

Original

**THE IMPORTANCE OF TECHNICAL SERVICE QUALITY OF ACTIVITIES IN
ADVENTURE TOURISM PROVIDED BY COMPANIES IN SPAIN, ITALY AND
COSTA RICA**

**LA IMPORTANCIA DE LA CALIDAD TÉCNICA EN EL SERVICIO DE LAS
ACTIVIDADES DE TURISMO DE AVENTURA EN LAS EMPRESAS DE ESPAÑA,
ITALIA Y COSTA RICA**

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RESUMEN

Un parámetro está constituido por diez ítems y la importancia que se le da a cada uno de ellos conforma el valor objetivo final que poseerá. Este valor es aportado por el propio sector empresarial, y se aplica a cada uno de los ítems y, por tanto, a cada parámetro que identifica la calidad técnica en las empresas de turismo de aventura o turismo activo.

Los datos finales obtenidos son contrastados con cada entidad aportando una medida objetiva en relación a la realidad del sector, que a su vez es segmentada por cada uno de los países en los que se ha aplicado. Dicho proceso se ha realizado a través de la obtención de los datos recogidos por el método HEVA™.

En conclusión, se identifican unos valores estándares significativos, como media empresarial, a la vez que una diferenciación entre compañías en función del país de origen.

Palabras clave: Importancia, turismo de aventura, calidad, España, Italia, Costa Rica.

ABSTRACT

A parameter consists of ten items; the importance attributed to each of them corresponds to the final objective value it will have. This value is created by the proper commercial sector and applied to each of the parameters and thus to each parameter that identifies technical quality in adventure/active tourism providers.

The final results obtained for every company are compared using a measurement unit applicable to the sector reality, which in its turn is segmented for each of the countries where it has been applied. The aforementioned process has been performed obtaining the data collected using the HEVA™ method.

In conclusion, some standard significant values are identified as the commercial average together with a clear differentiation among companies depending on the country of origin.

Keywords: Importance, adventure tourism, quality, Spain, Italy, Costa Rica.

INTRODUCTION

The word “quality” is used in all the contexts (educational, industrial, food, tourist, sports, etc.) where one wants to ensure the maximum value of what is produced for a third party, being it a good¹ or a service². Speaking about quality is trying to make things better. It is not only about doing something but about doing it with the best possible efficiency: Alonso, Barcos and Martín (2006), Amat (1992) Benavides (2003), Calabiug (2005 and 2008), Casadesús, Heras and Merino (2005), Crosby (2000), Dávila (2002), Deming (1989), Ghobadian, Speller and Jones (1994), Grönroos (1994b and 2001), Ishikawa (1991), Juran and Gryna (1993), Morales and Hernández (2004), Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988b and 1993), Reeves and Vendar (1994), Senlle, Martínez and Martínez (2001), Sasser, Olsen and Wyckoff (1978), Vara, (2002), Parasuraman, Zeithamly Berry (1993) and Zeithaml y Bitner (2002). The contextual versatility of this concept, in its turn, has generated technical confusions and incorrect usage of the word “quality”.

In general, two types of quality can be distinguished: perceived quality and technical quality. Focusing on perceived quality, many relevant authors define it as follows:

- Perceived quality is the amplitude of discrepancy or difference which exists between the customers’ expectations or wishes and their perceptions (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988a).
- Total perceived quality is the difference between expected quality and received quality (Grönroos, 1988).

At the same time, Grönroos (1983, 1988 and 1994) identifies technical quality as the chosen basis in which the technical aspects of a service are focused, which in adventure tourism and active tourism means the core of any provided service. All this is performed through a series of concrete actions

¹ Good: tangible elements or products which meet the direct needs of buyers or recipients. (R.A.E., 2011)

² Service: human assistance which meets a social need and which does not consist in production of material goods. (R.A.E., 2011)

which can be measured and in their turn perceived both by the service provider and by the recipient.

