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ALIGNMENT OF THE 7 QUALITY MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES: A SINE QUA NON FOR TOURIST SATISFACTION IN RURAL TOURISM

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Abstract: The paper aims to analyze the applicability of the seven fundamental principles of quality management, highlighting the importance of their operationalization to increase tourist satisfaction. Considering essential elements of rural tourism such as authenticity, hospitality or the environment and infrastructure, the study analyzes how principles such as customer orientation, leadership, staff involvement or continuous improvement act on the quality of services in rural tourism. The aspects that hinder the efficient application of these principles are also analyzed, as well as the existence of good practices. In a paradigm that aims at the mixture between quality and quantity, the paper aims to demonstrate, even though practical examples, the influence of the coherence of quality management principles on customer satisfaction, thus becoming a sine qua non condition for the sustainable development of rural tourism. The methodology and research are intended to be based on statistical analyses, questionnaires, reviews, comparisons, etc. which demonstrates that the main coordinates of quality, namely the requirements and expectations of customers, can be met by directly correlating and associating the 7 principles of quality management which, together, can ensure the success of any organization.

• Introduction

Rural tourism is an important sector in Europe, but not all forms of rural tourism are part of this sector. Rural tourism is based on agritourism and farm stays, characterized by nature-related activities and supported by small private enterprises. In Romania, in the rural area, although there is a deficient infrastructure, tourists are attracted by the authenticity of isolated villages, the natural environment and local traditions. Rural tourism is not affected by seasonality, offering activities specific to each season and thus attracting the largest possible number of tourists, which contributes to the sustainable development of local communities. Another advantage of rural tourism is the minimal investments in traditional houses, with major impact and authentic gastronomy, specific to the area, with natural products.

• Material and method

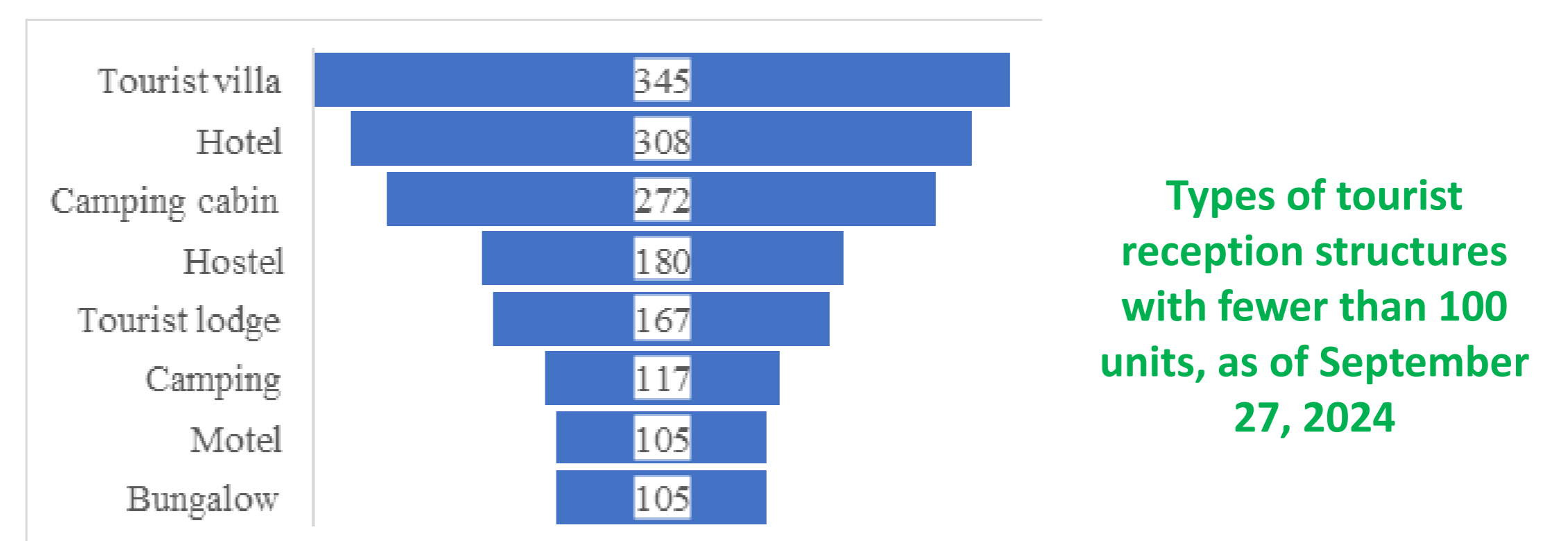
In the development of this study, official reports, academic research, and bibliographic analysis of the specialized literature were utilized, enabling a relevant comparative analysis of the data. These resources contributed to the evaluation of the applicability of the seven quality management principles within rural tourism. Emphasis was placed on the necessity of implementing a quality management system in tourist accommodation establishments to support the development of this sector.

• Results and discussions

In Romania, tourist accommodation units are classified according to Order no. 65 of 2013 of the National Authority, with subsequent amendments and completions. Each type of tourist accommodation unit receives a classification depending on the comfort and services offered. The diversity of these types of tourist accommodation units implies a tourist offer adapted to various demands, from maximum comfort to rural experience.

