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## Criteria of hotel services quality evaluation in the opinion of tourists on the objects in Świnoujście and Jurmala examples

**Codes JEL:** M31, L83, Z32

**Keywords:** seaside tourism, tourists` expectations, quality and development of services

**Summary.** According to NACE classification, tourism covers such areas as: accommodation, services related to food, activities of travel agencies, tour operator and other reservation service and related activities, arts and entertainment, operation of libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities, as well as sports, entertainment and recreation. This means that tourism industry is very composed and differentiated, but a first place where a tourist goes after arrival is a place of accommodation, therefore in this article we analyze quality of accommodation offer in two selected cities located on the Baltic coast: Świnoujście in Poland, and Jurmala in Latvia. In this article we aim to 1) build a list of shortcomings in shaping accommodation offer; 2) specify directions of necessary improvements, and 3) indicate differences between tourists` complains (expectations) in selected cities. To realize such defined aims, we have analyzed all negative opinions (more than 1700) published on the booking.com site, referring to 70 accommodation objects in Jurmala and 58 in Świnoujście.

## **Introduction**

Nowadays tourism still is one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, today even surpassing that of oil exports, food products or automobiles industry. International tourist arrivals worldwide are expected to increase by 3.3% a year between 2010 and 2030, while international tourist arrivals grew by 4.6 % in 2015 to 1,184 mln (UNWTO, 2017). And as the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer shows - the biggest tourism growth was driven by the recovery in Central and Eastern Europe (+6%). Although France, the United States, Spain and China continue to top the rankings by both international arrivals and receipts, Central Europe becomes more and more popular (UNWTO, 2017). Statistics show that every year in Poland ca. 25 mln tourists are reported, including foreign tourists accounted for 22%; in Latvia there are ca. 4.4 mln tourists, and 65% are foreign ones.

The touristic potential of a place is created by natural and cultural qualities, tourist infrastructure and accessibility. Every touristic destination can be described from these point of views. In this article, the analysis has encircled opinions of tourists about touristic infrastructure and specially – quality of accommodation.

There are several perspectives on quality in the literature. Alternative definitions of quality have evolved from five different approaches: transcendent, product-based, user-based, manufacturing-based, and value-based. Of these five approaches to defining quality, the most often is the user-based definition (Sebastianelli, Tamimi, 2002). That approach was used in this paper, where quality of accommodations is understood as quality of product evaluated by users.

Hotels and other accommodations promote themselves as ideal for a rest. What they offer in such a case? Of course, rooms with appropriate equipment (mainly comfy beds), bathroom, TV and the Internet, sometimes air conditioning. And outside the room – catering, services laundry, ironing, hairdresser, tour guides, or rent a car. All of this builds the quality of the offer. The quality stems from standards adopted in the field and is shaped by development of an industry (Hjalager, 2001). But it is not a constant thing – it is changing along with people`s expectations, time and place. It should be changed also by analyzing recipients opinions that is particularly conducive to possibilities offered by the internet. So, currently hotels and other providers of touristic services can improve the quality by using remarks and wishes submitted electronically by tourists (Atilgan, Akinci, Aksoy, 2003).

Statistically, the biggest expenses for tourism are done by Germans – they spend more than USD 1100 per person/per year; and this information is important from the point of view of tourism in Poland, because 36% of international tourists coming to Poland are Germans (GUS, 2016). As Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia informs (2017), due to geographical location, situation in Latvia is slightly

different – here, tourists mostly came from Russia (19%), followed by Estonia and Lithuania (11%). The potential of touristic base also looks a bit different – in Poland there are over 9850 tourist facilities offering accommodations; this kind of establishments in Latvia exceeds the number of 500.

The development of hotel services depends on several factors – i.e. policy of a state and regulatory frameworks, prosperity, people's style of life and tradition of spending holidays, but also on how hotels and other accommodation objects are managed. The way of managing certainly should respond to the needs of guests. From their point of view, the most important factors influencing perception of quality are:

- individual needs of the guests (tourists),
- previous experience of customers associated with prior use of similar services,
- external communication of facilities (promotion),
- image of an object – if a place has a higher position on the market, the higher quality of services is then expected (Frankowska, 2011).

