

# Quality evaluation of the services provided by enterprises promoting rafting activities

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## Introduction

With the growth of the interest in recreational and leisure sport activities, we have been watching a rise in the number of enterprises promoting rafting activities on the Paiva River.

In a market where competition has been leading to the search for new management practises and the definition of alternative differentiation strategies regarding materials and activity support equipments, the service quality appears as an alternative which provides the sports organization with a competitive advantage (Correia, 2001).

Only by understanding how the client perceives the quality of the service, can the marketing managers be capable of defining effective strategies. (Grönroos, 2000).

Bearing that in mind, our study sought to investigate the way practitioners perceive the quality and, at the same time, intended to evaluate the services provided by the enterprises promoting rafting activities on the Paiva River, through the analysis of the difference between the expectations and perceptions of the clients (Zeithaml et al., 1990).

Therefore, we used the SERVQUAL instrument created by Zeithaml et al. (1990), duly adapted by us for the present study.

## Methodology

### Sample

The universe of our study consisted in the 8 enterprises which promote rafting activities on the Paiva River in 2003. We randomly distributed 236 questionnaires.

Our sample was constituted by 77,5% male individuals and 22,5% female. Their age was between 20 and 54 years old. Agewise, the most significant interval was between 35 and 44 years old, with a weight of 39% of the sample. The most representative education level was the university degree, with a weight of 39%. It should also be mentioned that for 68,6% of the inquired it was their first rafting activity.

### Instrument

The instrument used was a questionnaire adapted by us for the rafting activity and based on the SERVQUAL<sup>39</sup>.

The variables at study were divided into two parts: the first part comprised the socio-demographic variables: (i) sex; (ii) age; (iii) academic qualifications; and (iv) previous experience.

In the second, the inquired were asked to give their opinion regarding each item, using 7 point, *Likert* type scales of answers (1= I totally disagree to 7= I totally agree).

The questionnaire was comprised of a scale and its purpose was to evaluate the perception of the service quality, integrating five dimensions: (i) Tangibility: Questions 1 – 12; (ii) Reliability: Questions 12 – 22; (iii) Response Capability : Questions 23 – 27; (iv) Trust: Questions 28 – 35; and (v) Empathy: Questions 36 – 44.

Beyond the consulted methodologies in the area of knowledge and aiming to guarantee the applicability and validation by criteria of the proposed questionnaire, a pre test was made, from which some deficiencies were identified and corrected. In general, the difficulties found were mainly related to the terminology used in the treatment of the contents.

### Statistical analysis

In the statistical analysis of the collected data we used SPSS<sup>40</sup> version 11.0.

For the characterization of the sample at study descriptive statistics were used (frequency, percentage) in the studied components. Afterwards, the normality<sup>41</sup> of the collected data was checked.

With the purpose of testing the hypotheses of the research, a factorial analysis was conducted. Namely, the  $t^{42}$  test for paired and independent samples ( $p < .05$ ).

<sup>39</sup> Questionnaire to measure the perception of the service quality (Zeithaml et al., 1990).

<sup>40</sup> *Statistical Package for the Social Science*.

<sup>41</sup> *Kolmogorov-Smirnov*.

In order to compare two or more groups regarding a continuous variable we conducted the *ANOVA* variance analysis, also with a significance degree of  $p < .05$ .

## Results and Discussion

The management of any sports organization has to work from the integrated information collected from the practitioners, the families, the technicians, the sponsors, the suppliers, the government and the market competition. It is important to know the market trends, the preferences, the new techniques, the recent technologies and the multiple interests involved in order to acquire resources and increase the efficiency of the sports services promotion processes (Correia, 2001).

Aiming to study and evaluate the client's perception of quality of the services rendered by the enterprises promoting rafting activities, and based on the research made as well as on the results we can conclude that:

1. There is a significant statistical difference between the formulated expectations and the perceptions of the clients of the enterprises promoting rafting activities on the Paiva river;
2. The tangibility and reliability dimensions are the most important to the clients in the definition of an excellent enterprise;
3. Among the reliability, response capability and trust dimensions there is a negative correlation in the perception of the service;
4. The female gender possesses both more expectations and perceptions of quality in the tangibility, reliability and trust dimensions than the male gender ;
5. Clients without previous experience have more expectations than those who have already tried rafting. Regarding the perceptions, those who try the activity for the first time are more demanding towards the reliability and response capability dimensions;
6. Concerning the age of the practitioner there are some statistically meaningful differences related to the trust and empathy dimensions. The group whose age is between 20-24 possesses the greatest expectations in the trust dimension and the group whose age is between 45-54 years old has the greatest expectations in the empathy dimension;

From the analysis of the results we emphasise the statistically significant differences concerning the expectations and perceptions of the clients of the mentioned enterprises, meaning that the quality perception of the same enterprises is low.

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<sup>42</sup> Normal distribution (parametric test).