

**An investigation of the perceptions and lived experiences of
60 + British tourists in 4-star hotels within the Northern
region of Malta.**

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Abstract

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<p>Satisfaction of tourists with a tourist destination is an important prerequisite for the development of the destination itself, especially because, based on the (dis) satisfaction of guests, decisions are made to improve the tourist offer of the destination itself. The level of satisfaction, and especially the perception and experience of tourists when visiting a tourist destination, are the final products of a tourist destination. Satisfaction is the most important reason why tourists visit tourist destinations, and satisfaction is a determinant of the quality of tourist visits, as well as the quality of the tourist offer of a particular tourist destination. Tourists have initial expectations about the quality of service offered to them in a particular tourist destination. These expectations are formed through messages, brochures, mass media, information obtained from close people, etc. If the entire experience meets or exceeds the initial expectations of tourists, it is considered that a satisfactory level of tourist satisfaction has been achieved, which is important for several reasons. Satisfied tourists will recommend a tourist destination to others, so this form is the cheapest and most effective form of marketing and promotion. Tourist satisfaction contributes to increasing the retention rate of tourists through their loyalty and patronage, which helps to achieve economic goals such as increasing the number of tourists and total income. It can be said that the overall satisfaction of tourists is based on the quality of the tourist offer, as well as on the price and perceived value of the tourist service. This paper explores the perceptions and experiences of 60+ British tourists during their visit to Malta. This age group was considered suitable because it is assumed that they have the freest time and financial opportunities for travel. The 4-star hotels in the Northern region of Malta have been selected, and the bias of the research stems from the author's stay and work in the hotel industry in this area. The paper primarily examines how much the historical and cultural ties between the UK and Malta affect Malta's popularity as a tourist destination, as well as what are the current benefits are that attract British tourists.</p>		
Keywords 60+ British tourists in Malta, perceptions and lived experiences of British tourists, 4-star hotels within the Northern region of Malta, connections between UK and Malta, hospitality in Malta		

Declaration of Authenticity



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Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of **Cristina Cristabelle Tabone** .

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CONTENTS

1.	28
1. INTRODUCTION.....	28
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	29
2.1. Explanation of basic concepts.....	30
2.2. Connection of Malta and Great Britain	33
2.2.1. Historical timeline of the takeover of the Maltese Islands	33
2.3. Tourist satisfaction.....	35
2.3.1. Factors of tourist satisfaction.....	37
2.4. Quality of service.....	42
2.4.1. Characteristics of tourist and hotel services.....	44
2.4.2. Measuring the quality of hotel services.....	46
2.5. Relationship between service quality and perception	48
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	50
4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS.....	53
5. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS.....	63
6. CONCLUSION.....	70
7. REFERENCES	73
APPENDICES	78
1.1 Appendix 1	78
1.2 Appendix 2	80
1.3 Appendix 3	81
1.4 Appendix 4	82
1.5 Appendix 5	83
1.6 Appendix 6	90

1. INTRODUCTION

From subjective experiences both as a visiting tourist and an employee in the hospitality industry, it was observed that British tourists form a significant part of the tourism market being attracted to the Maltese islands. Indeed, they represent a strong market of tourists targeted to visit the Maltese islands.

Based on the results of research conducted for the purposes of this paper, it is noticeable that some of the main reasons for large visits to the Maltese Islands by British tourists and what contributes to their positive experiences and perceptions are the following:

- In Malta, English is a legally recognised and existing official language, so communication in the mother tongue allows tourists easier orientation;
- Maltese culture is a combination of many cultures that have been in contact with the islands for centuries, with British culture being dominant, so that Britons can enjoy experiencing it;
- Maltese cuisine includes dishes from traditional British cuisine;
- Frequent and affordable air transport from the UK to the island and back is provided.

A strong factor in the attractiveness of the islands for this nationality constitutes the comfort of finding food in restaurants which is similar to that in the UK (such as English breakfast, fish and chips and so on ...). Having access to a favourite meal gives comfort when away from home; in fact, many elderly tourists in the northern region demonstrate a preference for English breakfast during their stay. Some local pubs targeting tourists from the UK usually choose names for such establishments with British characteristics. This is especially popular in the island's northern area where the pubs provide an atmosphere close to that at home (Ballou, 2014).

It is interesting to note that some compare the Maltese city of Buġibba to the British one of Blackpool (Rix, 2019, p. 41). However, the art of mutual culture and history is an especially important chapter for such tourists, as Malta was under British occupation for over a century, which has left a deep imprint on the island's culture and history (Castillo, 2006). For instance, nowadays Malta is still part of the Commonwealth community. The Commonwealth is an association of countries around the world that are deeply connected to the British Empire (The Commonwealth, 2022). Overall, fifty-four countries are part of the commonwealth unity (The Commonwealth, 2022) Adding Malta to the list in the early twentieth century would play a significant role in the tourism hospitality industry through several unique occasions and projects

of this community. In accordance with the above and being that the researcher is employed in the hospitality industry, the decision has been taken to explore the reasons for the great interest displayed by British tourists in Malta. Therefore, the aim of the research will be to examine and investigate the perceptions and lived experiences of British tourists aged 60 + in 4-star hotels within the northern region of Malta. This age category was chosen based on the observation that most British tourists visiting Malta, at least in the northern region where the researcher's subjective experiential work exposure is situated, are older people. The assumption is that this is the case as this age group is more flexible, both financially and in terms of leisure time.

The research will be conducted by gathering information from guests staying in four-star hotels in two resorts located in the northern regions of Malta, Buġibba and Mellieħa. For the purposes of the research, a questionnaire containing 34 questions will be used, which includes demographic questions and questions about the visit to Malta.

After the introduction, a review of the literature is given, which first explains the basic concepts related to the topic of work, namely hotel standards, hotel categorisation and the connection between Malta and Great Britain. It then discusses the perception and satisfaction of tourism users and their measurement. These data were collected from secondary sources; that is, from existing literature and research. The third chapter describes the methods and materials used to conduct research and process data. The fourth chapter presents the results of the research and analysis of the results. The fifth chapter is a discussion, whereas the study's last chapter consists of the conclusion, after which the literature utilized is listed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will first list and explain the basic concepts of the work's subject, which are the standards that a hotel should meet as a catering facility, as well as the categorisation of four-star hotels, as the latter tends to most affect the tourist experience, among other matters such as the destination, climate, culture and so on. It will also demonstrate the historical connection between Malta and Great Britain and which aspects of British culture and customs have remained on the island. The rest of the chapter provides an overview of the literature related to the perception and satisfaction of users of tourist services and their measurement, with special focus on the quality of service as the most key factor of tourist satisfaction.

2.1. Explanation of basic concepts

Modern trends in tourism and hospitality demand that all service providers adapt to continuous adjustment and innovations, implementing changes in business behaviour when required. Some authors claim that competition is one of the key reasons for resorting to the highest quality offer, and that developing different standards for the improvement and maintenance of the quality of hotel services is a basic prerequisite for successful business and survival in the tourism market (Vujko et al., 2015). In fact, it can be said that standardisation and quality are interdependent terms, since it is the standards that prescribe a certain quality. Today, quality is a way of doing business, especially in the tertiary sector of the economy. Quality service becomes a prerequisite for successful marketing management, but also impacts survival in the tourism market. Thus, quality is the foundation of competitive advantage. This is the business policy of all modern companies, which is achieved by respecting the standards of quality and quality management systems (Vujko et al., 2015). Standards are proof that a certain organisation possesses quality. Standardisation is a voluntary, complex, and ongoing process that requires teamwork and is implemented in several basic phases. The application of the standard simplifies the work process, rationalises costs and increases the speed of task execution, thus achieving quality of services (Vujko et al., 2015).

