

**BABEŞ BOLYAI UNIVERSITY OF CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Abstract

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF MANAGEMENT SERVICES IN TOURISM UNITS

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KEY WORDS: management, services, tourism, competitiveness, improvement, tourism units

INTRODUCTION IN AREA OF RESEARCH

First of all we would like to mention that in carrying-out this paper we are confident that it will effectively contribute to improving the area of research selected both conceptually and empirically, to enreaching the scientific fund, respectively that regards the service management and to increasing economic efficiency in tourism units in general and in hotels in particular by improving service management.

The policy developed by any tourism unit that regards service quality management, service strategy, human resources management and information technology assumes employment of various means and energies in the tourist sector, because direct contact with customers, intangibility of services and improvement of tourist services, are major elements. Therefore, we think that selection of the research topic is justified in this regard at least. Thus, we would like to present the **motivation** of research, that is turned to the following directions:

- ☞ Development of the tourism sector nowadays, the foreign income being forecast to US\$1030 billion in the year 2011 by the WTO (World Tourism Organization);
- ☞ socio-economic implications generated by the tourism sector, directed towards: increase of economic growth level (foreign trade with services, receipts etc.), educational progress (historic, geographic, artistic, scientific) and cultural diversification (civilization, communication etc.);
- ☞ development potential of the tourism sector, within which the hotel sector is a very important component, whose value is acknowledged in the specialty literature (O'

Fallon&Rutherford, 2011; Walton, 2009; Vallen&Vallen, 2012; Neacșu et al., 2011; Fleșeriu, 2011; Alon et al., 2012);

- ☞ buoyancy of the hotel sector is driven by the interconditioning relation with environment through the products and services it supplies;
- ☞ competitive environment wherein the hotels operate, focused on the customer satisfaction, that assumes strong interactions between hotel management and customer;

Related to the current stage of **knowledge in the area of research**, we would like to mention that though the service sector has become a basic element in modern economy (Lee et al., 1996; Oldenboom&Abratt, 2000), as there are many studies focused on the analysis of activity concerning service providers (Jones, 1995; Brentani&Cooper, 1992; Stevens&Dimitriadis, 2005), the empirical research related to service management is low (Tajeddini, 2010).

Under the circumstances, we would like to mention that foreign research in the area focused on a certain segment that regards service management, thus:

- ***diversification of hotel services***. Even from the beginning of the '80s, the diversification strategy was considered by researchers (Hofer&Schendel, 1978; Porter, 1987) as a governing factor in the business area of a firm, contributing to the development of performance indicators. Liaison between diversification and performance was analysed to a great extent by the strategic management researchers, however, theoretical arguments and empirical results remain unclear with all improvements provided to this area (Park&Jang, 2012). As regards the hotel sector, at present there are a few studies that regard service diversification (Lee&Jang, 2007, Tang&Jang, 2010, Park&Jang, 2012), the results outlining a non-linear relation between diversification and performance (Park&Jang, 2012);
- ***importance of customer orientation in hotels***. Taking into account the fierce competition existing in the hotel sector, managers should pay a significant attention to customer orientation in order to get the required economic efficiency. In this regard, the previous research focused on the front-office personnel (Bowen&Schneider, 1985; Di Mascio, 2010, Ariffin&Maghzi, 2012; Guchait et al., 2012), that has a major influence over formation, control and modelling of customers' expectations (Tajeddini, 2010). Thus,

dimension to which the personnel in hotels is focused on customer is considered a key factor for achieving economic success (Henning-Thurau, 2004);

- ***strategic prospect.*** One of the approaches related to the entire strategy of a firm is provided by Murphy&Murphy (2004), as representing a reflection of all competitive methods within which the management invested in, and every competitive method should be considered by the firm as an extremely important dimension to create added value within the overall strategy.

The main trends that govern the strategic orientation of hotels and contribute to the improvement of the service management are: outsourcing, branding, design, cooperation and innovation. Within a research carried-out over a number of 125 hotels (Petzer et al., 2008) a significant association places itself on record between perception of managers in relation to strategy and hotel size, meaning that managerial importance in relation to strategy increases with the hotel size at the same time. It has been also noticed that there is a significant connection – medium intensity – between the importance provided by hotels to manage its capability to supply products and services, as a response to the customers' requirements and ownership. Thus, for the independent hotels this issue is very important, while for hotels integrated within a hotel group is not so important (Petzer et al., 2008:19; Claver et al., 2006).

Another study carried-out in Spain over a 50-hotel sample (Espino-Rodriguez&Padron-Robaina, 2005), has revealed that application of the outsourcing strategy is carried-out for these activities that are not efficient or not generate value, in fact these that do not represent the source of getting a competitive advantage. At the same time, within the study, strong relations have been established between the adopted strategy and performance, and similar results have been achieved by other researchers, too: Dickson&Ginter, 1987; Avci et al., 2011; Petzer et al., 2008.

- ***Quality management.*** In the hotel sector, starting with 1980, there were concerns for quality of services and products supplied to customers (Johns, 1995) thanks to the impact they can have on the activity performance. Therefore, it has been noticed that quality management can impact the performance indicators in two ways (Garvin, 1984; Rust et

al., 1995; Reed et al., 1996): through an internal impact (efficiency improvement, cost cutting etc.) and an external impact (maximization of market share, increase the number of customers, achieving customer satisfaction, image improvement etc.) (Claver et al., 2006:351). Similar analytical results (Claver et al., 2006; Claver-Cortés et al., 2008; Tari et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2012) have highlighted that hotels implement the quality management systems as they are considered a way to:

- Improve service quality,
- Train employees,
- Develop a quality culture,
- Get the required economic efficiency (internal impact),
- Create a good image (external impact).

