist reception structure and on the website www.fratijderi.ro.

Also, from this Table 8, it can be seen that the occupancy rate of the pension for the three years of study is 6-9% higher than the occupancy rate of the tourist reception

structures at national level, which is about 31%.

It is also significantly higher than the national occupancy rate of tourist pensions which is only 20.3%, and compared to that of agritourism pensions is more than 2 times higher, it is only 16.4 %.

The constant increase of the indices attesting the quality level of the pension management and services, is due to the spirit of competitiveness, the desire to resist on the market and last but not least to the profit of the pension administrator, who became more and more interested in the permanent pursuit of the needs of tourists in order to fully, quickly and efficiently meet their requirements. In order to measure the degree of customer satisfaction, you first need to know their needs, and this can be done by conducting surveys that can be the basis for assessing whether or not the situation has improved and, last but not least, the basis for substantiating decisions.

Thus, following the applied questionnaire, which aimed to detect the degree of satisfaction of the tourist in relation to the quality of services offered in terms of their comfort, originality and diversity, half of the tourists were for the first time in the pension, and a significant percentage (44.7%) visited the pension several times which proves the existence of a reason to return, most likely the quality of management and services provided.

Almost half of the tourists know the pension from the stories of friends and relatives, which strengthens the expression regarding quality, in the sense that a satisfied tourist makes the reception structure prosperous. More than 69.6% of the number of tourists were very satisfied with the quality of services offered by the accommodation structure with accommodation function, none of them expressing their dissatisfaction.

The analysis of the activity carried out is the basis for identifying the most appropriate decisions to be taken, in order to improve the performance of the pension in terms of applying the principles of total quality management.

CONCLUSIONS

First of all, from the detailed analysis of all the elements regarding the location of the pension, in a quiet area without pollution, easy access on the national road DN 7, the special construction system, respecting the specific elements of local traditional architecture and especially perfect framing in the local landscape, originality, diversity and quality of the tourist offer, it can be said that this is a pension that fully deserves the 3-star classification level conferred, it far exceeds the requirements and expectations of tourists, aspect presented above and based on the level of quality indices analyzed in this work.

Although it has a lower accommodation capacity than the other 3 and 4 daisy boarding houses in the area, the "Frații Jderi" pension was ranked first in terms of arrivals, overnight stays, number of tourist days, tourist demand, average number of tourists per day, the accommodation capacity in operation, the actual offer and the degree of occupancy in this comfort category. The number of overnight stays was directly influenced by the number of arrivals and indirectly by the offer, respectively by the quality of the services offered in terms of the high degree of comfort. By implementing total quality management, the structure of new accommodation capacities must be shaped according to the requirements of tourists, with great adaptability to the quality/price ratio, which began to be more and more a determining factor in choosing a tourist destination, especially in the last year in which the pandemic left its mark on the local, national and especially international tourism activity. Improving the quality of rural tourism products and services, by implementing the principles of total quality management, would determine the other tourist reception structures to give more importance to customer expectations. This would increase their competitiveness in the internal and external tourism market.

The values of the indices of utilization of the accommodation capacity in operation, indicate a very low efficiency at the level of the studied area. The main element of the low

occupancy rate in the area is the short duration of stay, respectively the average length of stay being about 2.51 days, amid the lack of tourism programs, complementary accommodation facilities and poor tourism promotion in the area and county. The estimated values of the number of tourists according to the linear trend for the period 2017-2019 are increasing, the largest increase being reported in 2019.

Finally, it can be concluded that research is just a beginning in terms of approaching total quality management in rural tourism in the Valea Lotrului - Pășcoia area, and is intended to be a start in informing regional rural tourism entrepreneurs about quality management, of the total quality and their formation in order to implement it at the rural tourist pensions.

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