The hotel is a representative building of the tertiary sector (Vujko et al., 2017, p. 57). It is what the tourist first sees and may determine an opinion about the tourist destination or venues. Therefore, in tourism as an economic and social phenomenon, the hotel is the place where the largest number of services are provided. Thus, it must respect the required standards, its primary task being that of providing quality service. The number of stars usually testifies to a certain quality of the hotel. The stars in the hotel industry represent the level of service that consumers can expect. Usually, with one star, guests expect simple service and economic benefits. When choosing a five-star hotel, visitors expect impeccable service and comfort, a good location and the existence of various recreational facilities (Vujko et al., 2017, p. 57). Categorisation varies from one country to another, while standards are developed based on the best world experiences, not only in the organisation or country, but on a global level (Vujko et al., 2017, p. 58).

In 4-star hotels, first-class equipment is essential. According to the European Hotel Standard (EuHS), the equipment must be rich and meet high needs. For instance, it is necessary for such hotels to invest in special sound protection. Attention is also paid to modern telecommunication technologies. Technical equipment (sanitary and electrical installations) should also be modern, such that air conditioning measures must be adapted to regional requirements. The maintenance of these devices must be "very good". The difference in relation to an establishment with a 3-star rating is the following: the equipment must be comfortable and harmonious and meet the high demands of housing, especially for the living room. On the other hand, the difference compared to a 5-star establishment is the following: the equipment does not have to have an exclusive and luxurious note, but must be of first-class quality (EuHS, 2012).

One way of bridging the existing gap between perceived and expected service quality is to standardise services. According to some authors (Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2015; Kasiria et al., 2017), the introduction of standards in the hotel business allows hoteliers to simplify work activities, increase productivity, but most importantly, gives guests a sense of security (Popescu, 2011). The general objectives of standardisation developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) confirm the significant importance and breadth of the application of standards. In fact, the main purpose of standardisation in the hotel industry is to ensure the recognisability of the service that the guest can count on. Therefore, the introduction of hotel standards enables easier positioning in the tourist market, protects consumers, increases their information about the hotel offer and also creates a prerequisite for their loyalty. Standards create a sense of security for the guest; they are a guarantee that the guest will receive a quality that is highlighted by a certain standard - the number of stars, a quality label or some other special label. The goal of standardisation is to provide the guest with the expected quality of hotel products and services and keep them satisfied. The application of standards also encourages rational business and profit making (Vujko et al., 2017, pp. 63-64).

This dissertation will explore and investigate the perceptions and experiences of British tourists aged 60+ in 4-star hotels in the northern region of Malta. The British make up around 30% of arrivals each year (MALTA, 2016 Any author or proper references?). These are mostly British retirees who visit Malta primarily because of the temperate climate in the winter months. Research conducted by Avellino (2015) shows that older adult British visitors cultivate a "love" for Malta, which Maltese anglophiles reciprocate, despite some tensions between the two nations in the past. This relationship extends beyond a simple economic transaction and is

based on social, symbolic and cultural exchanges, thus representing a multidimensional approach to the motives for why British tourists visit the Maltese islands.

British tourists are especially fond of Malta because of its Mediterranean charm and climate, combined with lingering Anglo-Saxon traditions (MALTA, 2016). Malta formed part of the British Empire for more than 150 years, so it is no surprise that business, law and education have a British flair. Today, much evidence of Mediterranean "Britishism" can be found in the daily life of the Maltese. (Aquamarine-Moscow, 2022).

Together with Maltese, English constitutes an official language. It is widely used in communication. In the cities of Malta, especially in the capital, Valletta, numerous shops and cafes with British names can be found. These were built in the middle of the last century. Visitors are always surprised and touched by antique red British mailboxes and telephone boxes, even though they have long since disappeared from British streets. Driving in Malta is on the left, as it is in Britain. Many old British cars can be seen on the road: Morris Minors, Ford Anglia's and Prefects, Triumphs, Bedford trucks and buses, created in the 50s, 60s and 70s. Many of them are still used daily as transport, while some drivers only use older models on special occasions. Maltese cuisine also adopted some British elements, with local bars and cafés serving English breakfast and snacks. Beer is a favorite drink in Malta, just like in Britain, and is sold in pints and a half litres. The above may be some of the reasons why the British, especially the elderly, are so interested in visiting Malta (Ballou, 2014).

Other reasons for the dominant visit of British tourists aged 60+ to Malta is that this age group has a great tendency to travel. In fact, many people over the age of 50 in the UK "*still find travel very aspirational and this is their top spending priority*" (Mintel, 2008). Generally speaking, in terms of age, it is important to highlight those destinations such as Malta are aware of the needs and desires of this specific market segment. This type of tourist has been identified internationally as a specific market, with its own requirements (Wheatcroft and Seekings 1992, p. 1). The 60+ age group has greater economic power than other groups (Fitzpatrick Associates, 1998, p. 19).) "*Many hotels and tour operators believe that everyone over the age of 55 is looking for the same type of product and service*" (Avcikurt, 2009). According to Avellino (2015), older British tourists who have travelled to Malta tend to adopt a relaxed approach, and mostly want to sit in the hotel lobby or near the pool and read or enjoy sitting in groups and chatting, playing board or card games. A special difference can be seen in the post-summer months, when younger tourists are replaced by older adults preferring a quieter and calmer atmosphere.

It must also be borne in mind that the market for the elderly in Malta corresponds to the profile of “*repeat visitors*” (Avellino, 2015).

2.2. Connection of Malta and Great Britain

2.2.1. Historical timeline of the takeover of the Maltese Islands

In its early history, Malta became an important trading settlement due to its central location in the Mediterranean. The Phoenicians and later Carthaginians also built refuges on the island. In 218 BC, Malta became part of the Roman Empire during the Second Punic War. The island formed part of the Roman Empire until 533, when it became part of the Byzantine Empire. During 870, control of Malta was transferred to the Arabs, who remained on the island until 1090, when they were expelled by Norman adventurers. This led to it becoming part of Sicily for more than 400 years, during which several feudal lords sold their land, which would eventually belong to Germany, France and Spain. (Cassar, 2000).

In 1522, Suleiman II forced the Knights of St. John of Rhodes to spread to various locations throughout Europe. In 1530, Charles V, the Roman emperor, gained control of the Maltese islands, and for over 250 years the ‘Knights of Malta’ controlled the islands. During their time on the islands, the Knights of the Order of St. John built several cities, palaces and churches. In 1565, the Ottomans tried to besiege Malta (known as the Great Siege), but the Knights were able to defeat them. However, in the late 1700s, their power began to decline, and in 1798 they surrendered to Napoleon (Cassar, 2000).

Two years after Napoleon took Malta over, the population tried to oppose French rule and in 1800, with the support of the British, the French were attacked from the island. In 1814, Malta became part of the British Empire. During the British occupation of Malta, several military fortifications were built and the islands became the seat of the British Mediterranean Fleet.