Consequently, the supply of high quality services fosters the rise of economic efficiency, increases the customer satisfaction in relation to the services provided by hotels and results in lack of inaccuracies.

- ***Human resources practices.*** In 1993, Schneider and Bowen sustained the idea that within service providers, human resources practices may represent the essential element in achieving the competitive advantage. Therefore, the role of human resources practices in achieving customer satisfaction is acknowledged within quantitative research (research carried-out in 42 hotels in Taiwan) (Tsaur&Lin, 2004), and improvement of service quality should be focused on personnel selection, training and payment of incentive bonuses (Lovelock, 1985; Schlesinger&Hiskett, 1991; Schneider et al., 1985,1995);
- ***Information technology.*** Importance of information technology implementation in hotels is overwhelming as a result of its advantages: getting loyal customers (through implementation of a Customer Relationship Management application), improvement of profitability and improvement of service supply.

In this regard, studies have sustained the applicability of information technology in hotels in order to achieve the competitive performance (Abu Kasim & Badriyah Minai, 2009; Wu&Lu, 2012). Moreover, at present, discussions about "proactive adoption of the new technologies" are under way (Dwyer &Edwards, 2009:329). Acceptation of this opinion is provided by the fact that strategies used by hotel managers should be much more proactive in their attempt to create new products, new technologies, new opportunities

and new prospects. Therefore, in the future, hotels should be proactive in creating knowledge, in developing tourist products and in exchanging knowledge together with a better knowledge about information computer systems. This approach sustains the management theory (Dwyer&Edwards, 2009:330) that states that knowledge management should be increasingly integrated and settled in an organization in order to foresee the change and to develop new products and services (Buhalis, 2003). We think that this approach contributes to addition of value to the hotel product and service and implicitly to achieving and maintaining the competitive advantage.

DEFINITION OF OBJECTIVES AND IMPORTANCE OF AREA OF RESEARCH

The credible significance given by researchers to tourism in general and to tourism unit in particular in the modern time, both nationally and internationally, in conjunction with statistical data supplied by foreign organizations in the field reveal the **importance of the research topic** both macroeconomically and microeconomically. Therefore, the strength of environment wherein tourism units operate – and implicitly hotels – complies with a strong axe concerning:

- Policy developed through the service diversification process,
- Step to customer orientation,
- Concerns regarding total quality,
- Development of strategic management,
- Introduction of new information technologies, *and*
- How human resources management is implemented.

In this regard, empirical studies are very few nationally, and target certain segments of service management in hotels, respectively those studies carried-out by: Radu et al., (2009), State & Istudor (2009), Bordean (2010), Bordean et al., (2011), providing the opportunity to pencil the scientific frame in relation to the approached topic. Under the circumstances, we want to describe the novelty degree of the paper, that consists of the following elements:

- ☞ The pattern suggested by the author that focuses on improvement of service management in hotels;
- ☞ How the research methodology is applied in this area;

- ☞ Some similar analytical results together with completely different results compared to the foreign ones in relation to the approached topic;
- ☞ Carrying-out a research aimed to the hotel sector in Mureş county.

This paper deals with an extremely actual topic in the hotel sector, causing theoretical and practical implications by means of clarifying some topics that have driven a series of debates about this topic and by providing to the decision makers in the field, a frame that results in the increase of economic efficiency and implicitly, the growth of competitiveness.

According to the importance of the research topic, we mention that the **main objective** of the scientific step comprises identification of elements that contribute to improvement of service management in hotels and of dimension wherein managerial practice is focused on these elements, in order to reach a high economic efficiency. To this effect, we want to determine the existence of some relations and associations between customer orientation and economic results, managerial practices and activity efficiency, but to measure the dimension of service diversification, in order to determine the improvement level of service management in hotels and to put forward proposals in this regard. This goal will be achieved through an exhaustive quantitative exploratory research, carried-out up to managerial level on hotels in Mureşcounty.

The **secondary objectives** come from the main objective of research and are bounded up to theoretical and applicative level. *Theoretically*, we notice the following objectives:

- ☞ Clarification of some modern concepts and approaches that aim to the tourism sector;
- ☞ Analysis of tourism nationally and internationally as basic area of economic and social activities;
- ☞ Systematic clarification of importance concerning tourism unit within modern economy;
- ☞ Clarification of concepts concerning service management in tourism units;
- ☞ Identification of models that focus on improvement of service management in hotels;
- ☞ Identification of some indicators that focus on analysis of economic efficiency in hotels;

Up to applicative level, objectives are the following:

- ☞ Identification of some relations between customer orientation and results in order to improve service management in hotels;

- ∞ explanation of some relations between customer orientation and classification category of hotels;
- ∞ identification of dimensions concerning service diversification in hotels;
- ∞ determination of how hotels are grouped through factors specific to service diversification;
- ∞ analysis of some relations between managerial perception in relation to strategy, quality management, information technology and economic efficiency indicators in order to improve the service management;
- ∞ identification of some similarities between the results of this research and the results of foreign research in the field.