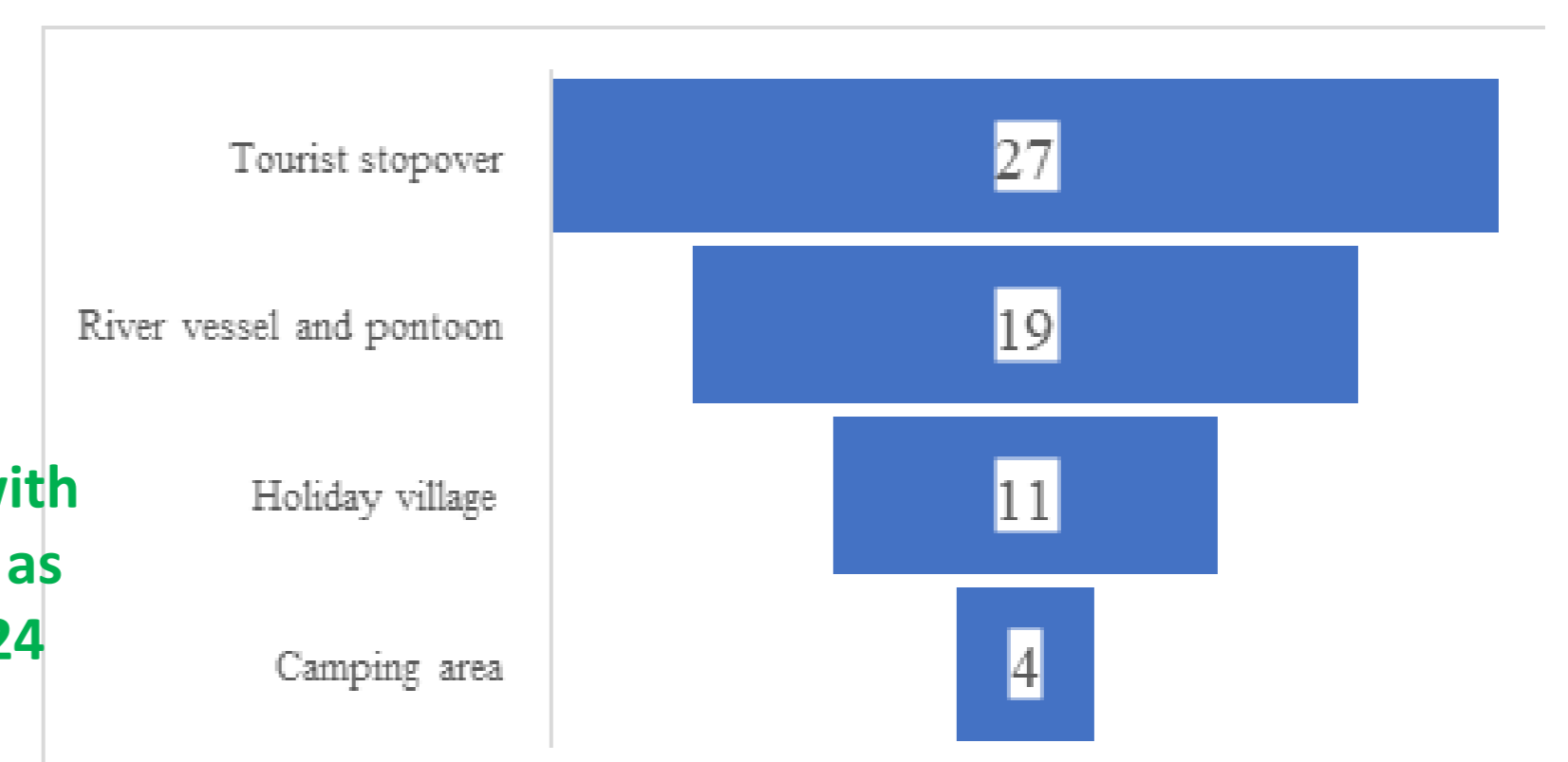
According to the table and graphs, the top positions in terms of the number of tourist reception units are held by the following structures:

- Rooms and apartments for rent, which are easy to set up, involve minimal bureaucracy, and offer high accessibility. Their growth is strongly influenced by platforms such as Booking and Airbnb.
- Tourist guesthouses and agrotourism guesthouses, which highlight the growing importance of rural tourism and reflect tourists' increasing preference for natural settings, local crafts, and traditions.



Types of tourist reception structures with fewer than 100 units, as of September 27, 2024

Types of tourist reception structures with fewer than 100 units, as of September 27, 2024



- At the lower end, with fewer than 100 units, are niche or seasonal structures such as:
- River vessels and pontoons, and tourist stopovers, which often serve temporary or specialized roles.
- Holiday villages, which typically require significant investment, potentially explain their limited presence

• Conclusions

The quality of services in rural tourism is essential for the level of tourist satisfaction and for the sustainable development of rural areas, influencing the intention of visitors to return. A high quality of services implies:

- the probability that tourists will return and recommend the destination to others;
- tourist loyalty through personalized packages, freebies, etc.
- increasing the number of tourists and the length of stays that will contribute to community income;
- promoting respect for traditions and the environment;
- generating new jobs for locals.

Therefore, implementing a quality management system in rural tourism means that each quality principle helps the unit to be clearer, more efficient and more appreciated by tourists. By applying the 7 principles of quality management, added value can be brought to rural tourism