Malta’s position in the middle of the Mediterranean and its importance to the British as a military and naval base had a profound impact not only on the island’s economy but also its political and constitutional development. From the very beginning of the British presence in Malta, the

Maltese argued for more rights and a greater liberty to manage their own affairs, predicated on the fact that they had not been conquered by the British but had requested the protection of Great Britain following the departure of the Knights with the arrival of Napoleon (Walz, 2008).

Prior to the passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962, there were few restrictions on Maltese migration to the UK. Malta experienced significant emigration, especially as a result of the collapse of the construction boom of 1907 and after World War II, when the birth rate increased significantly. Before World War I, there were very few Maltese people in the UK other than the Cardiff community. The Maltese saw the United Kingdom as a distant and cold country (Attard, 1989). Between 1919 and 1929, 3,354 Maltese were recorded sailing to Great Britain, of which 1,445 returned in later years. The rest are not all necessarily found in the UK, as many subsequently moved to Australia (Attard, 1989).

After 1962, the Maltese needed vouchers to migrate to the UK, but these were relatively easy to obtain from the Department of Emigration until 1971. The Department of Emigration would arrange interviews with potential migrants in British companies to allow them to cross into the UK to fill labour shortages. At the time, it was common for Maltese women to marry British soldiers and for Maltese women to join British military officers on merchant ships. Maltese statistics suggest that 8,282 people left Malta and went to the UK between 1963 and 1970 and the return of 949 people was recorded (Jones, 1973). Significant seasonal migration to the UK began in 1962. For instance, during this year, 70 Maltese women were recruited to work in the UK in order to can fruits and vegetables over a six-month period. Between 1967 and 1969, 250 Maltese people moved to the UK each year for seasonal jobs, mainly in the canning, ice cream and hotel and catering sectors (Jones, 1973).

On September 21, 1964, Malta gained independence. During the first ten years of its independence (from 1964 to 1974), Malta continued to be a monarchy, with Britain's Queen Elizabeth II as its head of state. Nevertheless, in 1974, the Republic of Malta was created, with Sir Anthony Joseph Mamo (the former Governor-General ruling on behalf of the British Queen) as its first president (Castillo, 2006).

In the period before independence, Malta was a British crown colony. Due to this fact, many British regulations and customs have remained to this day. Interestingly, in Malta today driving takes place on the left side of the road, which is a remnant of the British colonial heritage (in Europe, the left side is used for driving only in Cyprus and Ireland, apart from Malta and the UK).

Also, the biggest change in education in Malta came with the arrival of the British, who thoroughly reformed the education system, with an emphasis on higher education, transforming it into what it is today. The legacy of the United Kingdom resulted in the obligation of English being a standard language in secondary schools, colleges, and universities (Sultana, 1997).

In addition to Malta's British culture and language, the Maltese government's acceptance of low-cost flights to major British and Irish markets, with Ryanair starting flights from London in November 2006 and Dublin in March 2007, played a major role in reviving Malta's mainstream tourism (Malta Independent, 2007). Ryanair services and Air Malta ran a successful campaign for "cheap flights to Malta" deals and launched a new route from Liverpool to Malta (Malta Independent, 2007). Thus, in addition to the "home environment" for British tourists, they are provided with frequent and affordable flights to Malta and back.

According to the official website of Malta's national airline, flights from London to Malta and vice versa are performed almost daily. Thus, for example, for the month of May 2022, as many as 14 flights in economy class are planned at a special price of only 81 euros (Air Malta, 2022). The price of a plane ticket in one direction can be lower for certain flights, so tickets from 66 euros can be reserved. Air Malta flights operate to and from two London airports: Gatwick Airport and Heathrow Airport (Air Malta, 2022).

In 2021, 480,972 passengers used return flights from the UK to Malta and back, resulting in an increase compared to 2020, when there were 342,828 passengers. In relation to the total number of passengers from all countries who arrived in Malta; that is, 2,540,335, it is evident that the British made up almost a fifth of the total number of tourists who visited Malta in 2021 (MIA, 2021).

2.3. Tourist satisfaction

Satisfaction of tourists in service industries is one of the main business goals that affects the choice of destination, consumption of tourist products and services, the decision to revisit the destination, but also the success of business in a competitive market. The word "pleasure" is derived from two Latin words - *satis* (enough) and *facere* (to achieve). Pleasure is the feeling

obtained by somebody who achieves or fulfils their desires and who does not ask for more than they possess.

Customer satisfaction consists of a complex concept that is difficult to define because “*everyone* knows what satisfaction is, but no one seems to know how to define it” (Oliver, 2010). The most significant authors and definitions of client satisfaction are listed in Table 1 (Appendix 1).

For the last forty years, various definitions and perspectives of client satisfaction have been intensely discussed. Although there are significant differences in defining customer satisfaction, the authors of Giese et al. (2002) state that all definitions contain three common elements:

1. Customer satisfaction is a reaction (emotional or cognitive)
2. Reaction refers to a certain element of satisfaction that can be focussed on expectations, product / service, shopping experience, etc.
3. The reaction occurs at a certain moment (after consumption, after selection, based on previous experiences, etc.).

The term "tourist satisfaction" is derived from marketing literature and the term "customer satisfaction". Since the 1960s, scientists have conducted much research on tourist satisfaction, from the perspective of quality management and the intention to repurchase (Chen et al., 2013). Pizam et al. (1978) applied the concept of client satisfaction in tourism research, which led to the exceptional popularity of the topic in tourism research, as satisfaction is a strong indicator of the intention to return to the destination and willingness to recommend that destination to others.

Tourist satisfaction surveys focus on various products and services, such as accommodation services, restaurants, tourist attractions and tourist tours, but also on satisfaction with a tourist destination (Pooh, 2014).

Tourist satisfaction can be defined as an emotional state after an experience (Jiang & Zhang, 2016). Upon arrival at the destination, tourists have expectations about the quality of service offered to them at the tourist destination. They create expectations through information available in commercial messages, brochures and mass media as well as through information received from friends, relatives and also users of social media and review websites.

The level of tourist satisfaction depends on the psycho-physical state of tourists (for example, mood and needs in addition to external events such as climate and the influence of others) and can be determined by measuring the tourist's reaction to the experience. Tourist satisfaction also implies experience, i.e. interaction with the destination (Baker & Crompton, 2000). Tourists can

express their satisfaction with oral and written reviews, including the demonstration of ways to express their loyalty. The results of previous surveys of tourist satisfaction indicated that a high level of tourist satisfaction leads to loyal tourists and recommendations to others (Ahrholdt et al., 2019). But according to Marcussen (2011), satisfied tourists will not necessarily return to a destination if they want to experience another tourist experience. The same author points out that the satisfaction of tourists, even if they do not return to the destination, is important because of their oral presentation or expression, acting as sources of information for potential tourists.

Among other things, the satisfaction of tourists is manifested by increasing the level of tourist retention in the destination, but also by attracting new tourists via word of mouth and social media. Tourist satisfaction positively affects the destination by helping it achieve economic goals, such as increasing the total number of tourists, income and competitiveness of the tourist destination, which favours the destination by helping it become more sustainable and profitable (Saayman et al., 2018).