In order to shape a frame suitable to the scientific step and achieving objectives aimed within research, we think it is important to perform a systematic presentation of this paper:

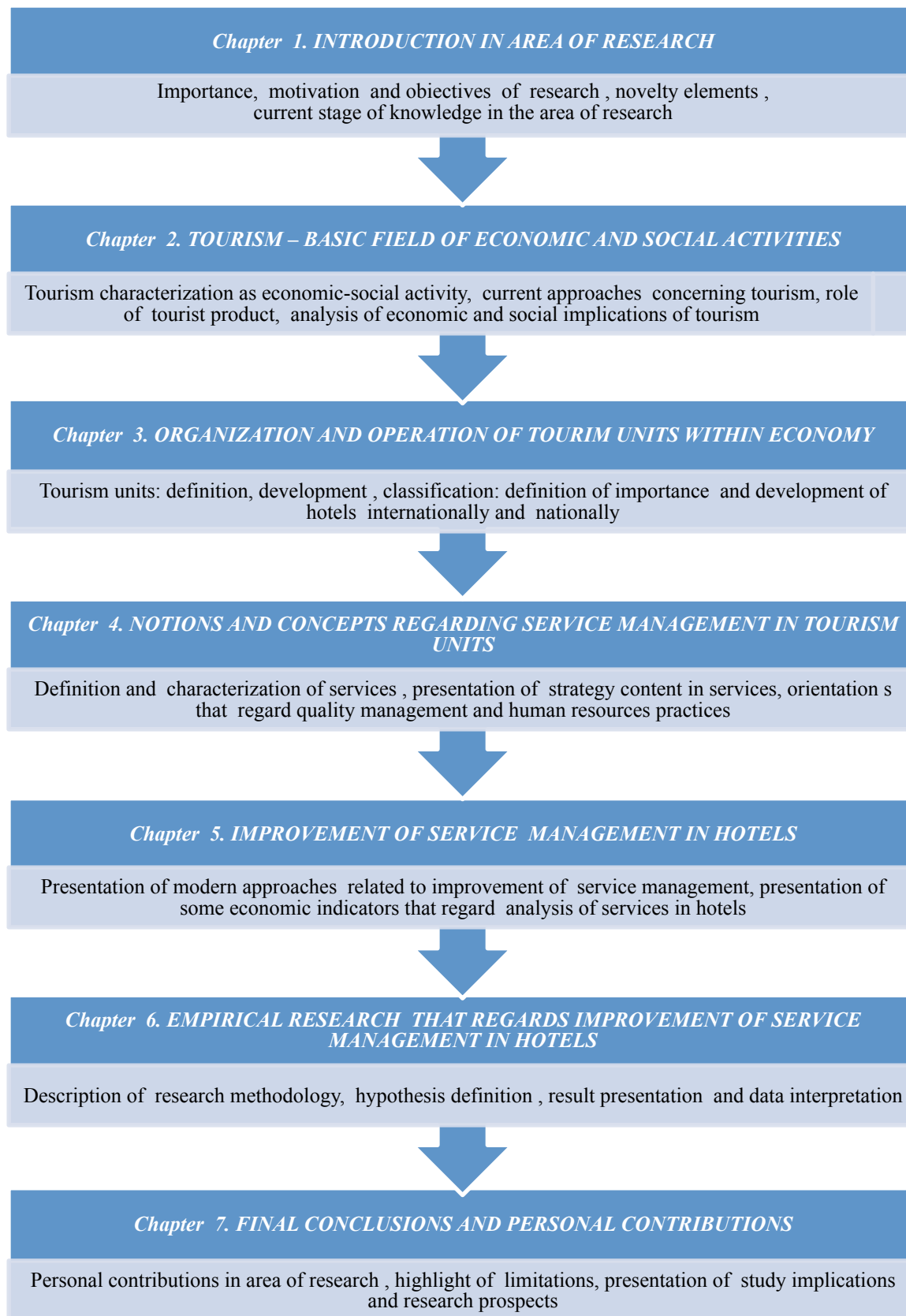


Figure no. 1. Structure of doctoral dissertation

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AS REGARDS IMPROVEMENT OF SERVICE MANAGEMENT

According to the linear model of scientific research, the first step is represented by establishment of objectives and definition of research assumptions.

Within this research, research assumptions are correlated and stated starting from the research objectives, in order to test every hypothesis, a wide range of statistical methods is used – both statistical data analysis methods, and hypothesis testing methods (table no. 1). The option for diversity of statistical methods is sustained by their complementary usage, the final aim being getting some as detailed as possible and full interpretations, following the example of research in the studied international reference, included in the main flow of publications. The chart of the research model is shown in the following figure:

