

## ASSESSMENT OF THE SERVICE QUALITY IN A SMALL FAMILY HOTEL IN THE RURAL TOURISM OF BULGARIA

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### *Abstract*

*It is expected that after the COVID-19 pandemic, mass travel is unlikely to be as popular, although it will be relatively cheaper. Tourists will look for more individualization and consumer interest to be focused on a better quality tourist product, guaranteeing them greater security and safety. It is through family hospitality that customers' preferences are satisfied for comfortable, secluded and safer accommodation, with an original atmosphere, such as family hotels and guest houses, with reasonable prices, with fair cleanliness, combined with natural and unadulterated natural and social environment, in ecologically clean areas. In the present study, an assessment of the quality of the hotel product in family sites for accommodation in rural tourism in rural, mountain municipalities in Bulgaria. An evaluation methodology has been developed. The selected quality assessment criteria are divided into basic and additional. Each criterion is formalized by five quantifiable indicators. The aim is to fully cover the composition, structure, specifics and activities of the family hotel business. The obtained results were analysed and conclusions were made.*

**Key words:** family hospitality, quality, assessment, criteria, indicators, rural tourism

### INTRODUCTION

The crisis caused by COVID-19 in 2020, as well as the new rules for social distance and the change in consumer attitudes gave a chance to small hotels and resorts in Bulgaria - not only by the sea, but also elsewhere in the country. The demand for guest houses and small family-owned hotels in the past 2020 had a great consumer interest. The attitudes of tourists have changed when taking a tourist trip. They are already looking for a safer and more secure place, more privacy and less risk of meeting other tourists. Large hotels and resorts can hardly offer such a product. Already at the beginning of the summer months in the segment of small family hotel sites, the number of trips has increased, as the interest is focused not only on the Black Sea coast, but also on mountains, dams, rural and other types of alternative tourism. This trend continued until the end of 2020. In fact, many international experts believe that the crisis caused by COVID-19 will change the way people travel in the long run, and perhaps forever. It is expected that after the pandemic, mass travel is unlikely to be as popular,

although it will be relatively cheaper. Tourists will seek more individualization and consumer interest to be focused on a better quality tourist product, ensuring greater security and safety....and at the same time with small family hotels there are some new advantages that are manifested as qualities that were almost unknown until now“[10]. Based on the analysis of the characteristics and features of family hospitality, in particular in rural tourism, we derive the following definition of family hospitality: Family hospitality is a major sector in the hotel industry in rural tourism and is: family owned and/or managed by entrepreneurs, mainly a small hotel business, supported by family members, which produces and sells a territorially determined hotel product that meets the needs of tourists, this product is characterized by authenticity, hospitality and atmosphere, recreating rural identity and providing direct contact with the host (owner). Small family-owned hotels satisfy customers' preferences for comfortable, secluded and safer accommodation, with an original atmosphere, such as family hotels and guest houses, with reasonable prices, with fair

cleanliness, combined with natural and unadulterated natural and social environment, in ecologically clean areas. The needs of various forms of leisure time are met [3].

As a type of superstructure, the family hotel industry includes the main objects for accommodation in rural tourism: a guest house with/without agriculture, villas and a family hotel in mountainous and rural areas, private rooms, boarding houses, etc. [under the Ordinance for categorization of tourist sites, 2020] [8]. All of them are similar mostly in the following main feature in the context of the superstructure - small capacity of the bed base. Rural houses are the main means of accommodation for tourists [5, 6]. Their appearance and interior design are subject to the characteristics and requirements of the region.

Family hospitality is extremely important for the development of alternative forms of tourism - rural, ecotourism, cultural and cognitive, culinary, wine, extreme tourism and others. Family hospitality as an economic activity is of economic importance because it contributes to increasing family income, provides employment for family members, provides livelihoods in rural areas, stimulates small businesses, stimulates traditional crafts, increases employment and welfare of local people, preserves the cultural and historical heritage in the region, creates an opportunity for direct realization of own agricultural production, etc. Revenues in municipal budgets, from tourist taxes and through the patent tax paid by the small family hotel business are also increasing. Therefore, tourism services in the rural areas are able to support local population and communities in developing economic diversity [9]. The family hotel industry has good market positions with its unique product, aimed at market niches looking for local cultures, traditions, nature, history, hospitality [1].