Generally, the researches focus on detecting the quality perceived by the customer. However, the present research aims to identify the value of parameters used to measure provided technical quality before providing a service, trying to approach the total quality system by Deming (1989) who reflects the idea of “0” failures from the start of the service.

In the evaluation of the resulting quality of a service the customer is a determining element mainly in two aspects: one is unpredictability since there are many factors which can modify the customer’s behaviour and decisions, and the other one is recognizing that the customer is not the only element producing impact on the resulting quality of a service since there are factors one has to take into account before arriving at the definition of “customer”.

Crosby’s theory (1987 and 2000) is based on the principle of “zero defects”, which means doing everything well from the first moment when providing a product or a service, in all the necessary processes. For this reason, Crosby believes that the implementation of quality is the most adequate preventive measure. Therefore, it is considered that there are many elements before arriving at the customer, which we can use to develop the proper service in adventure tourism and active tourism (Mediavilla, 2010) in our case.

Thus, the quality system for a service company will be a set of concrete and measurable actions (norms, certification system, protocols, etc.) generating a degree of conscience of the offered service (Gronröos 1994). This requirement can become an obligatory requisite both for all the service sectors and for all the providers who want to collaborate with the principal company, ensuring a value of total quality and aiming to improve the management of excellence of the entire provided service (Benavides, 2003).

Quality in tourism is based on quality in the service sector, given that tourism is predominantly a service and this service should be understood as the product offered by tourism (Casanueva, García and Carro,

2000). In this case, tourism together with all its identified sub-sectors, among them adventure tourism and active tourism, requires standardization and normalization (Membrado, 1999). But one of the characteristics of tourism is that it is a highly dispersed sector and it shows a great diversity of sub-sectors not all of which have norms applicable to the technical profile (Valls, 2003).

One of the norms of major use for its international recognition and its popularity (though it is difficult to implement it in the tourism sector since it is based on processes) is ISO 9000 which deals with quality control. Its names may differ depending on the scope of recognition. In Europe it is called EN 29000 and in the USA ANSI/ASQC Q 90. The EN norms are mandatory for the countries of The *European Committee* for Standardization while the ISO norms are for informational purposes (Casadesús, Giménez and Heras, 2001 and Cronin and Taylor, 1994).

Implementation of a norm in the tourism sector is not an easy task as it is a highly diversified sector with specialized sub-sectors and clearly defined products. Analyzing the norm implied in this sector, we can see that it is represented in four important areas (Alonso, et al. 2006):

- Non-tourism regulation which covers such areas as security, hygiene, etc., but is a basis for the development of a subsequent demanding service.
- Mandatory tourism regulation: tourist hotels and accommodations, travel agencies and tour operators, and recreational scuba-diving services.
- Recommended regulation: the protocol format approved by the sector and recognized by an official authority.
- Autoregulation: may result from an individual requirement (difficult to measure) or from an associative requirement (slightly easier to control) and is represented by clarifying norms in different sub-sectors created for it.

Another norm related to the tourism sector is CEN/TC 329 that covers three tourist sectors: hotels and other systems of tourist accommodation, travel agencies and tour operators, and recreational scuba-diving services. This norm is only focused on the

named areas and fundamentally comes from the idea of being a norm centred on security of the activities and their requisites.

Creation of this norm and the corresponding technical systems of quality were a pioneer initiative in the tourism sector at the European level, which made them serve as a model for the rest of norms and criteria of quality which derived from it. This model faced the difficulties of a service sector where the perceptions have to be objectivised, thus offering the management of total quality, and where it is not enough to check the final product but is necessary to verify the whole process.

In many cases the normative quality processes are the tools agreed by the operators of the sector who have switched from believing in the obligatory legacy to believing in the optimization of the production process, and even to design not only what can be representative for a commercial sector but also the most demanding processes adapted to their own product and their own self-demanded norm of quality (Boulding, Karla, Staelin and Zeithaml, 1993). For adventure tourism and active tourism, the recognition of the parameters which measure quality and within them the recognition of the specific aspects identifying the level of importance is a step towards this international norm of recognition of what the sector itself identifies as fundamental elements.