2.3.1. Factors of tourist satisfaction

The concept of tourist satisfaction is determined by the predecessors and consequences of tourist satisfaction. Antecedents of tourist satisfaction are elements or events that precede satisfaction, create conditions for its continuation and development and can influence it (Raspor, 2012). Precursors of tourist satisfaction include service quality, expected and perceived value, image and reputation (Jiang et al., 2016). Consequences of tourist satisfaction are the result of tourist satisfaction and are seen as intentions in the behaviour of tourists, which most often include loyalty and complaints (Saayman et al., 2018). Figure 1 clearly shows the precursors and consequences of tourist satisfaction, which are described in more detail below:

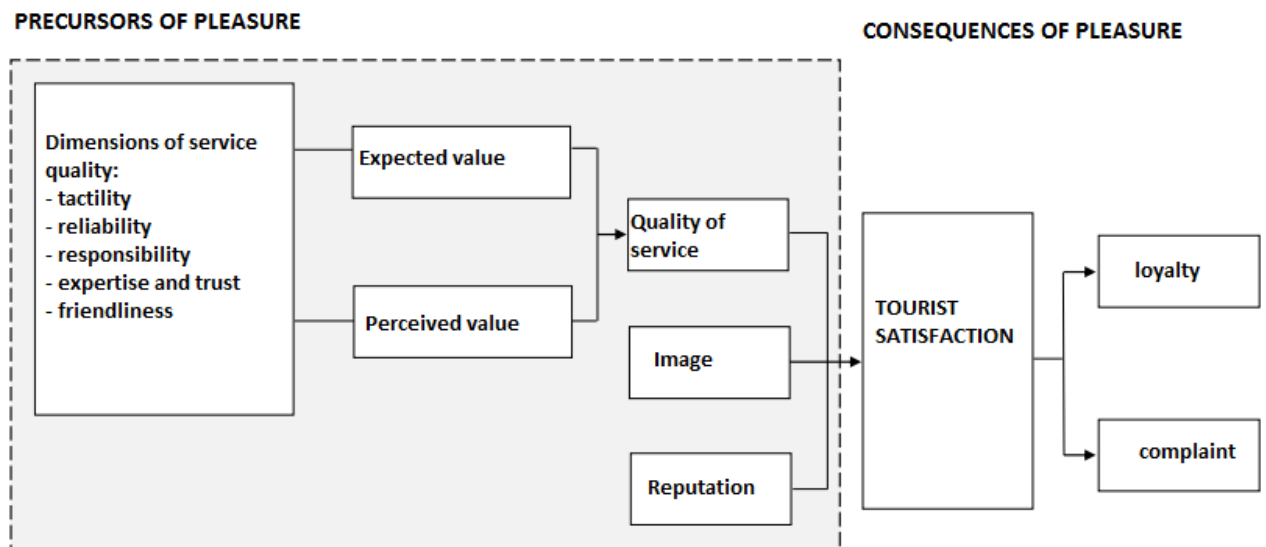


Fig. 1. Precursors and consequences of tourist satisfaction, which are described in more detail below (Saayman et al., 2018)

Quality of service

Quality is a concept with wide and everyday use. Service quality is considered as an important factor in the competitiveness and visibility of the destination and the company. Although the importance of the concept was recognised in the early 1980s, theorists are not unanimous in terms of definition. Quality of service is most often defined as per the theory of (non) confirmation according to which clients evaluate the quality of service by comparing their expectations about a particular service with the perception of what is experienced (Oliver, 2010). It can be said that quality of service means meeting or exceeding customer expectations. Due to the importance of the quality of service to the perception and satisfaction of tourists staying in hotels, this concept will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Expected value

Expectations refer to what the tourist expects to find in the next travel experience. Within the theory of (non) confirmation of expectations, the latter play an important role in determining the quality of service, satisfaction and loyalty (Saayman et al., 2018), and are defined as "*an individual's feeling that something will happen or as a longing or desire of tourists (consumers) that they feel that service providers should offer, rather than what they will offer*" (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

According to Zeithaml & Bitner (2003), tourists' expectations regarding service occurs at two basic levels, as the desired level of service and the corresponding level of service. The desired level of service indicates what the tourist (client) thinks they should get and what they consider reasonable to receive from the service provider. In contrast, the appropriate level of service is that which is acceptable to the tourist at their lower level of expectation. Thus, the desired level can be described as "I should get" and the corresponding level "I can get" and is influenced by what clients think they will "get" (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003).

In general, tourists base their expectations on available information. Expectations can be influenced by first impressions, personal experience, general experience and word of mouth of friends and acquaintances, as well as social media, prices, wishes and the preferences of tourists. Other elements such as promotional activities, image, reputation, brand, and so on can also be added (Raspor, 2012). Therefore, tourists shape their expectations based on factors that may be influenced by tourist destination holders and others that cannot be controlled.

The Impact of Technology

The development of technology is significantly related to the expectations of tourists. Sheng & Chen (2013) state that for today's tourist, travel is not just a local trip, but can be a virtual tour on computers to identify with local cultures. Tourists believe they can experience the pleasure of travelling through the experience of local life. Authors Narangajavana et al. (2017) investigated the impact of social media on the creation of expectations using the Multiple Indicator Multiple Causes method and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results of the research showed that the respondents receive user-generated content related to the tourist destination, create expectations about the destination and trust the published content. This suggests a general acceptance that expectations in tourism are formed before travelling or visiting a destination through previous experiences, personal and impersonal sources of information, personal characteristics of tourists, attitudes and motivation and shared beliefs (Sheng & Chen, 2013).

According to the theory of expectations, a tourism experience that satisfies or exceeds the experiences of tourists will be remembered as positive (Cohen et al., 2014) and the opposite is true. The theory of (non) confirmation suggests that the differences between the perceived experience (received by the consumer) and the expected outcome will determine the degree of tourist satisfaction. However, contrary to all of the above, expectations do not play such a significant role in shaping tourist satisfaction. Hughes (1991) states that tourists are satisfied

even though expectations have not been met, and the authors Hackl et al. (2000) found that expectations do not have a significant effect on satisfaction or that this effect is negligible.

Perceived value

Perceived value has attracted a lot of attention from industry and researchers. Tourists perceive what they expect; expectations are based on their learning, education, values, interests, motivation, previous experience, personality traits and so on. Consumers are more likely to express positive comments and feedback when they perceive high consumption value. Despite such an important construct, researchers have not reached a consensus on the definition of perceived value, especially in the context of tourism.

Perception is a very important factor in consumer behaviour because it mediates between stimuli and cognition. It is a process by which an individual selects, organises and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and significant picture of the world; that is, as a way for the individual to view the world around them. Perception is also a key factor in the tourist decision-making process, as it mediates the relationship between system characteristics and tourist behaviour in the choice of destination and services (Koppelman, 1980). In other words, the perceived or cognitive value of a service is determined by tourists based on their experience with the service. Only the level of service that is in line with their expectations is appropriate for tourists, so the perception of tourists should be observed in relation to their expectations.

According to the above, Zeithaml (1988) defines perceived value as *“the client’s overall assessment of the usefulness of a product (or service), based on perceptions of what is received and given”*. Perceived value can be measured as a one-dimensional or multidimensional construct. Perception measured by just one question seeks to assess total value with reference to value for money. The one-dimensional measure has often been criticised for omitting other important dimensions of value that could result from the overall experience, which may further affect tourist satisfaction, but also the fact that tourists (clients) perceive value differently, perhaps due to different sociodemographic characteristics of respondents. The authors Gallarza & Gil Saura (2006) combined the following dimensions of perceived value as: functional value, emotional value, social value, epistemic value (truth, justification, correctness, groundedness), quality, monetary price, non-monetary (behavioural) price, reputation, emotional reaction, efficiency, quality of service, social value, entertainment, aesthetics, perceived monetary cost, perceived risk, time spent and effort.