Tuchman defines quality as the synonym for excellence [11]. This is what makes it difficult to measure, and „the quality of service is much more difficult to measure as compared to the product quality“ [4]. Recently, there is a tendency to introduce higher quality criteria for the product "family hotel". These criteria

cover the development and appearance of the building, the authenticity of the product related to local traditions, lifestyle, culture, offering local cuisine and specialties, impeccable hygiene, safety and security for guests and staff, effective communication with guests and care for them, offering more opportunities for spending free time. The quality of the family hotel product is determined by several other specific criteria: a higher degree of uniqueness and authenticity of the product; creating an atmosphere and coziness for guests close to the family; individualized service and customer care; higher degree of application of the principles of sustainable development.

In our opinion, the following three main types of tourist resources should be evaluated: material and technical base; intangible conditions - the entire cycle of hotel service to the guest; additional services - social responsibility and environmental protection, the specifics of the location and style of the site. In a quality hotel product, the tangible and intangible elements are combined in an optimal way and therefore this product is able to satisfy the needs of the customer and to be competitive. Kotler states that „American society for quality control defines quality as the sum of the features and characteristics of the product or the service that support its ability to satisfy the customer's need. Definitions that are customer-oriented suggest that quality begins with the needs of the customer and ends with their satisfaction“ [2]. Our research interest is focused on the quality of both tangible and intangible elements.

**The purpose** of this article is based on a developed methodology to assess and analyze the quality of the hotel product in family-type accommodation in Bulgaria.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The selected quality assessment criteria are divided into: basic and additional. The aim is to cover the entire composition, structure, specifics and activities of the family hotel business [3].

**The main criteria** are 6, as each criterion is specified by 5 mandatory indicators. The

additional criteria are 3, as each criterion is formalized by 5 indicators.

**The additional criteria** are 3, as each criterion is formalized by 5 indicators. The main evaluation criteria are in fact synthesized by the criteria for categorization of the respective site, specified in the Ordinance in the Ordinance for categorization of accommodation facilities (2020). The fulfillment of these criteria guarantees full coverage of customer expectations. These criteria are mandatory because a local quality brand is awarded only to those family hotels that meet the categorization criteria and guarantee customer satisfaction. The main criteria include indicators that aim to consider the originality and uniqueness of the family hotel.

**The main criteria are:** 1. improvement and maintenance of the building and the common premises; 2. the room - furniture and condition; 3. actual customer service; 4. nutrition; 5. organization of the free time; 6. offered additional services. The additional criteria consider additional activities forming the complex character of the offered tourist product, related to the protection and preservation of the environment, local traditions and culture, etc.

**The additional criteria are:** 1. environmental protection; 2. feedback from the client; 3. acquaintance with the local culture. The criteria and their corresponding indicators are presented in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Assessment criteria and indicators