Various customers attach different weight to different factors of course, but certainly they assess quality of hotel's services, both through a prism of own expectations and by way of their realization.

### **Methods, research sample and results**

Continuous improvement of services' quality is a prerequisite for tourist destinations development and for maintaining the number of incoming tourists. Therefore, managers must analyze critical remarks expressed by guests and strive to keep number of complains declining. On the other hand, to manage the change effectively one needs to have knowledge, what in the first place should be improved. That's why in this article we aim to 1) build a list of shortcomings in accommodation offers; 2) specify directions of necessary improvements, and 3) indicate differences between tourists' complains (expectations) in selected cities. The research has included all hotels (defined as objects with at least 10 rooms, and a majority of beds in single and double rooms, providing a wide range of services), motels, hostels, and guest houses, which are registered on internet portal [www.booking.com](http://www.booking.com). The main limitation of this study is the geographic area (tourist site) of the research process. Moreover, the analysis covered only critical comments about accommodation services referring to hotels and other objects operating in two resorts: Świnoujście (Poland) and Jurmala (Latvia). In total more than 1700 opinions were analyzed.

In both cities the biggest temptation is definitely the beach (with the width of 150–250 meters), and healing mud. Both selected destinations are located on the Baltic coast, are similar in size (about 40 thousand inhabitants), and are also frequently visited by foreigners, with a difference that Świnoujście is visited by

German tourists mostly, and Jurmala – by Russians. The number of tourists coming to both destinations is shown in figure 1.

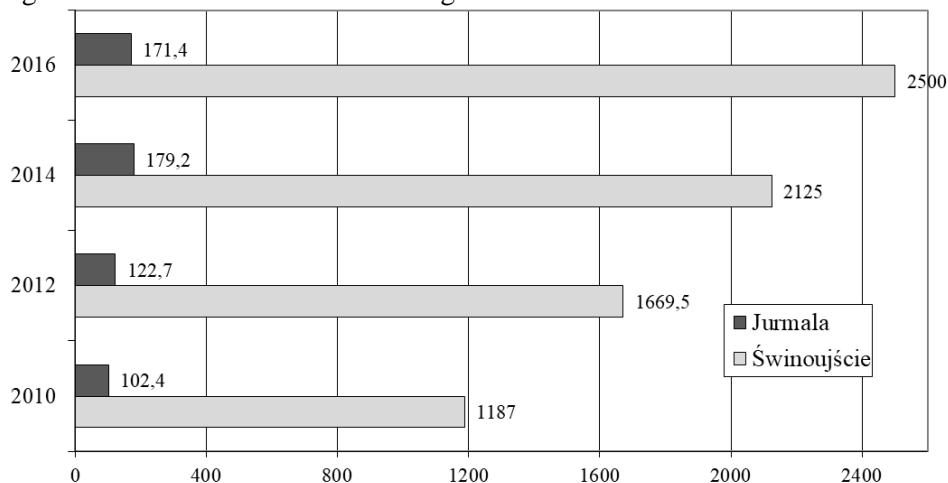


Figure 1. The number of tourists visiting Świnoujście and Jurmala (in thousands)

Source: own work based on Urząd Statystyczny..., 2016; *Tourism...*, 2017.

Empirical part of the article has arisen by using comparative analysis method – opinions of guests that were put on portal booking.com, were taken as a source of empirical data. On this portal 68 tourist facilities (hotels, hostels, apartments, guest rooms) in Jurmala and 58 in Świnoujście were found. And as we were interested only in negative views, so taking only these comments we have found 547 opinions about accommodations in Jurmala, and 1157 about accommodations in Świnoujście.