The present research has been based on the data received from the World Tourism Organization (WTO), in particular, from its annual reports showing in various periods of time Spain, Italy and Costa Rica as important countries with major volumes of inbound tourism in this sector. The ranking is always led by our neighbour; France and Spain tend to be between the second and the fourth place competing against the USA and Italy (World Tourism Organization, 2010).

METHODS

All the information gathered for the performance of the present research is indicated in HEVA™ and related to the commercial profile of the analysed adventure tourism and active tourism companies. As

soon as the said values were recognized, a system has been created for the quantification of the data through a questionnaire (Cea, 2004; Robles, 2005; Sierra, 2003a and Tojar, 2006).

The present research has used and combined the qualitative and quantitative method, given that the majority of the consulted authors refer to different forms applicable to these methods during the development of a research process (Alaminos and Castejón, 2006; Cea, 2004; Díaz, 2002; Gutiérrez-Dávila and Oña, 2005; Heinemann, 2008; Rojas, 1999; Sierra, 2003a, 2003b and Tójar, 2006).

Statistical Analysis

After the collection of all the questionnaires and the transfer of all the data, each of the questions that appear in HEVA™ was encoded for the performance of their further analysis using the informational program Statistical Package for Social Sciences/ Personal Computer Plus (SPSS 18) for Windows.

Questionnaire

For this type of research which aims to obtain information, whether managed or auto managed, depending on the phase of the research, it is known that the best method here is a survey as the most adequate methodological tool since answering its questions reflects values to work with (Cea, 2004). The questionnaire in itself should be developed in a clear form so that the data obtained is as accurate as possible.

The aim of applying these three phases in a strict form is to try and go one step beyond the national Spanish frontiers, searching for an example in another European space. Italy is the chosen country, given that it represents a space with the same characteristics, though in a different geographic location. Of all the Italian regions in which active tourism is developing, Trentino-Alto Adige was selected. Valle Central in Costa Rica was chosen for the same reason.

Efforts have been made to ensure that all the actions performed in relation to the questionnaire, both at the national and international level, were aligned with the scientific accuracy and validity, for this purpose taking into account how the questions were

developed, who are the respondents, the internal check of the validity of the results, and the formal processing of the questions (Heinemann, 2008).

Reliability: stability and consistency of the questionnaire

During the performance of the research efforts have been made to minimize the possible errors which could affect the data collection (Cea, 2004). This criterion was used to ensure that the data obtained in the research did not condition its reliability and to find clarity in the analysis applied to the said research (Babbie, 2000).

The present research has followed the instructions given by Cea (2004) who proposes some specific patterns for the methodological procedure to achieve a "high reliability coefficient", and has applied them as follows:

1. *Provide extensive data.* The previous research used a survey taken by 11% of companies while the further research of active tourism in Spain looked at 23% of the companies in the region. In Italy, the data was collected from 31% of the companies in the region and Costa Rica reached the level of 19%.
2. *Take questionnaires at different moments.* In case of Spain, the surveys for the pilot research and the final questionnaires were performed at two important moments, at the beginning and at the end of the year 2011, in order to minimize the impact on its economic activities.
3. *Standardize the data collection.* All the performed surveys have followed the same process: during the first application the questionnaire is given to the company manager and answered in the surveyor's presence while the latter is collecting the data on the evaluation done by the company manager. On the other hand, during the second application the questionnaire is given to the manager and collected afterwards together with the evaluation which has been done.
4. *Increase the variance of variables and the number of areas.* The present research has taken into account the data received from the beginning of the development of the HEVA™ tool (experts,

professionals, scientists, industry-specific public exhibitions, meetings, international congresses, etc.).

Profile of the collected data

The selected companies are mainly grouped in two continents, America and Europe. The European continent was chosen as a space that contains Spain and Italy, the countries selected in their turn for their natural wealth and attractiveness, cultural heritage and recognized position in the nature tourism sector. In the American continent, Costa Rica was chosen as the most prominent country in nature tourism in the whole America, according to the OMT 2010 annual report.