Criteria	Indicators
<b>Main criteria</b>	
<b>Building and common areas</b>	hygiene and maintenance - entrances, corridors, stairs, lobbies
	yard, garden, availability and condition of swimming pool, green areas, parking, barbecue
	lighting, ventilation, space heating
	safety and security - the presence of fire extinguishers, signs, amenities for people with disabilities
	originality, uniqueness of design and layout
<b>Room</b>	amenities - furniture, lighting, heating, air conditioning, terrace
	level of hygiene in the room and bathrooms
	technical serviceability of the equipment in the room and the bathrooms
	calm, noise, security
	originality of the furniture of the room in accordance with local traditions
<b>Actual service</b>	welcoming, check in, accompaniment to the room, assistance in carrying luggage, acquaintance with the hotel, etc.
	customer service (service during the stay)
	check out, sending, payment options, ordering transport, invitation for the next visit, issuing a relevant document
	degree of individual approach to the guest - knowledge of specific requirements, assistance if needed
	emergency preparedness - power and water cuts, fire, guest indisposition
<b>Nutrition</b>	availability of an organized dining room
	serving breakfast in the room (room service) - home-cooked food
	offering local cuisine and specialties
	guarantees for compliance with food and beverage safety standards
	offering purchase of agricultural farm products, own production, organic products
<b>Leisure's organization</b>	material base for outdoor and indoor games: chess, backgammon, cards, computer games, etc.
	library with books, children's books, newspapers, magazines
	corner in the living room for watching TV, movies, listening to music
	organization of excursions, visits to cultural-historical, architectural landmarks
	participation in local folklore festivals, fairs, festivals, cooking courses
<b>Additional services</b>	cleaning, laundry room
	providing transport when needed
	information and communication services - internet, wireless internet in the rooms, post office, etc.
	items for rent - for sports, for the beach, for SPA, for mountain hikes
	specialized services for people with disabilities, care for children, the elderly
<b>Additional criteria</b>	
<b>Environmental protection</b>	availability of local heating
	alternative sources of electricity
	base for separate waste collection
	inclusion of guests in training in local folklore
	environmental protection briefing
<b>Customer feedback</b>	database with regular customers and their requirements
	book for registration of complaints and quick and adequate response
	conducting surveys among the guests for opinion, evaluation and recommendations for the quality of service
	inclusion in internet-based reservation and information systems
	liaison with travel agencies for the purpose of distributing advertising materials
<b>Acquaintance with the local culture and its preservation</b>	acquaintance with the individual interests and desires of each guest
	visits to craft workshops and local crafts
	participation in local initiatives for preservation of local folklore
	providing a guide for longer hikes
	dinners by the fireplace and barbecue with the family

Source: Author's development.

The indicators used are quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative indicators consider the number of funds, facilities, services, information materials, offers, etc. The quality indicators cover the level of hygiene, personal approach to the guest, atmosphere and comfort, etc.

The evaluation is carried out by applying a point system as the number of points express a certain evaluation and correspond to a certain level of quality. Points are awarded for each indicator. The sum of the points on the main criteria indicates whether the minimum established quality level is met. Achieving this level is the first condition for certification and awarding a local quality mark. The sum of the points according to all criteria determines the level of quality of the hotel product in the family hotel and the category that can be acquired. The grading system used in the present study is four-point to indicate a minimal, negative, unsatisfactory grade; average; high level assessment; and maximum, extremely positive assessment - level of luxury.

The rating scale is from 1 to 4 points for each indicator, and the ratings mean: level 1 means a low, unsatisfactory level of quality.

The rating scale is from 1 to 4 points for each indicator, and the ratings mean: grade 1 means a low, unsatisfactory level of quality; grade 2 - average level; grade 3 - high level; rating 4 - luxury level.

According to each of the main criteria, a maximum of 20 points can be obtained by indicators, giving a maximum of 4 points for each of the 5 indicators. A minimum of 5 points or a total of 30 points from all 6 criteria must be obtained for each of the main criteria. If 30 points are not received, they cannot be compensated by the additional criteria and indicators. The maximum number of points that can be obtained from the main criteria is a total of 120. The additional criteria, which are 3 criteria with 5 indicators each, can give a maximum of 60 points. According to the proposed methodology, the level of quality is determined according to the number of points received from surveyed respondents as follows:

- with a total evaluation of up to 30 points - the hotel site does not meet the requirements for the level of product quality in the family hotel industry, even if it has been awarded an official category under the current mandatory ordinance for categorization.

- with a total assessment from 31 to 80 points - third category/level/of quality

- with a total assessment from 81 to 130 points of the second category/level/of quality

- with a total assessment from 131 to 180 points first (highest category/level/for quality). This scale was developed by the author and adapted to the needs of the present study.