In visited objects tourists could rate the following elements:

- a) comfort: general cleanliness, bathroom, bedding, towels, bed, furniture, air conditioning, insects, noise, room amenities;
- b) location: distance to a center, distance to beach, public transportation, distance to clubs and restaurants, parking, access by car;
- c) amenities: wi-fi, TV, elevator, currency exchange, electric outlets, meals, ironing, terrace / space outside a room;
- d) personnel: courtesy, professionalism, accessibility languages;
- e) other elements of a service: room compatibility with reservation, price.

As mentioned, in total more than 1700 negative opinions have been expressed. In case of accommodation facilities in Świnoujście judgments in 48% came from men, in 31% from women (the other guests did not specify gender). Opinions about objects in Jurmala came in 26% from men and in 32% from women (fig. 2). Significantly, in the case of Świnoujście most critical observations came from men, in the case of Jurmala – more often from women.

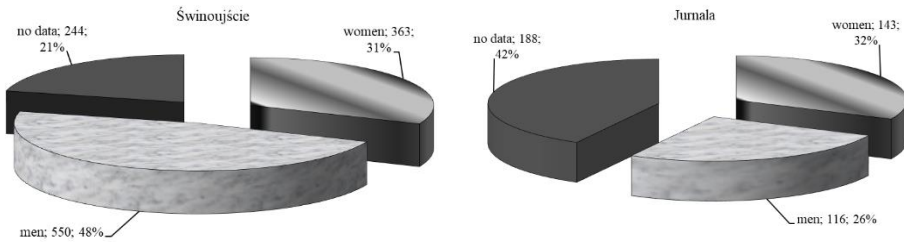


Figure 2. Structure of research samples

Source: own work.

For most of the visitors holidays by the sea mean family holidays. Both in Świnoujście and Jurmala, the bulk of tourists came with families (fig. 3), and their average stay was 7 days.

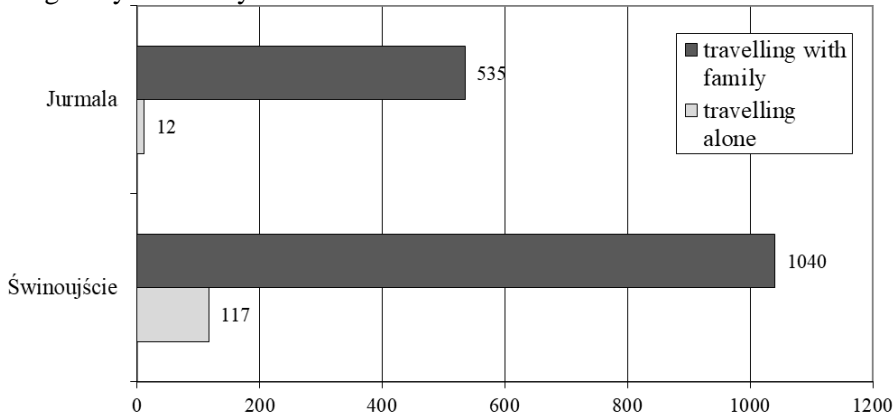


Figure 3. Tourists coming to the seaside alone and with families

Source: own work.

### Results

As mentioned, respondents have evaluated accommodations' facilities from 5 categories point of view: comfort, location, amenities, personnel and other elements of a service. All critical remarks were divided into two groups: 1) appearing quite often and representing more than 5% of all observations; 2) appearing less often and constituting no more than 5%. Results of the research show that tourists' remarks on accommodations are similar in both cities only partially. It turns out that most tourists have claims for comfort: they criticize cleanliness, condition of a bathroom, beds, furnishings and finally bad soundproof windows and too big noise. Particularly badly from the comfort point of view are evaluated

accommodations in Świnoujście. Objects in Jurmala in turn are poorly assessed from the point of view of staff availability, and quality of wi-fi (fig. 4).