In customer satisfaction index models (CSI models), the concept of perceived value as a precursor to satisfaction is viewed as a multidimensional measure and is most often examined as the relationship between quality and price of a product or service. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the perceived value and quality of service shape the satisfaction of tourists and their impression of the destination's image, which is crucial for their decision to visit the same destination again.

Image

In tourism and service industries, the image of service providers and destinations has been recognised as an important factor in tourist satisfaction and has made a major contribution to better understanding tourist behaviour during decision-making and tourist destination selection (Gallarza & Gil Saura, 2006).

Although numerous definitions of the image of a tourist destination can be found in the literature, it is most often defined as a set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that individuals have about a particular destination. The image of a tourist destination is "*tourists' opinions about the destination in the form of ideas, impressions, beliefs about the popularity, simplicity and reputation of a particular tourist area*" (Raspor, 2012).

The image of a tourist destination is a multidimensional construct consisting of functional (tangible) and psychological (intangible) characteristics of a tourist destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). The authors of Chen & Tsai (2007) list the dimensions that best describe the image of a tourist destination, such as interesting places and culture, atmosphere in the destination, outdoor activity, landscape, adventure, beaches, brand (destination) destination, nature, in other words, sun, sand and fun.

Tourist destinations have recognised the perceived image as a means of competitive advantage and distinguishing one destination from another. Given that potential tourists are limited by purchasing power and available free time, tourist destinations, with their image in the target markets, tend to develop a positive and strong image. Thus, managing the image of a tourist destination has become the primary activity of marketing professionals whose goal is to communicate with existing and future tourists and manage their behaviour (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

Reputation

Reputation arises because of the verbalisation of the image. It represents an intangible value that affects the success of all stakeholders in tourism and tourist destinations (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993).

2.4. Quality of service

An important characteristic of tourism and hospitality is that the subject of purchase is primarily services, not products. The fact is that tourists buy different products during their travels, but these are not a motive for tourist movements.

Kotler (1985) points out that service is an activity that one party offers and provides to another, is intangible and does not arise from ownership of something. In other words, people who create and deliver tourist services make wide contact with their clients, the latter being, in this case, positioned as users of tourist services. The quality of these relationships and the way the service is delivered have the same impact on tourist satisfaction as the efficiency of service production.

Quality is a measure in which a product or service meets customer requirements. The quality of a product or service can be defined as the overall property of a product or service that affects their ability to meet stated or implicit needs.

The quality of service can be defined as a social act that is realised by direct contact of the service user with a representative of the service company (Norman, 1984). The dimensions of service quality depend on the nature of the specific service being delivered, the system and environment through and in which it is delivered, as well as its technological characteristics and the staff employed by the service company. As in other economic activities, in tourism, more and more attention is paid to the quality of service and customer satisfaction. Gaining the loyalty of existing tourists and winning new ones by providing a quality service that meets their needs is the key to success and retaining their presence in a globalised tourism market where competition is increasingly pronounced (Olsen, 1996).

In 2000, the International Organization for Standardisation (ISO) defined quality as the totality of the characteristics of products or services that meet the needs and expectations of users that

are determined in advance. The definition was partially changed in 2005 and quality was then defined as the level to which a set of inherent characteristics meets the requirements (ISO: Standards, 2018).

One of the most important factors influencing the success of business in the hotel industry is certainly the quality of service. Managing the quality of services in a hotel is a comprehensive system of company management based on the engagement of material, financial, information and other resources and aimed at effectively achieving the established goals of the hotel company (Talib & Rahman, 2010). The essence of such a management system is reflected in the creation of conditions for more efficient operations of the company and its more favourable position in the market. The company opting for the concept referred to as "Total Quality Management" – TQM - implements quality management systems, environment, health and safety at work. Such a company shows that they care about all employees, as well as other market stakeholders. It shows customers how it provides them with only the best and highest quality products and services and demonstrates to the competition that they are stable, innovative and ready for challenges (Hussain & Khan, 2020).

According to Feng et al. (2006), overall quality management means that all organisational units and all individuals in them in addition to quantity and deadlines must ensure quality and sustainable development. Sustainable development is an increasingly common topic for many business people, but the practice is slowly evolving. The introduction of total quality management also supports sustainable development, which is of great importance nowadays.

Thus, by using a quality system, the company also affects the competition, suppliers, as well as all other stakeholders in the market. Therefore, the concept of TQM or its implementation helps hotels to achieve a positive business result and advantage in a competitive tourism market (Talib & Rahman, 2010).

Satisfying the wishes and needs of guests through the provision of quality service is the most important goal of every hotel, because the quality of hotel service is directly related to customer satisfaction. Achieving this goal, the hotel achieves a competitive advantage, because there are many hotels on the market that offer the same or similar service, so the quality of service constitutes a way of standing out from others. In this way, hotels improve their business and make it efficient and effective (Ali et al., 2015).

2.4.1. Characteristics of tourist and hotel services

Assessing the quality of service in tourist traffic; that is, "tourist services", from the point of view of its user is a complex issue. The reason for this lies in the specific characteristics of the services, which are reflected in the following:

- ***Intangibility of the service***
- ***Heterogeneity of service***
- ***Simultaneity***
- ***Inseparability of consumption and production of services***
- ***Cost structure***
- ***Intensity of work.***

These service characteristics are described in more detail in Appendix 2.

The quality of services in the hotel industry, their measurement, delivery and definition are determined by demand that changes under the influence of various factors (e.g., season, holidays, vacations), and insufficiently defined standards. Accordingly, it is necessary to pay attention to two aspects of standardisation in terms of the quality of service in the hotel industry. The first aspect refers to the quality of service that cannot be standardised and includes all aspects of communication of hotel staff with guests (friendly relationship, kindness, help of staff, etc.) whose understanding depends on the subjective feelings of guests. Another aspect refers to the quality of service that can be standardised, such as product and service quality policy, the application of food preparation and guest accommodation standards, etc.

Demand for services is characterised by unevenness, because there are periods of increased and decreased intensity (e.g. a certain part of the day or year), which is especially pronounced during the holidays. Uneven demand for services has an impact on the consistent quality of service, i.e. its definition (Mei et al., 1999).

The Classification of Services

The classification of services serves as a model of classification in the economy of a country. One of the main goals is to provide a set of categories which are used in planning, statistical research, data collection and processing. In addition, the classification of services helps in the

selection of adequate strategies and other activities for their positioning in the market. In harmonisation with the standards imposed by the European Union, the European Statistical System, the "*classification of activities*" was adopted, which includes, inter alia: accommodation and food services (Eurostat, 2008):

1. **Accommodation:** this category includes hotels and similar accommodation, resorts and short-stay facilities, camps and auto-camps, as well as other forms of accommodation.
2. **Preparation and serving of food and beverages:** this include restaurants and mobile catering facilities, followed by catering and the preparation and serving of food, as well as the preparation and serving of beverages.

Parasuraman (1985) lists five differences that negatively affect the quality of service in tourism:

- The difference between the expectations of consumers and tourists and the perception of managers regarding expectations.
- The difference between managers' perceptions of what tourists want and service quality specifications.
- The difference between service quality specification and what is delivered.
- The difference between what is delivered and what is promised to consumers via means of communication.
- The difference between consumer expectations and perceptions of the quality of service provided.

Based on the above facts, Parasurman (1985) defined the quality of service as a function of the degree of difference between the expectations or desires of visitors and their perception of the delivered service.