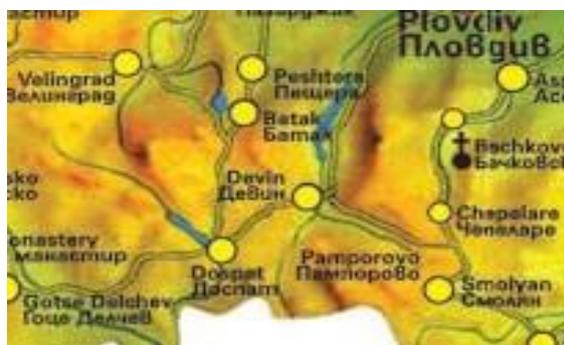


Fig. 1. The studied municipalities in the Western Rhodopes, Bulgaria

Source: Own determination.

The developed methodology for product quality assessment in family hospitality is applied to study the quality of family hotel products in rural mountain municipalities in the Western Rhodopes (including the municipalities of Nedelino, Borino, Smolyan, Chepelare, Batak, Dospat) implemented in June 2019 - September 2020. The following methods were used to collect primary information: - survey to study the quality of the product "family hospitality" among 153 customers, guests of family hotels, guest houses, villas in the Western Rhodope region during the period June 1, 2019 - February 31, 2020; - a survey to assess the quality of the hotel product among managers of 30 family hotels, 23 guest houses and 12 villas in the Western Rhodope region during the period: June 1, 2019 - February 31, 2020. Visits and observations were made in family hotels, guest houses, villas in the mountainous rural areas of the Western Rhodopes, sites of these types of accommodation sites on the Internet

were also analyzed, surveying the satisfaction with the service. of the tourists who stayed in them, in-depth interviews were conducted with the owners and managers of these family hotels. The survey of the opinion of the clients staying in family-type sites on the territory of the Western Rhodopes region (including the municipalities of Nedelino, Borino, Smolyan, Chepelare, Batak, Dospat) was carried out through specially developed questionnaires. They are provided to managers for distribution to hotel guests through the reception, by rooms and in person. The total number of completed questionnaires by customers is 153, and by hotel owners 65.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to the applied methodology for quality assessment in the family hotel industry, we perceive the following "... average ratings have the following meaning: - a score below 1.0 means a low level of quality (corresponds to a number of points below 30); - a score of 1, 1 to 2.0 - medium quality level (from 31 to 80 points) - rating from 2.1 to 3 - high quality level (from 81 to 130 points) - rating from 3.1 to 4 - luxury quality level (from 131 to 180 points) "[3].

Table 2. Quality assessment scale

Rating	Quality level	Number of points
below 1.0	low level	under 30
from 1.1 to 2.0	intermediate level	from 31 to 80 points
from 2.1 to 3	high level	from 81 to 130 points
from 3.1 to 4	luxury level	from 131 to 180 points

Source: author's development.

The results of the consumer survey of the **main criteria** and their indicators for the quality of the hotel product in the surveyed family hotels in the region of Western Rhodopes are the following:

The study on the criterion "**buildings and common areas**". Not all family hotels in the western Rhodope region have a traditional Rhodope-style exterior. The interior design and design to a greater extent preserve the Rhodope tradition. It is clear from the surveys that this requirement is not among the main ones for the guests.

70% of customers are satisfied with the maintenance and the level of hygiene in the common areas and give a rating of 3, ie. high assessment of the condition of the common areas in the hotel. This result shows that the maintenance and condition of the building and especially the level of hygiene attracts the attention of customers. Some respondents also noted that there are guest houses in which the rooms and corridors are cluttered with objects that are not even of authentic local origin. Their opinion is similar regarding the green areas and the yards. A low score is given to the second indicator of this criterion, where there is no possibility for parking.