The Technical Quality Assessment Tool for Adventure Tourism and Active Tourism, (HEVA™, in Spanish) was applied in all three countries to a total of 82 companies, of which 28 were Spanish (34,1%), 30 were Italian (36,6%) and 24 were from Costa Rica (29,3%).

RESULTS

The results are presented using the following scheme applied to each of the Technical Quality Assessment Tool (HEVA™) parameters:

1. First of all, the descriptive parameters of each item will be shown (average and standard deviation), by country. It should be taken into account that the score range is from 1 to 5.
2. Then a variance analysis will be performed, questioning the hypothesis that there are significant differences in averages in the total score of each factor based on the country of origin.

Finally, in the event that significant differences in averages are revealed via ANOVA, the Scheffé test will be used to analyse in which specific countries such differences take place.

Table 1. Averages and standard deviations of the Company parameter in Spain, Italy and Costa Rica

COMPANY	SPAIN		ITALY		COSTA RICA	
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation
C.0.1.I Carry out a business feasibility study.	3,82	1,307	4,20	1,243	4,67	,482
C.0.2.I. Should the general manager have formal qualifications or training?	4,64	,870	4,07	1,015	3,83	,816
C.0.3.I. Should the general manager have training in specific areas of the sector?	4,64	,559	4,33	,884	4,33	,482
C.0.4.I. Carry out a consultancy or auditing on the quality of service delivered.	3,82	1,124	3,80	1,495	4,67	,482
C.0.5.I. Use a tool to measure customer satisfaction.	4,25	,844	4,27	,785	4,42	,654
C.0.6.I. Belong to a sector specific association.	4,36	1,026	3,87	1,106	4,58	,654
C.0.7.I. Require specific criteria to belong to a self-regulating business association.	4,36	,911	3,93	1,081	4,17	,816
C.0.8.I. Use a customer service system.	4,29	1,084	3,80	1,126	4,92	,282
C.0.9.I. Have and show public recognition or awards.	3,39	1,315	3,15	1,317	4,25	,847
C.0.10.I. Develop a system to improve the company's quality of service.	4,46	,576	4,40	,724	4,83	,381

Company

Table 1 shows the descriptors (average and standard deviation) of the ten elements that make up the Company parameter, bearing in mind, as previously explained, that the score range is established using a

Likert-type scale of 5 points, from low to high. Items 3, 5 and 10 have an average value above 4 in all the countries.

A variance analysis was performed in which a significant effect size may be observed by country

($F=8,338$, $p=0,001$). Consequently, it may be stated there are significant differences among the companies of the three countries with regards to the valuation they show in the Country parameter.

We ran the Scheffé test to determine which pairs of countries show significant differences ($p<0,01$). In

case, there are significant differences between Italy and Costa Rica, the values of the latter being higher. Spain, in turn, shows no significant differences when compared to the other two countries included in the analysis.

Table 2. Averages and standard deviations of the Key Activity parameter in Spain, Italy and Costa Rica

KEY ACTIVITY	SPAIN		ITALY		COSTA RICA	
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation
C.1.1.I. Standing out for the most demanded key activity per season.	3,89	1,227	3,53	1,383	4,67	,482
C.1.2.I. Having specific requirements for the customer to perform the activity.	4,39	,994	4,33	,959	4,50	,780
C.1.3.I. Assessing the customer's knowledge and experience required for the key activity.	3,64	1,367	4,07	,979	4,00	1,022
C.1.4.I. Having a protocol (written) on the standard operating procedure for this activity.	4,11	1,133	4,36	,911	4,83	,381
C.1.5.I. Having an instructor-to-customer ratio below industry norms.	3,81	1,210	3,92	,776	4,50	,885
C.1.6.I. Sharing information with the customer prior to the activity.	4,61	,567	4,27	,944	4,75	,442
C.1.7.I. Knowing the current and specific regulations that regulate this activity.	4,79	,418	4,80	,407	4,83	,381
C.1.8.I. Showing permits required for the performance of the activity.	4,04	1,232	4,47	,730	4,42	,654
C.1.9.I. Having activities adapted to people with special needs.	3,96	1,036	4,13	1,106	4,42	,974
C.1.10.I. Identifying and showing levels (difficulty and skills) of the "Key Activity".	4,39	1,133	4,47	,819	4,83	,381