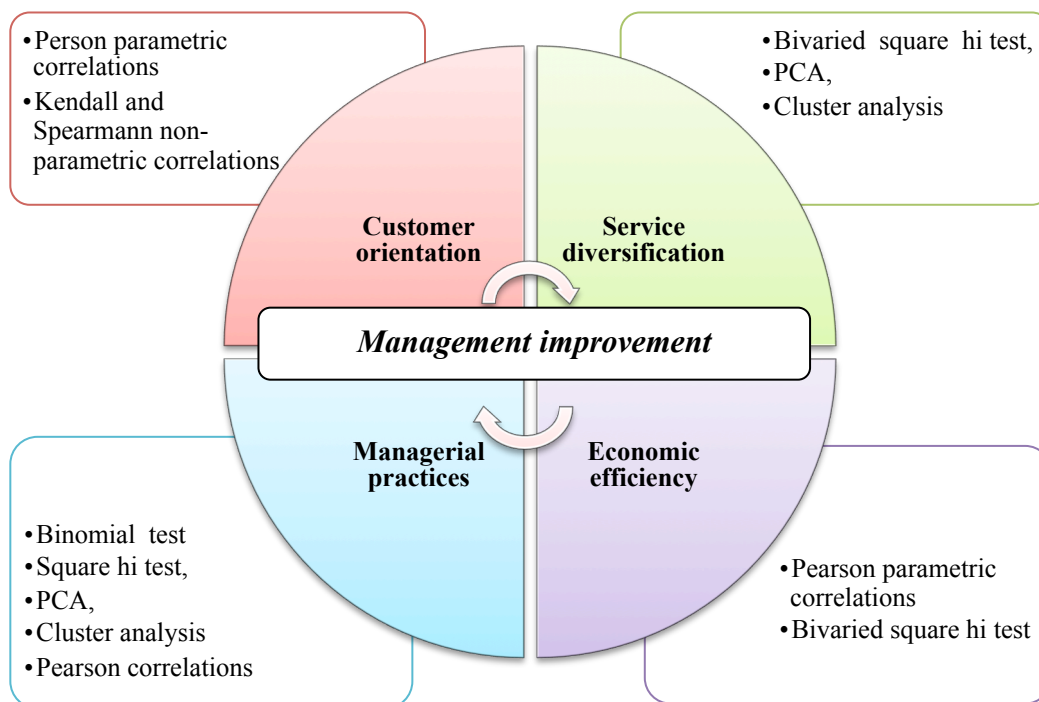


Figure no. 2. Chart of proposed research model

Table no. 1. Research objectives and assumptions

OBJECTIVES	HYPOTHESES RELATED TO EACH OBJECTIVE	Applied research method
O ₁ : Analysis of hotel sector in Mureş county using descriptive statistics		Weighted arithmetic average; absolute and accumulated frequencies
O ₂ : Analysis of correlation between customer orientation in line with classification category and in line with results, that contributes to improvement of service management in hotels	<i>H₁: Customer orientation is correlated directly proportional with classification category of a hotel</i>	Pearson parametric correlations Kendall and Spearmann non-parametric correlations
	<i>H₂: Dimension of customer orientation of hotels is at least medium correlated with dimension of economico-financial indicators</i>	Pearson parametric correlations
O ₃ : Analysis and grouping of services that contribute to diversification of hotel activity as support of improving service management	<i>H₃: There are no statistically significant differencies as regards dimension of diversification concerning hotel services according to classification category of hotels.</i>	Bivaried square hi test
	<i>H₄: There is a limited set of factors specific to diversification through the management decisions in hotels</i>	Principal component analysis
	<i>H₅: More than 50% of hotels included in the study are dedicated to business tourism</i>	Cluster analysis
O ₄ : Analysis of correlations and associations that regard service strategy in line with the hotel dimension and results in order to determine the extent of improving service management	<i>H₆: Dimension of hotels is not associated with managers' perception towards strategy in improving service mangement</i>	Bivaried square hi test
	<i>H₇: Dimension of hotels is correlated with managers' perception towards strategy in improvement of service management</i>	Pearson parametric correlations
	<i>H₈: Dimension of economico-finnacial indicators of hotels is not associated with managers' perception towards improvement of service management</i>	Bivaried square hi test
	<i>H₉: Dimension of economico-financial indicators of hotels is correlated with managers' perception towards strategy in improvement of service management</i>	Pearson parametric corelations
O ₅ : Analysis of correlations between quality management in line with human resources practices and in line with	<i>H₁₀: Quality management in hotels is positively correlated with economico-financial indicators in improvement of service management</i>	Pearson parametric correlations

results that determine improvement of service management in hotels.	<i>H₁₁: Human resources practices are positively correlated with quality management in improving service management</i>	Pearson parametric correlations
O ₆ : Analysis of correlations and associations of factors that define information technology in hotels, according to classification category, dimension and results, in order to entail the improvement level of service management.	<i>H₁₂: Implementation of information technology in hotels is positively correlated with economico-financial indicators in improving service management</i>	Pearson parametric correlations
	<i>H₁₃: There are no significant differencies as regards implementation of information technology as an aid of improving service management according to classification category of hotels</i>	Bivaried square hi test
	<i>H₁₄: There are no significant differencies as regards implementation of information technology as an aid of improving service management according to hotel dimension</i>	Bivaried square hi test
O ₇ : Typological analysis of hotels according to implementation of information technology in order to entail the improvement level of service management.	<i>H₁₅: There is a limited number of factors that define usage of information technology in hotels</i>	Principal component analysis
	<i>H₁₆: A small number of hotels will group in line with the software used by hotels.</i>	Cluster analysis
O ₈ : Analysis of importance concerning implementation of information technology that entails improvement of service management in hotels.	<i>H₁₇: At least 50% of surveyed hotels have revealed as being important or very important to implement information technology in order to improve service management</i>	Binomial test

The **general population** consists of 42 hotels of all classification categories located in Mureş county. The **surveyed population** consists of **general population**, motivation being that the general population is small-sized. Therefore, this study has been carried-out through the exhaustive research, data being taken over from the report entitled "List of tourist reception structures with classified accommodation functions" shown by the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism. A significant stage of research taken into consideration was the pretesting of questionnarie, that took place in August 2012, whereupon a management representative for every classification category of the hotels located in Târgu-Mureş, and as a result, time allotted to fill the questionnarie in was verified and some variables were modified.