After the "level of hygiene", this is the second factor that lowers the assessment by the criterion "building and common areas". In terms of hygiene, lower ratings are also given to dining rooms. For 40% of the dining rooms, customers give a rating of 1.8, which corresponds to 31 to 80 points - an average level of quality. This lowers the arithmetic mean of this criterion. The fashion in this statistical order is 2.9, which means that many customers give high quality by this criterion. The arithmetic average score on this criterion is 2.82, which corresponds to from 81 to 130 points - high quality of buildings and common areas in family hotels. The location of the hotel is essential for the consumer value of the hotel product. For the most part, family hotel sites, with their location, valorize valuable natural and anthropogenic resources. In many regions they are the basis of the tourist destination and form its appearance.

According to the criterion "**condition of the room**": furniture, equipment and hygiene, customers give positive ratings, finding a wide range of ratings. The coefficient of variation is 65%. The fashion in the statistical order is 3.1, which is on the border between high and luxury level. The indicator of technical serviceability of the equipment is also highly rated. The average score on the criterion "condition of the room" is 3.15.

Regarding the "**actual service**" criterion, the clients combine the actions of the reception and dispatch staff, with large differences in assessments. These two indicators show the largest amplitude between the minimum and

maximum score. The coefficient of variation is over 70%, which shows that there is great diversity in the studied statistical order. The fashion for the average score for the criterion is 2.3, which corresponds to from 81 to 130 - a high level of quality but is very close to the border between medium and high level. This result is negatively affected by the service in guest houses and in separate rooms, where the service is reduced to handing over the key and fleeting instructions. Clients give a high assessment of the personal attitude towards everyone - addressing by name, welcoming, expressing kind hospitality, help in transferring personal belongings to the client and getting acquainted with the main points of information orientation. The indicator "service during the stay" - customers assess the satisfaction of individual requests, assistance in ensuring a full stay. A score of 4, however, on this indicator is rare. Statistical mode, the most common case in the studied population is 3.

The provision of "assistance and care for the client in specific and emergency situations" is highly valued in family hotels - grade 4, and in guest houses there is a decrease in the rating to 2 - medium quality, mainly due to some delay in assistance. The arithmetic mean of this indicator shows the number of points in the range from 81 to 130 and gives high quality of the hotel product in family hotels.

In the criterion of "**nutrition**", the indicator "local cuisine" is highly valued, its arithmetic mean value is 3.6 (points 131 to 180). This result shows that in the guest houses and family hotels great attention is paid to home-made specialties with organic products, with good taste and attractively served. The coefficient of variation is low and the mode in the statistical order is 3.5. The indicator "guarantees of compliance with food and beverage safety standards" receives average and high scores in the range from 31 to 130 points. The coefficient of variation is 58%, which is indicative of the relative heterogeneity of the statistical order. In many cases, the type and aesthetic design of the food when served, rather than its content, raise doubts in some customers. However, the high score on this indicator is predominant. A

high score of 4 on the indicator "serving breakfast in the room" is given mainly by younger customers, while older customers do not pay much attention to this element of the hotel product. The arithmetic mean score on this indicator is between medium and high - 3. The indicator collects 123 points.

The criterion "**organization of leisure time**" receives between average and high marks from customers. The statistical order includes units, scores from 1.4 to 2.8, collects from 40 to 120 points. The indicator "availability of material base for outdoor and indoor games" receives an unsatisfactory assessment and it lowers the overall assessment according to this criterion. The average score of 1.4 on the indicator "availability of a corner in the living room for watching TV, movies" indicates that customers are not looking for this service. The coefficient of variation has the lowest value, which means the uniformity of the statistical order. Such homogeneity - coefficient of variation of 30% is found in the indicators "organization of excursions, visits to cultural, historical, architectural landmarks" and "participation in local folklore festivals, fairs, festivals, cooking courses" of this criterion, only that the score is high - 3.6 - from 131 to 180 points.

The facilities and conveniences for spending free time, opportunities for communication, information are crucial for the formation of uniqueness and specialization of the hotel product, for the provision of services of special interest and for active recreation. The evaluation according to this criterion once again confirms the essence of the alternative forms of tourism, incl. and rural tourism - to escape from everyday life and look for the exotic.