The quality of a hotel product implies a market category that includes the emergence of its tangible and intangible components, connecting into an integral whole, as well as the realisation of related services, at a level that ensures the compliance of these processes and customer requirements (Kosar, 2005) (Appendix 3).

Maintaining the hotel business in a market that is demanding and dynamic and achieving a high degree of competitiveness depends on the introduction of a system of complete quality management and improving the quality of products and services. The complexity of the hotel service is reflected in the interconnectedness of its tangible and intangible elements, as well as their importance for the satisfaction of the guest. The services affect the quality of the experience that tourists will gain and have during their stay at the hotel. The quality of service depends not only on the quality of the catering facility, but also the professionalism and kindness of the employees. In addition, some other elements are important, such as the accessibility and atmosphere of the facility, the cleanliness of the space, the speed of service and so on. (Ali et al., 2015)

Quality management in the hotel industry is one of the most important aspects of modern hotel management and represents respect for set standards, their maintenance and constant improvement. In the field of hotel management, the most important thing is that the quality is in accordance with the categorisation of hotels, i.e. the number of stars; in other words, that all hotels of the same category provide the same quality of service.

2.4.2. Measuring the quality of hotel services

Quality is defined as the matching of expectations and the actual service provided. Given that the demands of guests are constantly changing, it is not possible to determine one-time quality information (Senić&Senić, 2008). However, Mattila and Enz (2002) believe that measuring emotional factors after service can be an important indicator for assessing service quality. The research shows that, among the indicators for the assessment of hotel businesses, those which have an impact on future behaviour stand out and relate to oral recommendations and the intention of the guest to visit the hotel again.

The quality of hotel service certainly influences future behaviour through consumer satisfaction. An example of this is the fact that guests who are, say, satisfied with the quality of the hotel room have positive comments and recommendations, while those who are dissatisfied with, for example, poor waiter service may, later on, disparage the hotel (Ladhari, 2009). When examining the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, it is important to choose a good way in which this assessment is performed, to determine whether the guest's expectations are met and to what extent. Assessment is subjective, depending on each consumer individually. This assessment may depend on both emotional and rational motives.

The characteristics of the criteria for assessing the quality of services are listed in the Appendix 4.

The specificity of the hotel product is the fact that the services are inseparable from the product and related to it in a complex manner. This phenomenon can be seen in two ways: firstly, the service is closely related to the hotel; that it is not possible to perform individual services

(reception, maids, waiters, etc.), secondly, the services are related to material products (food, beverages and other products).

Various models appear in the literature to measure the quality of services:

Authors Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) created the SERVQUAL (service quality) model, which is used to measure the five dimensions of service quality: tangibility, reliability, accountability, security and empathy. SERVQUAL is one of the best-known multi-attribute procedures for measuring service quality.

Knutson et al. (1990) introduced a service quality measurement instrument called LODGSERV, defining five dimensions of service quality: reliability, security, compassion, tangibility and empathy.

A study of the quality of service in hotels in Australia conducted by Mei and his associates (1999), formed a new scale for measuring the quality of services, the HOLSERV scale, which includes three dimensions: employees, material components and reliability.

The best-known and most commonly used alternative to the SERVQUAL model is the SERVPERF model, proposed and formed by the authors Cronin and Taylor (1992). The main difference between the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models is that SERVQUAL measures service quality by comparing expectations and consumer perception, while the SERVPERF model does not consider expectations, but equates between service quality and customer satisfaction.

A study of the quality of service conducted by Getty & Getty (2003) in hotels in the United States developed a new five-step measurement scale, called the Lodging Quality Index. LQI involves measuring the following five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, compassion, trust and communication.

These measurements demonstrate that different techniques can be used to measure the quality of hotel services, because it is a very complex process. Also, the obtained data can be interpreted in different ways. Problems that occur when measuring the quality of services are numerous. The most common constitute measuring latent attributes, measurements using rating scales that give exaggerated results and giving measurements of certain target groups, as well

as measuring certain special causes. Using traditional, quantitative and qualitative research techniques can also lead to various errors. Therefore, it is necessary to modify and expand the current research methods, but also introduce new ones. Each phase in service quality measurement programmes requires certain research techniques to diagnose problems, understand problems in detail and implement solutions.

2.5. Relationship between service quality and perception

Numerous authors have influenced expectations about the process of assessing the quality of service and the fact that primary importance is given in the scientific literature relating to the measurement of the quality of service. Despite the latter, however, the concept of expectations is still vague and neglected. The question of whether expectations should be included in measuring perceived service quality has led to two conflicting paradigms (Getty & Thompson, 1994):

- 1) The disconfirmation paradigm, according to which guests evaluate the service by comparing perception with their expectations
- 2) The perceptual paradigm, according to which the assessment of guest expectations is not relevant; that is, according to which the assessment of the quality of a tourist product is often equated with the assessment of satisfaction with this product, regardless of expectations formed before arriving at the destination.

According to the disconfirmation model from the consumer's point of view, satisfaction or dissatisfaction comprise personal feelings, created due to a comparison of the perceived performance of a hotel product in relation to expectations. Whether a consumer is satisfied after purchasing a service or product depends on how well the offer meets their expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2006, p. 412). The guest is dissatisfied when their expectations are not confirmed; that is, if they expected something different from their experience at the hotel (Stevens et al., 1995). The guest is satisfied if their expectations are met. In the case that the quality is experienced above expectations, it is said that the guest is very satisfied or delighted. Each consumer individually creates the expected value of a service. Confirmation of expectations can be observed through the gap; in other words, the difference that arises between the expected and perceived value for the customer.

The perceived value to customers is the difference between the sum of the benefits and all the costs of the offer as well as the possible alternatives considered and assessed by the potential

buyer. Total value for customers is the perceived monetary value of a set of economic, functional and psychological benefits that customers expect from a given market offer, while total cost to customers is the set of costs in the evaluation, procurement, use and disposal of a particular market offer, which involves time, energy and mental effort (Kotler & Keller, 2006, p. 141).

Quality and consumer satisfaction are two concepts that are closely related, but still differ from each other. The extensive literature dealing with this issue is dominated by the view that consumer satisfaction is a value that results from every transaction with a service company. Unlike the perceived quality of service, which signifies the attitude of the consumer created by a comprehensive and long-term assessment of the service and the service company, consumer satisfaction is short-lived (Bitner, 1990, p. 70).

Consumer satisfaction because of transactions with a service company is defined as an emotional response to the experience provided with a purchased product or service, or as a customer's cognitive state of appropriate or inappropriate reward for survivors (Oh & Parks, 1997, p. 36).

The hotel as a catering facility should meet certain standards regarding both physical characteristics and quality of services. Based on meeting the prescribed standards, the hotel is categorised by the number of stars. The categorisation of hotels in addition to other tourist attractions such as destination, climate and culture of the local population significantly affects the experience and satisfaction of tourists. There are several ways of measuring the perception and satisfaction of users of tourist services. To this end, special attention is paid to the quality of service as the most important factor. Given Malta's natural resources and the historical connection between Great Britain and Malta described in this chapter, the visitors' experience in hospitality during their stay on the island is of great importance to the examination of the perceptions and satisfaction of British tourists when visiting Malta. Therefore, a survey of the perceptions of British tourists who were accommodated in 4-star hotels in Malta was conducted. The research methodology is described below.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the types of research in relation to its methods and the questionnaire as a method for collecting data during research. The design and structure of the questionnaire used for this research will then be delineated.