As regards our research, the gathering method is the **inquiry** through **the total observance (exhaustive)**, and the tool used is the **questionnaire**. **The elements** studied within the questionnaire are the following:

- aspects that relate to a series of identification data of respondent and the hotel that is represented (classification category, position held, hotel dimension, experience of service, ground for tourists' travel and influence of seasonal character);
- dimensions (variables) in relation to which hotels comprised in the study are surveyed, in order to entail the improvement level of management. Variables regard the following segments: customer orientation (services supplied by the front-office and back-office personnel), supplied services (accommodation, food, entertaining, additional and customized services), managerial practices (strategy, quality, employees and information technology) and economic efficiency. For the first segment – customer orientation – I have emphasized a series of discrete, spontaneous behaviour that employees show voluntarily and that can help carry-out a positive evaluation of quality of services supplied to the customers. For the service segment we have surveyed the diversification extent of services in the hotels located in Mureş county, and for the managerial practices segment we have studied first of all, the extent to which these practices are correlated and associated with hotel dimension, classification category, and results, and secondly, we have studied the relation between these practices;
- economico-financial indicators of the hotels comprised in the study through indicators: occupancy in a hotel, turnover for accommodation services, turnover for food services, turnover for other services, market share and volume of income and expenditure.

DATA ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

All statistical methods used in this research for data analysis and hypothesis testing have been selected and applied taking into consideration the empirical research internationally in the area of hotel sector, the main goal being their validation for the Romanian hotel market. Concerning the analysis of data obtained, we mention that it has been carried-out through the following software: SPSS 17.0 (Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences) and Microsoft Office Excel.

Data analysis and hypothesis testing have been done in two stages, that comprise:

- results of descriptive analysis of observed data, *and*
- results of descriptive analysis, hypothesis testing and data interpretation for dimensions that regard improvement of service management.

As the results of descriptive analysis, hypothesis testing and data interpretation for dimensions that regard improvement of service management present an overwhelming importance within the study, we consider it is important to describe them below.

The first element that contributes to improvement of hotel service is represented by **customer orientation**. Therefore, the first **hypothesis (H_1)** within our research: *Customer orientation is correlated directly proportional with classification category of the hotel*, has been tested through the calculation of the Pearson correlation coefficient. Results **confirm** hypothesis, the only exception being represented by the variable: *Personnel provides questionnaires for testing tourists' opinion with regard to quality and satisfaction of supplied services*. This situation can be explained in that the testing of tourists' opinion about satisfaction of supplied services can be carried-out through other possibilities (for instance, through questionnaires placed in hotel rooms).

Studies in the area (Tajeddini, 2010) have surveyed the impact of customer orientation on economic efficiency of hotels activity, through quantitative studies. The results of these studies have emphasized that hotel managers that regard customer orientation as a priority, succeed to get the required profit and sales alongside investment profitability (Tajeddini, 2010:227). In this regard, we have carried-out a **second hypothesis (H_2)** within the research: *Dimension of*

customer orientation of hotels is at least medium correlated with dimension of economico-financial indicators. The hypothesis testing has been carried-out through calculation of the Pearson correlation coefficient for variables that assign customer orientation and economico-financial indicators of hotels. The results partly acknowledge hypothesis, most variables that describe customer orientation being at least medium correlated, positively or directly, with a statistical significance of at least 0.05, with economico-financial indicators.

Having as main objective, diversification and implicitly improvement of services, hotel managers can decide extension of range concerning the standard services required for legislation, in order to meet the current consumption requirements. Extension of the service range should take into account the current trends in the area that rule the hotel sector, and should not take into consideration by any means the hotel classification category. Therefore, the two or three-star hotels can get service diversification by supplying some services such as: hairdresser's, hairstyle, manicure, Wellness center, organization of some corporate events (anniversaries of companies, business dinners etc.), thus achieving the required economic efficiency. Under the circumstances, we have defined **hypothesis 3 (H₃):** *There are no statistically significant differences as regards dimension of diversification hotel services in line with hotel classification category.* In order to check the relation between dimension of diversification the services supplied to tourists of hotels included in the study and classification category, we used the χ^2 test that is based on testing statistical hypotheses.

Following the application of the χ^2 test, the third hypothesis has been **partly invalidated**, for very few variables there are no statistically significant differences according to classification category.

In order to complement these results, I have thought necessary to formulate **hypothesis 4 (H₄):** *There is a limited set of factors specific to diversification through management decisions in hotels.* This hypothesis has been tested by applying the principal component analysis (PCA) over all variables describing the diversification services in hotels included in the study.

The variables remained in the study have been grouped in three principal components that explain 79.73% of total variance and are those for which the χ^2 test invalidated the null hypothesis, and led to the conclusion that diversification is different according to hotel

classification category. The results **acknowledge that hypothesis 4**, the 51 initial variables describing the diversification services of hotels included in the study, after repeated processing, have been reduced to a number of three new factors, named as follows: **relaxing and entertaining services**, **business tourism services** and **auxiliary services for accommodation services** that complement business tourism services (figure no. 3)