Criterion "**additional services**" - in all family hotels and guest houses are created conditions to meet small household needs of customers - laundry, ironing. However, sports equipment and rental items are not available everywhere. This indicator collects from 81 to 130 points. Customers give a score of 2.78, which corresponds to a high quality of service according to this criterion. The service in the hotels is characterized by a personalized approach to the client and emphasized

hospitality. The unique atmosphere, the personalized service technology and the customer care, which are not subject to standardization, all this creates the image of the hotel. Satisfaction with the service during the stay creates popularity and loyal customers who recommend it to relatives and acquaintances.

Regarding the **additional criteria** for assessing the quality of the hotel product in family hotels:

By criterion "**environmental protection**": Few family hotels have created alternative sources of electricity; also a base for separate waste collection. But since many family hotels have local heating and hot water all year round, according to this criterion, customers give an average rating - 2.9, which means high quality. The protection of the environment is carried out in ways that do not require financial resources, but rather work by the staff and the owner and the participation of the client.

According to the criterion "**acquaintance with the local culture and its preservation**", the clients give high marks to the indicator "maintaining the local culture" - 2.9, which means from 81 to 130 points and shows a high level of work of family hotels in this regard. The clients of the guest houses give a low grade according to the indicator "acquaintance with the individual interests and desires of each guest" regarding acquaintance with all the surrounding historical, architectural, natural and other landmarks - arithmetic average 1.5, which corresponds to 31 to 80 points, very close to the negative assessment. For family hotels according to these indicators the rating is over 2.8 in the range -2.1 - 3, which corresponds to from 81 to 130 points and means a high rating of the hotel product in family hotels.

Regarding the "**customer feedback**" criterion. Customers are interested in the indicator "inclusion of the hotel in the Internet reservation and information systems" and, where available, give it the highest rating - 4. But since there are guest houses and villas that do not meet this criterion, the average rating is decreases to 3.2. Most family hotels and almost all guest houses do not have a database

of regular customers. This is a negative side of their activity. The creation of such a database will raise to a much higher level the personal approach to customers, the relationship with regular customers of the hotel and will improve the quality of their service and the overall quality of the hotel product in family hotels.

The average customer ratings on the indicators of the main and additional criteria are reflected in the following Table 3.

Table 3. Average customer ratings

basic criteria	average grade	additional criteria	average grade
building and common areas	2.82	environmental protection	2.9
the room	3.15	customer feedback	2.6
actual service	2.73	getting to know the local culture	2.2
nutrition	3.64		
organization of leisure	2.57		
additional services	2.78		

Source: Own calculation.

The evaluations of the owners and managers of family hotels according to the main criteria are:

The average arithmetic score according to the **main criteria** with which we perform evaluation is 2.79, which is on the border between high and luxury level of quality of the hotel product. The range in which it is located is from 2.1 to 3, which corresponds to points 81 to 130, it follows that the level of quality is high. The average ratings of owners and managers are mixed. The largest number are the grades over 3 - a total of 33. 23 estimates are between 1.5 and 2.5, ie. owners and managers give high marks to the quality of the hotel product. There is no score below 1, ie. under 30 points. Definitely high marks are given to indicators such as: offering traditional local cuisine; created amenities through furniture, air conditioning; high level of hygiene in the room and common areas; quality consumables - frequent change of bed linen, towels; organized dining room in traditional Rhodope style and atmosphere, etc. There are many ratings that are close to the maximum score of 4. At the same time, there are ratings that confirm an average level of

quality. These ratings are primarily for guest houses.