Research is the most commonly used tool to increase and gather knowledge about a particular topic. It differs in terms of the applicability of results, research methods used, types of data collected, types of data studied, frequency of implementation, objectives, scope of research areas, time targeted and object research (Barnham, 2015).

There are two standard ways of conducting research: qualitative and quantitative. While qualitative research relies on verbal narrative such as spoken or written data, quantitative research uses logical or statistical observations to draw conclusions. (References are missing)

Qualitative research aims to provide insight and understanding of the problem. It is an unstructured, exploratory research method that studies very complex phenomena that are impossible to elucidate with quantitative research; however, it creates ideas or hypotheses for later quantitative research. Qualitative research is used to gain an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, experience, attitudes, intentions and motivations based on observation and interpretation to find out how people think and feel. It is a form of research in which the researcher gives more weight to the views of the participants. Case studies, grounded theory, ethnography, history and phenomenology are all types of qualitative research (Lakshman et al., 2000).

On the other hand, quantitative research is a form of research that relies on the methods of the natural sciences which provide numerical data and hard facts. Its goal is to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between two variables using mathematical, computational and statistical methods. To this end, the research is also known as empirical research because it can be measured accurately and precisely. Data collected by researchers can also be divided into categories or ranked and measured in units of measurement. Graphs and tables of raw data can be constructed with the help of quantitative research, which facilitates the researcher's analysis of results (Lakshman et al., 2000).

In addition to specific quantitative or qualitative research, a combination of these methods is often used.

Whether qualitative, quantitative or combined research is done, different data collection methods are used in the research and the logic of thought procedures is also different and adapted to the method. When conducting research, there are also different methods of data collection. This takes the form of primary and secondary research. The first consists of applied empirical research. It also implies a methodological approach in which data is collected and information formed from them in the exclusive function of the research problem and the task set by it (Barnham, 2015). Such primary research is conducted to collect data and analyse information about attitudes, opinions, motives and so on. The observation method is often used, which is the process of observing and recording facts or events without asking questions. Additionally, the questioning method, consists of asking questions orally or in writing. The survey method is used in the form of survey; that is, a questionnaire containing a formal list of questions asked to the respondent in writing or in the form of interviews, which is a freer form, in which oral questions are asked with a specific conversation. For the research to be conducted efficiently and successfully, it should be based on a concrete and clearly defined problem. Adequate methods should also be selected for its implementation (Barnham, 2015).

Secondary data are the result of the previous collection of primary data, collected before for some other purpose. The researcher would then possess the data as completed information, ready to be analysed and published.

In this dissertation, secondary data based on available literature were used and empirical research was conducted through a questionnaire. The survey questionnaire includes the collection of quantitative or qualitative data on certain attitudes of large populations in order to gain certain knowledge. Its use is so widespread that it is considered to be a separate method. Surveys using questionnaires are the most common and sometimes constitute the only research instrument for both the scientific and professional analysis of social trends. The survey questionnaire is an indispensable measuring instrument used to obtain input data for various analyses, most of which are of a statistical nature (Kabir, 2016).

The questionnaire compiled for the purposes of this research includes 34 questions which can be divided into questions about the demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, residence) and questions related to the arrival of respondents in Malta, as well as

impressions about it. The second part of the questionnaire examines, among other things, how many times the respondent visited Malta, how to get to Malta, what type of transport was used during the visit, where and for how many days the visitor was accommodated, their assessment of the quality of catering services and whether Brexit has affected the choice of Malta as a tourist destination, the choice of a visit to Malta and whether the respondent will repeat the visit or recommend it to friends and so on.

The research was conducted in local pubs, bars and restaurants. The sample was compiled by a random selection of British tourists who were staying in four-star hotels in Buġibba and Mellieħa, villages in the northern region of Malta and who were given a questionnaire (Appendix 5).

The limitations of this research relate to the smaller number of respondents (59) and the fact that not all answers are specific (due to the possibility of general answers).

Basic ethical principles were used in this research such as honesty, objectivity, integrity, care, openness, respect for intellectual property, confidentiality, responsible publishing, responsible mentoring, respect for colleagues, social responsibility, rules of discrimination, competence, legality and the protection of people.

The data collected will be presented in the next chapter, Results and Findings. The research uses the inductive-deductive method, the method of analysis and synthesis and the descriptive method. The method of synthesis and analysis is used to define the basic concepts of tourist perception. The method of induction and deduction are used when making conclusions and claims. The descriptive method was used for the empirical part of the paper, and the results are presented in tables and graphs.

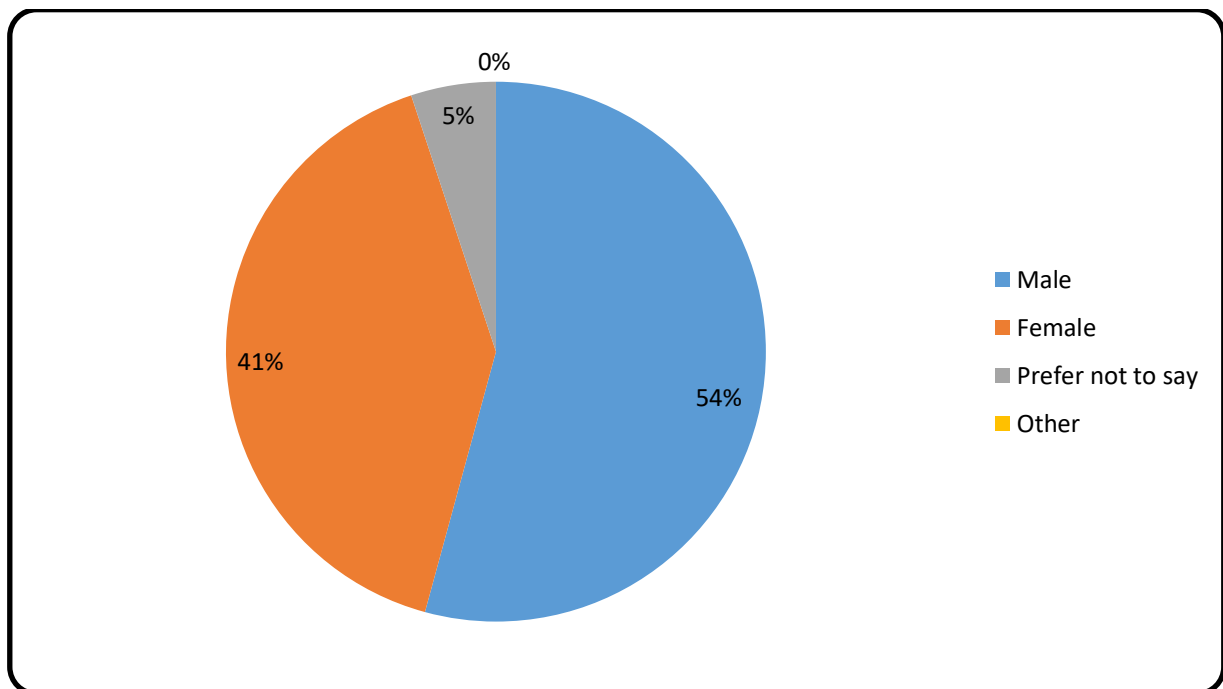
4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

For the purposes of this paper, a study was conducted on the topic of perceptions and lived experiences of British tourists aged 60+ in 4-starhotels within the northern region of Malta.