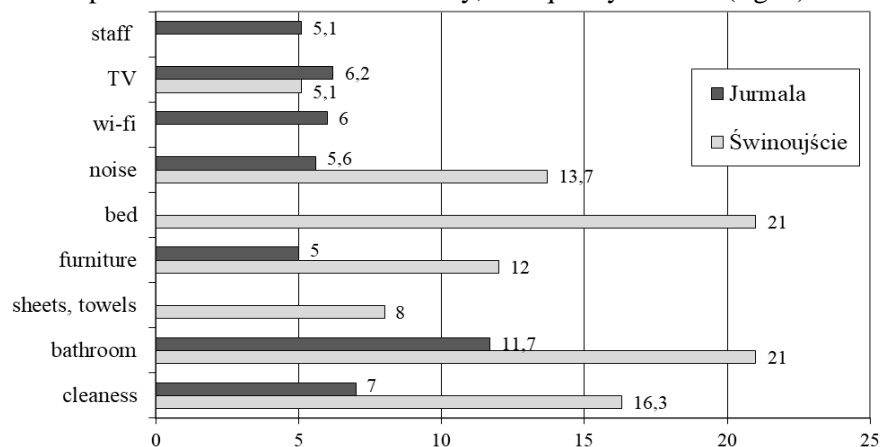


Figure 4. Main comments of tourists about the offer, representing more than 5% of all complains

Source: own work.

The second group of comments are opinions constituting less than 5% of all evaluations. Accommodations in Świnoujście are criticized for not working wi-fi, lack of air conditioning, or rudeness of staff, while objects in Jurmala are criticized for a poor state of bedding, lack of parking spaces and problems with staff (politeness, knowledge of languages), which is shown in figure 5.

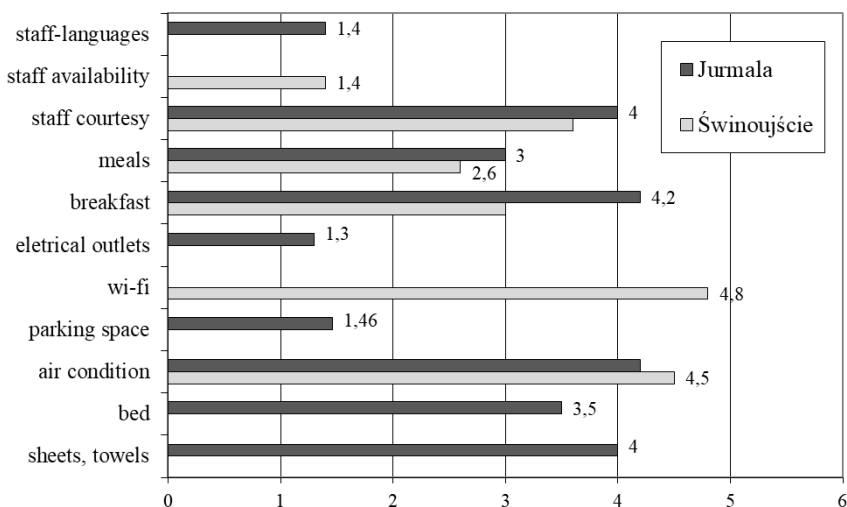


Figure 5. Secondary comments on offer

Source: own work.

The study has shown that the list of main shortcomings includes:

- uncomfortable beds,
- purity in a bathroom,
- general cleanliness,
- noise.

Less frequent remarks apply to broken internet (wi-fi), air conditioning and courtesy of the staff.

## **Discussion**

Tourists' satisfaction from a stay stems from several elements, which in the literature are called motivational factors. They are divided into two groups: push and pull factors (Jamrozny, Uysal, 1994). To the first group of such factors there are included: needs of a person, family/friends togetherness, escape, adventure, looking for novelty and excitement, luxury/doing nothing, prestige and familiar environment. Whereas the second group includes such factors, that are associated with a specificity of a place, for example: sunshine and natural environment, active sports environment, safety, inexpensiveness, cultural activities, entertainment, sightseeing, local culture and cuisine, uniqueness of a place. All of this, as well as word of mouth communication and destination image, shapes expectations of visitors (Woodside, Martin, 2007).