According to the main criteria, the average arithmetic rating is 2.79, which means the border between high and luxury level of quality of the hotel product. It is in the range of 2.1 to 3, which corresponds to a number of points from 81 to 130, therefore the level of quality is high. The average ratings of owners and managers are mixed. The largest number are the grades over 3 - a total of 33. 23 are ratings between 1.5 and 2.5, which means that owners and managers give a high rating to the quality of the hotel product. There is no score below 1, similarly below 30 points. Definitely high marks are given to indicators such as: offering traditional local cuisine; created amenities through furniture, air conditioning; high level of hygiene in the room and common areas; quality consumables - frequent change of bed linen, towels; organized dining room in traditional Rhodope style and atmosphere, etc. There are a large number of ratings that are close to the maximum score of 4. At the same time, there are ratings that confirm an average level of quality. These ratings are primarily for guest houses.

According to the **additional criteria**: The evaluations of the owners and managers according to the criterion "getting to know and maintaining the local culture" are in the range 1.6 - 2.5, which corresponds to medium and high quality of their activity on this issue. The coefficient of variation is over 50%, which shows that the individual units, cases in the statistical order are very different. The median is 2.15, which is on the border between medium and high quality. This shows that opportunities should be sought to improve the work in this area. The maintenance of the local culture, historical, architectural, natural and other landmarks is an activity that requires coordinated actions of the owners of family hotels and the municipal administration. According to the criterion "environmental protection": the owners/managers give ratings in the range 1.3 - 2, which corresponds to an average level of quality. This means that the owners and managers themselves assess their

environmental protection activities, as well as the information and instructions they provide to guests on this issue, as unsatisfactory. Regarding the criterion "customer feedback", the ratings are average. As mentioned above, most of the family hotels have not created databases for their regular customers. Investments are needed to create web-based systems for reservations, information services, customer feedback.

It is clear that the owners and managers of family hotels have managed to offer facilities and conditions for accommodation that meet quality requirements and customer expectations. The atmosphere in the family hotels is friendly, informal, close to the comfort of home. The service is mainly through personal contacts between the owner/manager and customers, individually and leads to the creation of friendly relationships between staff and customers. The protection of the environment is carried out in ways that do not require financial resources, but rather work by the staff and the owner and the participation of the client.

The shortcomings are mainly due to: lack of flexibility in supply (various offers); organization of leisure services; means to diversify the stay; lack of a database for regular customers.

Family hoteliers need to look for ways to introduce and improve their distinctive features and in combination with the application of "newer approaches focused on Magaš [7]:

- how the company will meet the needs of consumers
- achieving a unique competitive advantage
- offer greater (added) value to the guest
- constant monitoring of the needs of the guests ",

they will contribute to the creation of a better and more competitive hotel product.

The opportunities for improving the quality of the product in the family hotel industry of the Western Rhodopes region are in the following main directions: - improvement of the tangible characteristics of the product, with the emphasis on changes in the superstructure; - raising the professional and language qualification of the staff and development of

its key competencies; - enrichment of additional services in order to better use the free time of the clients and increase the quality of the experience; - improving the quality of the intangible characteristics of the product - personalization of the service; creating a database for customers to study in more detail their needs and desires, to seek feedback from customers, to analyze feedback on social services and web-based systems for booking and customer feedback; - unification of the family hotel sites in the Western Rhodopes region in a voluntary local system for product quality certification.

In conclusion, it can be summarized that family hospitality in the region of the Western Rhodopes can highlight its product as attractive, high quality and sought after, which will contribute to the specific appearance of this region as a destination.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study and analysis, the following conclusions can be made:

The family hotel sites in the Western Rhodopes region have a high degree of identity and distinctive image, are associated with local culture and nature, reflect the spirit and appearance of the region; the atmosphere, the conditions, the services, the cuisine are unique and specific. However, the distinctiveness of the sites, based on the design and the atmosphere, does not guarantee them a sustainable competitive advantage.

It is necessary to apply a specific methodology for product quality assessment in the family hotel industry. It will assist owners and managers in making decisions and finding ways to maintain high quality and create loyal and regular customers who are not only satisfied but also exceeded expectations. The specific methodology for product quality assessment must be part of a comprehensive system for certification and award of a local quality mark. The development and application of such a system imposes the need to unite family hotels in the region and cooperation both between them and between them and industry organizations and educational institutions.

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