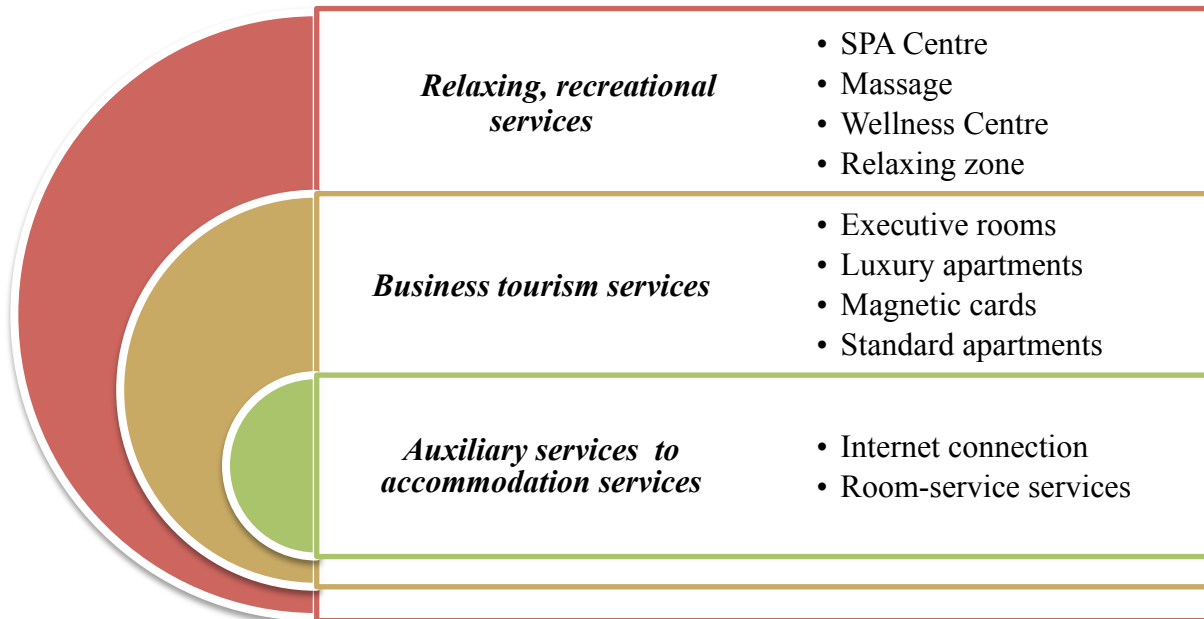


Figure no. 3. Factors specific to diversification of identity by applying the PCA method

In order to survey how hotels are grouped in line with classification category, we used the **cluster analysis** on the new principal components (CP1, CP2 and CP3). In this regard, we have carried-out **Hypothesis 5 (H₅):** *More than 50% of hotels included in the study are dedicated to business tourism.* In order to state the number of clusters, firstly we have applied the hierarchical cluster analysis, based on which, hotels grouped in two clusters. **Cluster 2** is defined by the principal component 2 and is different by the principal component 1, is defined by **business tourism services**, respectively, not being defined by **relaxing and entertaining services**. According to the results of the ANOVA analysis, cluster 2 is statistically significant for the three principal components, and a number of 23 hotels are defined on this cluster, that belong to classification category 3, 4 and 5 stars. Therefore, we mention that in Mureş county there are 23 hotels that are dedicated to **business tourism** and are not dedicated to **relaxing and recreational**

tourism. In conclusion, **hypothesis 5** has been totally confirmed, a percentage of 55% of total hotels included in the study is dedicated to business tourism.

Implementation of strategy is critical for the success of hotels, and strategic orientation relates to how a firm succeeds to adapt to external competitive environment (Hrebiniak, 2009:12 after Miles&Snow, 1978; Mintzberg, 1973). As a rule, researchers use strategic orientation to investigate the relation between a firm's strategy and performance (Avci et al., 2011:148 after Dess et al., 1993), as well as the relation between managers' perception in relation to the importance of competitive strategies and hotel dimension (Petzer et al., 2008). Under the circumstances, the following **hypotheses** were enunciated within research:

H₆: Hotel dimension is not associated with managers' perception in relation to strategy in improvement of service management

H₇: Hotel dimension is correlated with managers' perception in relation to strategy in improvement of service management

H₈: Dimension of economico-financial indicators of hotels is not associated with managers' perception in relation to strategy in improvement of service management

H₉: Dimension of economico-financial indicators of hotels is correlated with managers' perception in relation to strategy in improvement of service management

The results have emphasized the following aspects: hypotheses 6, 7 and 9 have been partly **validated**, and hypothesis 8 has been **invalidated**.

The most important researchers in the area of quality (Deming, 1982; Juran, 1988), have studied the relation between quality management and performance, indicating that the role of quality is critical in order to improve the performance indicators. In general terms, the empirical literature that presented the relation between quality management and performance, use different variables that express quality and reports mixed results (Tari et al., 2010: 501). As a result, we have thought necessary to formulate **hypothesis 10 (H₁₀)**, *Quality management in hotels is positively correlated with economico-financial indicators in improvement of service management*, respectively. The results of the Pearson correlation analysis for variables that designate quality management and economico-financial indicators in hotels included in the study, emphasize average values of correlation coefficients (statistically significant) but also

values non-correlated significantly statistically. In conclusion, we state that hypothesis 10 has been **partly confirmed**.