Both, push and pull factors, attract people to Świnoujście and Jurmala, where each year thousands of tourists are coming. They come because perhaps their previous experience/stay was positive, or they heard about these places from friends, or because of promotional activities encouraging for visiting, or because these places have generally image of good destinations (Rodríguez, San Martín, Collado, del Mar García de los Salmones, 2009). These are also initial factors affecting a scope of expectations about quality of an offer. Being there, tourists expect more, for example: experience of easiness and fun, cultural entertainment, personal identification, historical reminiscences, and getting away from normal life (Sheng, Chen, 2013). However, at the same time they expect good conditions of a stay, such as cleanliness or sleeping comfort.

Both selected for analysis cities are well known destinations to potential tourists. For decades, Polish and German tourists travel to Świnoujście, and Latvian and Russian ones – to Jurmala. Both destinations offer sandy beaches and the sea, as well as health spa and wellness services. The first city offers also interesting environment (Świnoujście lies on 3 islands), while the second - proximity to Latvian capital Riga. In both cities there are dozens of hotels and hostels as well as guesthouses offering rooms, so the competition is fierce. It would seem, therefore, that managers of these facilities will make every effort to meet demands of their guests, especially that these requirements are – apparently – pretty obvi-

ous. First of all guests expect cleanliness in general, as well as hygiene of a bathroom. And this postulate is common for tourists staying in both studied cities. They expect also comfortable beds and good room equipment. The first postulates can be realized easily, because it is a matter of accurate fulfillment of duties by cleaning personnel. On the other hand, the number of tourists coming to Świnoujście and Jurmala has been growing for several years, which may be reason to believe that everything is all right, because tourists are still coming. However, they should ask themselves a question: they will come, but where will they sleep? Will they select my place? In order to make guests to come back, managers should therefore improve cleanliness, replace beds for more comfortable, buy new furniture for rooms. These remarks were claimed by visitors in the first place.

Amongst remarks appearing less frequently, but also important, are the quality of wi-fi, lack of air condition, and quality of meals. In the first case, it seems that it is negligent of owners, since Internet access is widespread and quite cheap, especially from a company point of view. The need for air conditioning, however, is an effect of climate change – until recently summers in Baltic countries have been warm, but not hot. Thus in the north we needed a good heating systems more than air condition. However, it must be noted that climate change is causing a variation in needs and, in a consequence, causing necessity of changes in accommodation services.

Guest satisfaction is an element which must be examined on a regular basis, and results should be used for making changes for better. A study discussed in this article shows that directions of the adjustment should be as follows:

- a) improve cleanliness in general, and bathroom in particular;
- b) improve sleeping comfort;
- c) protect visitors from the noise.

In addition, hotels and other examined objects should improve elements such as air-condition, access to wi-fi, and finally meals. Subsequently, they should also correct engagement of employees and their professionalism. These are basic elements of accommodation services, so if a hotel, hostel or any other place of accommodation wants to be competitive, they must be improved.

It may be noted that guests in Jurmala often complain about access to wi-fi and staff. Guests in Świnoujście more likely have critical remarks about beds, bedding and bathrooms. This may result not only from a quality of provided services but also from expectations. It must be remembered that customers' satisfaction results from comparing received offer with a standard (expectations). If received service does not meet expectations, then guests are not satisfied and they will pass on their opinion to the others. None of hotels operating in a competitive market should ignore it. However, one should also know that satisfaction is a subjective opinion, which is influenced by numerous factors, such as the nature of a person and previous experience. It is significant, however, that guests must



be provided with obvious standards such as cleanliness and silence. Feedback from a visitor allows a hotel to identify strengths and weaknesses in terms of all aspects of provision of services. Certainly this information provides answers to the following questions:

Which elements of services process provision are the most vulnerable for visitors? What are causes of customer dissatisfaction? What are their needs and expectations? Finally: which elements of services are still, in visitors' opinions, inadequate and need improvement? (Frankowska, 2011; Hernik, Tuntev, 2014).