Key activity

Table 2 shows the descriptors (average and standard deviation) of the ten elements that make up the Key Activity parameter, where items 2, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 10 in all three countries show an average value above 4.

In the variance analysis we find a significant effect size ($F=4,615$; $p=0,013$). The Scheffé test indicates that there are significant differences ($p<0,05$) between Costa Rica and Spain, the value of the former being higher (differences in averages = 4,38 points). Italy, in turn, does not show significant differences with respect to the other two countries included in the analysis.

Material Resources

Table 3 shows the descriptors (average and standard deviation) of the ten elements that make up the Material Resources parameter. This section is especially important for companies since all Material Resources items, except items 4 and 5, have an average value above four in all countries.

In the variance analysis no significant effect size is shown by country ($F=1,882$, $p=0,159$), so it may be stated that there are no significant differences between the companies included in the three countries with regards to the value they reflect in the Material Resources parameter.

Table 3. Averages and standard deviations of the Material Resources parameter in Spain, Italy and Costa Rica

MATERIAL RESOURCES	SPAIN		ITALY		COSTA RICA	
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation
C.2.1.I. Have and show specific equipment approved for each activity.	4,71	,535	4,20	1,349	4,67	,482
C.2.2.I. Replace equipment when it is no longer useful.	4,68	,612	4,67	,711	4,50	,511
C.2.3.I. Replace damaged equipment.	4,89	,315	4,73	,691	4,67	,761
C.2.4.I. Replace equipment that does not match the company image.	3,68	1,090	4,15	,881	3,67	1,204
C.2.5.I. Check customers' equipment.	3,96	1,315	4,53	,629	4,67	,761
C.2.6.I. Replace customer equipment if theirs does not meet the minimum standards.	4,26	1,163	4,73	,450	4,33	,868
C.2.7.I. Designate a staff member to "material resources".	4,43	,959	4,53	,819	4,58	,504
C.2.8.I. Use specific equipment for each of the activities.	4,75	,518	4,67	,606	4,92	,282
C.2.9.I. Knowledge and performance of equipment maintenance procedures.	4,79	,418	4,67	,606	4,67	,482
C.2.10.I. Keep systematic record of equipment use.	4,43	,879	4,93	,254	4,50	,511

Safety

Table 4 shows the descriptors (average and standard deviation) of the ten elements that make up the Safety parameter.

In the variance analysis, no significant effect size is

shown by country ($F=1,606$, $p=0,208$), so it may be stated that there are no important differences between the companies included in the three countries with regards to the value they show in the Safety parameter.

Table 4. Averages and standard deviations of the Safety parameter in Spain, Italy and Costa Rica

SAFETY	SPAIN		ITALY		COSTA RICA	
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation
C.3.1.I. Review basic safety norms and self-protection rules.	4,86	,448	4,60	,814	4,67	,482
C.3.2.I. Remind customers that they must follow the guide's instructions.	4,86	,356	4,40	,968	4,92	,282
C.3.3.I. Have a civil liability insurance.	5,00	,000	5,00	,000	4,75	,442
C.3.4.I. Have care insurance including first-aid cover.	4,82	,548	4,73	1,015	4,83	,381
C.3.5.I. Do you have an insurance policy excess?	3,00	1,532	2,93	1,464	4,50	,511
C.3.6.I. Show official qualifications of instructors.	4,00	1,186	4,53	1,042	3,92	1,213
C.3.7.I. Have other safety elements for the instructors.	4,39	,994	4,73	,583	4,25	,737
C.3.8.I. Have guidelines for action and follow up for accidents.	4,93	,262	4,67	,606	4,92	,282
C.3.9.I. Carry out registered weather checks.	3,79	1,343	4,36	,989	4,25	,847
C.3.10.I. Use formal communication strategies during the course of the activity at pre agreed intervals	4,18	1,219	3,80	1,584	4,75	,442

Environment

Table 5 shows the descriptors (average and standard deviation) of the ten elements that make up the natural Environment parameter. None of the items show an average above 4 in any of the three countries.