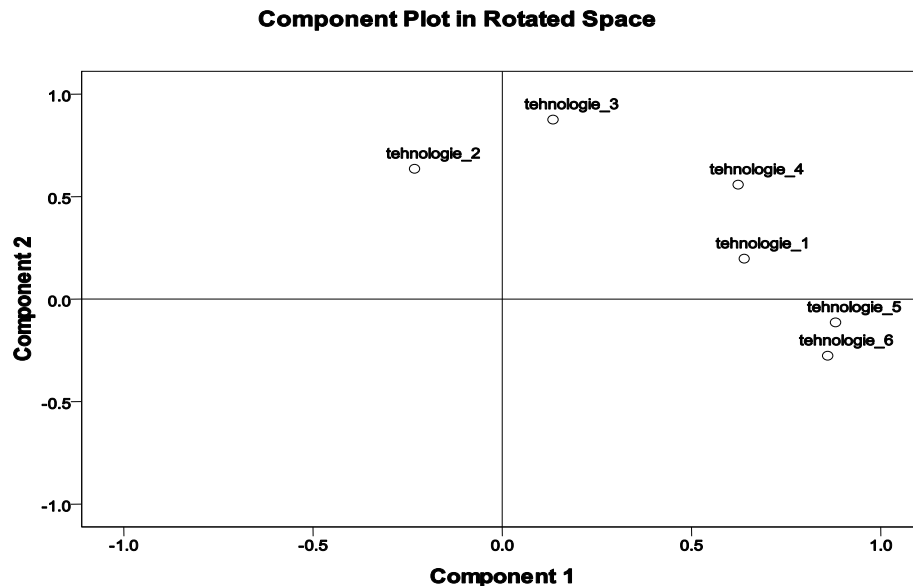
The human resources management comprises all management decisions and human resources practices that affect or directly influence employees (Dhammika, 2010:2). Therefore, the need to develop and implement human resources practices is inherent. The specialty studies (Lovelock, 1985; Schlesinger&Heskett, 1991; Schneider et al., 1985, 1995) have sustained the idea (through empirical research) according to which, improvement of quality should be focused on human resources practices, selection, training, improvement and bonus, respectively in service providers (Tsaour&Lin, 2004:472). These studies have determined wording of **hypothesis 11 (H_{11}):** *Human resources practices are positively correlated with quality management in improving the service management*. Results of analysis have led to the **in full acknowledgement** of hypothesis.

In the course of time, service providers have invested a great deal in information technology, in order to increase activity efficiency, improve productivity and sustain management decisions (Kim et al., 2008:500). Thus, I have thought it is important to carry-out **hypothesis 12 (H_{12}):** *Implementation of information technology in hotels is positively correlated with economic – financial indicators in improving service management*. Hypothesis testing has been carried-out by the Pearson correlation coefficient, and results have led to **hypothesis invalidation**.

In order to study thoroughly the survey, I have used the PCA method, in order to group initial variables that relate to usage of information technology, in new variables. In this regard, I have worded **hypothesis 15 (H_{15}):** *There is a limited number of factors that define usage of information technology in hotels*.

By applying the PCA, correlation coefficient matrix revealed us that the variable *We use services of some specialized sites that provide us consultancy and online advertising* has registered very low correlations (below 0.1) with the other variables, that resulted in its reject. The second processing reveals medium and strong correlations between the six remaining variables. Consequently, we mention that variables remained in the study have grouped in two principal components that explain 67% of total variance. The first component explains approximately 40% of variance, and the second component explains approximately 27% of variance. The two formed components reveal a discriminatory group between services that define usage of

information technology, therefore the study contains hotels that either use *professional software applications of hotel administration*, or use *standard software applications* in managing accommodation and food services. Graphic representation in two-dimensional plane of initial variables on principal components is the following:



Graph no. 1. Graphic representation of initial variables on principal components

In conclusion, hypothesis has been in full **acknowledged**, resulting a low number of factors, two principal components, respectively (*professional software applications of hotel administration* and *standard software applications of hotel administration*).

In order to complement these results, we have thought it is important to verify by means of the binomial test if a proportion of 50% of hotels included in the study have implemented applications focused on information technology, the related **hypothesis (H_{17})** being: *at least 50% of hotels in the study have revealed as being important or very important implementation of information technology in order to improve service management.*

Starting from the results of the binomial test, the test related hypothesis has been acknowledged only for variables *We use standard software (Word, Excel, data bases)* and *We use services of some specialized sites that provide us consultancy and online advertising*, the latter having a statistical significance of $\alpha=0,16$. Therefore, hypothesis is just **partly acknowledged**.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND PERSONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Presentation of conclusions within a scientific paper is the last stage of research, a very important time as it emphasizes the substance of results over the four years of research.

Theoretically, the main personal contributions are aimed to know the selected area of research, and are materialized in the following directions:

- ☞ *profiling and tourism analysis as the basic area of economic and social activities.* In this regard, we have thought that a scientific approach of tourism is important through approaching its development, outlining, definition and characterization as economic and social activity, alongside with presentation of the main implications that it assumes. Therefore, from the first definitions given to tourism it resulted that it assumes an activity of relaxation, recovery and pleasure, with socio-economic implications, assigning the following implications: business, medical, religious, sport, social, etc. Alongside with these meanings, the content of tourist activity has acquired new levels, the notions of "industry" and "hospitality" being introduced, frequently used in the specialty domestic and foreign literature, at the same time resulting in debates and controversies between specialists and practitioners.
- ☞ *Systematic clarification of importance concerning tourism unit within economy.* In order to emphasize this aspect, we have clarified the elements that are connected with history, development, definition, classification and analysis of hotels internationally and nationally;
- ☞ *Presentation of the improvement model of service management in hotels.* In order to present this research aspect, we have covered three stages. Firstly, we have clarified the main elements that are around the area of service management (by covering the foreign references within the main flow of publications), the content and foundation of service strategy, the main orientations concerning quality of services in tourism units, the information technology and human resources practices, respectively. All this elements have been described within chapter four, emphasizing that tourism units should manage their work through a multidimensional management process that includes:
 - A strategy suitable to the environment they operate in,

- A continuous concern for quality,
- An increased attention paid to human resources activity, *and*
- Implementation of information technology.

Secondly, we have settled the significance of improvement conception applied in the area of service management. A first starting point in improving the service management in hotels is represented by service diversification, that represents addition of some new or improved services (addition of some new services to accommodation, food, entertaining and auxiliary services) to the services that are required obligatorily by the legislation in force (basic services). Another important point in improving the service management is represented by customer orientation. The elements that assign customer orientation are: personnel condescendence, their promptitude in settling problems when they involve in, customized attention, supply of a service when it is promised, services supplied by the hotel personnel, respectively. The last particularly important aspect in the significance of improvement concept applied in this area is represented by managerial practices implemented by hotels. The last stage has been earmarked to presentation of the improvement model of service management in hotels, that represented a complex step of research.