The conducted study shows that several elements of services need to be substantially repaired and the perfect offer should include a better level of cleanliness and comfort first of all. It does not appear that, in this case, to improve quality of services is not possible for financial reasons or time-consuming. It depends more on knowledge of managers about guests' satisfaction and awareness that the lack of response will lead to loss of number of guests (Dmitrović et al., 2009), and next worse market position. In today's fierce competition on the market of goods and services, quality becomes a „strategic weapon”. So a company can achieve better results and get higher position among competitors, if a quality of its products or services is seen as very good primarily from the customer's perspective (Frankowska, 2011; Atilgan, 2003).

## **Conclusions**

Every visit of a tourist is a moment of confrontation an accommodation offer with expectations. If we assume that in a competitive market quality of an offer must be assessed from a visitor standpoint, then consistently we should also assume that visitors will be asked about positive and negative comments and their suggestions will change the shape of an offer.

In this article it is stated that dissatisfaction of tourists stems mainly from inadequate cleanliness and lack of comfort during a night. About these elements of accommodation mainly tourists visiting Świnoujście (Poland) have complained. Guests arriving to Jurmala (Latvia) also complained about cleanliness, but they were also unhappy with bed linen and towels, as well as breakfast. So, corrective actions should include: 1) improvements of cleanliness in general, and bathroom in particular; 2) improvements of sleeping comfort; 3) better protection of visitors from the noise.

The quality of accommodation services is based, on the one hand, on some standards, on the other hand – it is simply assessed on basis of information which a hotel gives. Dissatisfaction can therefore stem from the fact, that an offer promises more than a guest is given on a spot. Therefore negative reviews could be avoided by placing reliable information about a quality and range of an offer. Customer's satisfaction will therefore be associated not so much with a perfect offer, but with compatibility of a promise with reality.

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### Kryteria oceny jakości usług hotelarskich w opinii turystów na przykładzie obiektów w Świnoujściu oraz Jurmali

**Słowa kluczowe:** turystyka nadmorska, oczekiwania turystów, jakość usług, oferta turystyczna

**Streszczenie.** Zgodnie z klasyfikacją NACE, turystyka obejmuje m.in. takie obszary, jak: zakwaterowanie, usługi związane z gastronomią, działalność biur podróży, organizacja wycieczek i inne usługi rezerwacyjne, rozrywka, działalność muzeów i innych obiektów kulturalnych. Oznacza to, że przemysł turystyczny jest bardzo złożony i zróżnicowany, ale pierwsze miejsce, do którego udaje się turysta zaraz po przyjeździe, jest miejscem zakwaterowania. Z tego względu w artykule podjęto się analizy jakości zakwaterowania

w obiektach zlokalizowanych w dwóch wybranych miastach położonych na wybrzeżu Morza Bałtyckiego: Świnoujściu (w Polsce) i Jurmali (na Łotwie). W tym artykule autorki dążą do: 1) sporządzenia listy braków w jakości oferty zakwaterowania; 2) określeniu kierunków niezbędnych udoskonaleń oraz 3) wskazania różnic między oczekiwaniami turystów w wybranych miastach. Aby zrealizować zdefiniowane cele przeanalizowano wszystkie negatywne opinie (ponad 1700) opublikowane na stronie [www.booking.com](http://www.booking.com), odnoszące się do 70 obiektów noclegowych w Jurmali oraz do 58 w Świnoujściu.

*Translated by Joanna Hernik*

### **Cytowanie**

Hernik, J., Grīnberga-Zālīte, G. (2017). Criteria of hotel services quality evaluation in the opinion of tourists, on the objects in Świnoujście and Jurmala examples. *Marketing i Zarządzanie*, 1 (47), 209–219. DOI: 10.18276/miz.2017.47-19.