In the variance analysis we find a significant effect size per country ($F=3,677$, $p=0,031$), so it may be stated that there are significant differences between

the companies included in the three countries with regards to the value that is obtained in the natural environment parameter.

The results of the Scheffé test show that there are significant differences ($p<0,05$) between Italy and Spain, where the value is higher for the former (difference in averages = 5,42 points). Costa Rica does not show significant differences with the other two countries included in the analysis.

Table 5. Averages and standard deviations of the Natural Environment parameter in Spain, Italy and Costa Rica

ENVIRONMENT	SPAIN		ITALY		COSTA RICA	
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation
C.4.1.I. Become aware of environmental regulations in terms of outdoor areas.	4,36	,731	4,13	,900	3,83	1,090
C.4.2.I. Inform the appropriate environmental management agencies about your activities.	2,78	1,311	4,00	,667	2,75	1,260
C.4.3.I. Show the appropriate permits on environmental issues for customers' benefit.	3,21	1,424	4,20	,997	3,33	1,274
C.4.4.I. Show ISO 14000 or a similar standard.	3,00	1,633	3,92	1,283	2,73	1,162
C.4.5.I. Perform an analysis on the environmental impact of the activities.	3,50	1,291	4,00	1,131	3,50	1,142
C.4.6.I. Recognize and identify further training needs in environmental issues.	3,96	,962	4,07	1,052	4,00	,933
C.4.7.I. Carry out environmental improvements or recovery exercises.	3,89	,916	4,20	1,186	4,50	,659
C.4.8.I. Know, monitor and manage the environmental resilience of a natural area.	3,75	1,175	4,43	,997	3,83	1,007
C.4.9.I. Review the most important environmental measures with customers.	3,96	1,160	4,57	,920	3,83	1,167
C.4.10.I. Register certain transmission of environmental values during the activity.	4,32	,905	3,93	1,359	4,17	,816

Human Resources

Table 6 shows the descriptors (average and standard deviation) of the ten elements that make up the Human Resources factor.

In the variance analysis we find no significant results ($F=0,824$, $p=0,443$), so it may be stated that there are no significant differences between the companies included in the three countries with regards to the values that they show in Human Resources.

Customer

Table 7 shows the descriptors (average and standard deviation) of the ten elements that make up the Customer parameter. It should be noted that in all three countries every item has an average higher than 4, thus showing the importance of this parameter for the companies.

The variance analysis data shows an effect size per country that is not significant ($F=0,941$, $p=0,395$), so it may be stated that there are no significant differences between the companies included in the three countries with regards to the values obtained in the Customer parameter.

Table 6. Averages and typical diversions of the parameter human resources in Spain and Costa Rica

HUMAN RESOURCES	SPAIN		ITALY		COSTA RICA	
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation
C.5.1.I. Have a document with names and descriptions of positions.	3,46	1,290	3,85	1,434	4,50	,659
C.5.2.I. Show formal official qualifications of instructors.	3,86	1,325	4,64	,621	4,00	,933
C.5.3.I. Use some kind of professional follow-up system for employees.	4,25	,887	4,07	,900	4,17	,565
C.5.4.I. Demand some kind of registered staff retraining.	4,46	,693	3,77	1,210	3,67	1,204
C.5.5.I. Have a low staff turnover.	4,29	1,013	3,71	1,049	4,42	,504
C.5.6.I. Create an organizational chart of the HR structure of the company.	3,89	1,086	3,38	1,098	4,08	,881
C.5.7.I. Taking specific actions: positive discrimination, work life balance, etc.	3,32	1,249	4,15	1,190	4,25	,608
C.5.8.I. Acknowledging the staff's experience, qualification, certification and/or duties.	4,64	,559	4,27	,691	4,75	,442
C.5.9.I. Have an internal system for correcting employee errors.	3,71	1,243	4,21	,876	3,83	1,007
C.5.10.I. Provide guides/instructors with their own specific material for their own safety.	4,61	,567	4,60	,724	4,42	,654