Empirical personal contributions are important for both hotel managers included in the study and the decision makers existing nationally, being represented by the results achieved at research level:

- ☞ *Identification of the relation between customer orientation and the results that contribute to improvement of service management in hotels.* The results of research carried-out on hotels included in the study reveal a positive relation among most elements that entail the dimension of customer orientation and economico-financial indicators. These results are sustained by foreign studies within the hotel sector (Tajeddini, 2010) that highlighted a strong connection, with a strong statistical significance between the dimension of customer orientation and results, managers that consider customer orientation a priority, succeed to reap profit, required sales and profitability, respectively.
- ☞ *Extent wherein service diversification in hotels contributes to improvement of service management.* In order to highlight this aspect, firstly, we have verified the relation

between the dimension of service diversification (for all range of supplied services – accommodation, food, entertaining, auxiliary and customized services) and hotel classification category in the study. Results show that managerial perception in relation to service diversification varies according to classification category of the hotel included in the study, and a very small number of services does not contribute to diversification progressively. Secondly, we have identified factors specific to service diversification through management decisions in hotels. Therefore, the 51 initial elements describing diversification services in hotels, have been reduced to a number of three new factors: relaxing and recreational services, business tourism services and services that are auxiliary to accommodation services and complement the business tourism services. We also mention that the variables remained in the study and for which there are factors specific to diversification belong to the hotels classified with three, four and five stars.

- ☞ *Determination of how hotels are grouped according to the classification category through factors specific to diversification.* The results of analysis carried-out in this regard emphasizes that in Mureş county there are 23 hotels of 3, 4 and 5 stars dedicated to business tourism and 9 hotels of 3, 4 and 5 stars dedicated to relaxing and recreational tourism. As a result, a percentage of 55% of total hotels in Mureş county are dedicated to business tourism, 66% of total hotels of three, four and five stars are dedicated to business tourism, respectively.
- ☞ *Identification of some relations between managerial practices and results in order to improve the service management.* The results of analysis carried-out emphasized medium and low intensity relations between elements that built-up the strategy in services, quality management and economico-financial indicators, as well as statistically insignificant relations between variables that entail information technology and economico-financial indicators, fact that entail to enounce the following improvement proposals of service management in hotels to increase economic efficiency:
 - *Strengthening of service strategy* by developing some unique and original services that are in line with international standards, providing some tip and incentive bonuses, paying a special attention to get loyal customers, diversification of supply to attract customers and last but not least implementation of service outsourcing. In order to sustain this aspect we want to

mention that foreign empirical studies in this field (Dickson&Ginter, 1987; Avci et al., 2011; Petzer et al., 2008; Espino-Rodriguez&Padron-Robaina, 2005) have proved the existence of a strong relation between implementation of a strategy suitable in hotels and performance;

- *Improvement of quality concerning supplied services.* In our opinion, we think that managers that work in the hotel sector should first of all pay a special attention to tangible facilities, hotel design, upkeep of spaces, landscape and neighbourhood, respectively. Secondly, they should pay a special attention to quality control of products and services, and thirdly, they should be concerned for hotel personnel, employees' responsibilities and obligations entail to create some quality services, respectively. In this regard we want to mention that the results of foreign studies have proved the relation between quality of supplied products and services and performance (Wang et al., 2012; Claver et al., 2006), relation that will result in achieving the sustainable competitive advantage.
- *Implementation of information technology.* Information technology should represent a basic resource in hotels to rise economic efficiency. This statement can be sustained through the research carried-out in the area, that emphasized the existence of an extremely important relation between implementation of information technology and performance (Kim et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2012; Abu Kasim & Badriyah Minai, 2009).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The main **limitations of research** that can emerge, have the following directions:

- Proposed research model. Improvement of service management in hotels represents an extremely complex and dashing area of research, and the proposed model that focuses on customer orientation, service diversification and managerial practices, is not an exhaustive one. In this regard, the model can be improved, developed and perfected within the dynamic environment of the area of research;
- Although the study is an exploratory one, through the total observance, the studied population is small-sized (42 hotels), therefore its representativeness and generalization

up to a geographical region or nationally cannot be sustained and should be regarded and analyzed carefully;

- Improvement of service management in hotels is approached only managerially and as a result, we mention that the research focused on service diversification, customer orientation and managerial practices requires an additional support;

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING AREA OF RESEARCH

Taking the limitations of research into account, we consider it is important to present the following **recommendations** concerning the area of research:

- ☞ Extension of research up to a region (for example, up to the Centre Development Region) or even nationally to include a higher number of studied units to get research representativeness and decide efficient and smart suggestions in the studied area;
- ☞ Completion of a research to include an illustrative number of hotels that belong to a national or international hotel chain as well as hotels that operate based on a management contract or franchise;
- ☞ Completion of a comparative as well as a complementary study to allow approaching the study-improvement of service management in hotels – in relation to customers, satisfaction level of customers compared to services supplied to hotels, respectively to allow finally improvement of services (diversification, improvement of service quality, personnel training etc.) and achievement of optimum balance between customer satisfaction and activity profitability;
- ☞ Improvement of the research model that targets the following directions: customer orientation, service diversification and managerial practices;
- ☞ Completion of a future analysis to include the impact of service management on performance, by taking into consideration both economico – financial indicators and non-financial indicators;

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