Table 7. Averages and standard deviations of the Customer parameter in Spain, Italy and Costa Rica

CUSTOMER	SPAIN		ITALY		COSTA RICA	
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation
C.6.1.I. Measure the quality of service customers receive.	4,36	,911	4,80	,407	5,00	,000
C.6.2.I. Recognize which quality parameters the customer perceives.	4,36	,731	4,73	,583	4,25	,737
C.6.3.I. Use a customer loyalty system in a structured way	4,11	1,031	4,47	1,106	4,25	1,113
C.6.4.I. Formalize some kind of written customer contract or authorization for doing the activity	4,36	,989	4,40	,814	4,17	1,090
C.6.5.I. Inform the customer (registered document where liabilities, prices, roles, etc. are present – signed by customers).	4,54	,637	4,67	,606	4,50	,659
C.6.6.I. Identify a process for managing complaints.	4,25	,799	4,00	1,050	4,42	,776
C.6.7.I. Inform and identify services and activities offered to customers.	4,57	,690	4,53	,730	4,25	,608
C.6.8.I. Always track customer feedback.	4,21	1,067	4,07	1,081	4,25	1,113
C.6.9.I. Use a protocol for activities with children.	4,61	,497	4,80	,407	4,33	,637
C.6.10.I. Identify skills needed to treat special needs groups.	4,14	1,044	4,67	,479	4,25	,737

CONCLUSIONS

1. When relating business to quality, the entities within the adventure tourism sector and active tourism deem that, not only must the company and

its manager have the appropriate permits, but they must also display them in public.

2. Belonging to an association of active tourism companies is more important than meeting the legal requirements of the sector.

3. It is important for companies in Costa Rica and Spain to position themselves in an area of activity within the sector so they feel it is significant to be identified by an activity or an area of activities.

4. It is important to display all kinds of requisites for the performance of activities, especially in countries like Italy and Spain, whilst it is not as relevant in Costa Rica, due to the lack of demands and regulations to which these companies are submitted.

5. The most important "element" that determines the success of the services/activities provided in this sector of adventure tourism or active tourism, is related to the people in charge of them.

6. *Equipment* is the most important fixed asset for some companies in Costa Rica because it implies a large economic investment for companies. On the other hand, for companies in Italy and Spain investing in equipment is considered an important part of the activity, but it does not cover the whole quality of the service because it is finite, it deteriorates, it must be changed, etc. In this regard, Italy and Spain change their equipment as per the manufacturer's instructions. In Costa Rica this does not work the same way.

7. Given the attractiveness and wealth of natural open grounds in Costa Rica, companies have accepted that it is necessary to have a good knowledge and training of the environment, but at the same time they consider that it is a resource that must be exploited. In Spain and Italy, specific training of the environment is not required. On the other hand, it is the Italian and Spanish companies that choose to share this kind of information in a formal way with customers en route or during the course of the activity.

8. Costa Rica exceeds Spain in the perception of quality within the activity. Spain cannot position itself in one activity but rather in an area of activities that change depending on the time of year. The same applies to Italy, given that the seasons of the year condition the activities. Obviously, in Costa Rica the areas of the activities are more marked; since there are only two seasons (dry season and rainy

season) it may be assumed that the seasons do not have a great influence on the activities.

With regards to the facilities: The highest consideration is apparent in Costa Rican companies. Spanish companies also believe that having good facilities is important, while Italian companies attach less importance to this aspect.

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