Gender representation.

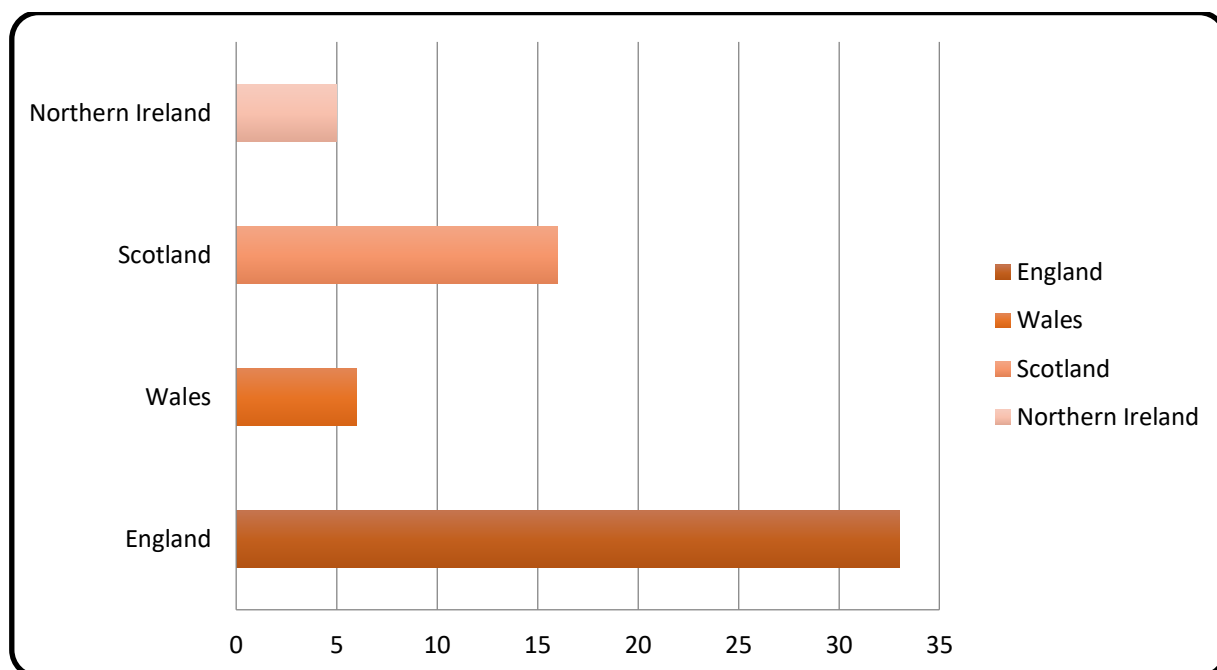
A total of 59 respondents participated in the survey, of which 24 (40.7%) were female, 32 (54.2%) were male and 3 respondents (5.1%) did not comment on this variable.

Graph 1. Structure of respondents by gender



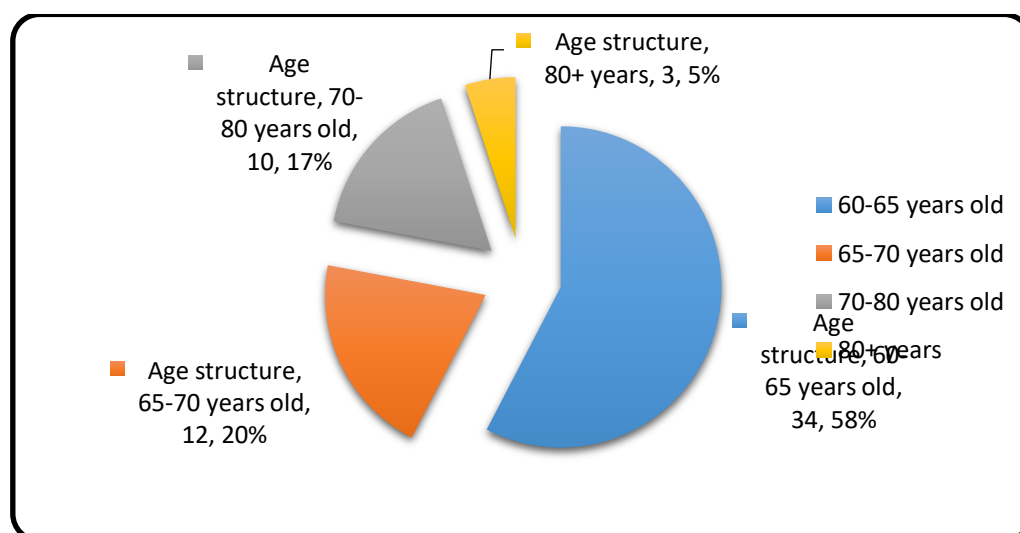
The sample consisted of tourists from the United Kingdom, 33 of them from England (55.9%), 6 from Wales (10.2%), 16 from Scotland (27.1%) and 5 from Northern Ireland (8.5%).

Graph 2. Structure of respondents by place of residence



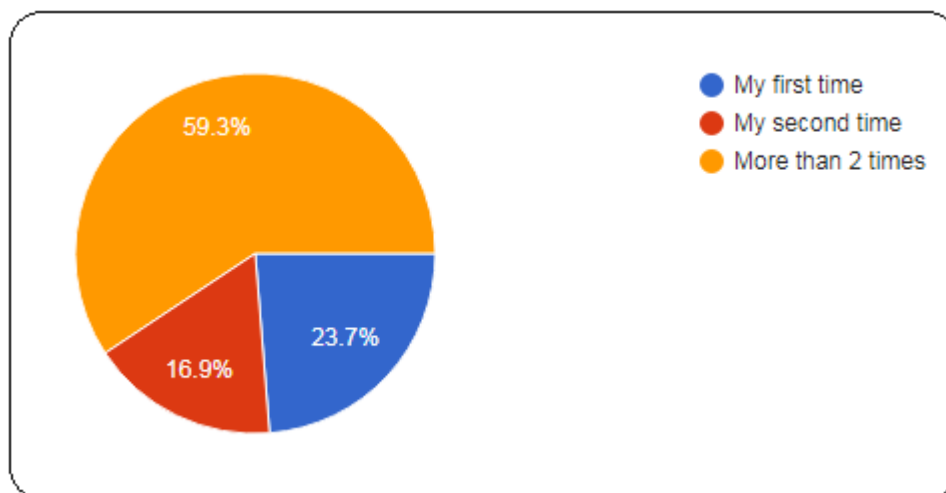
The age structure of the respondents is shown in Graph 3.

Graph 3. Age structure of respondents



It can be noted that most of the surveyed tourists are between 60 and 65 years of age. 14 tourists (23.7%) visited Malta for the first time. 10 of them (16.9%) were in Malta for the second time during the survey, while as many as 35 (59.3%) had visited Malta more than twice.

Graph 4. Number of visits to Malta



Family and Social relations with / in Malta.

The largest number of respondents 43 (72.9%) stated that they have no family or social ties to Malta. Two said they did not know whether they had any family or social ties to Malta, while 14 of them did. Respondents who answered “yes” to the question stated that they mostly have friends in Malta, while a number of them stated that the mother's family or the daughter's husband's family lived in Malta. One respondent said that his brother has been living in Malta for the last few years, and one that his family has lived in Malta for many years.

Choice and Reviews of Modes of transportation.

During their stay in Gozo and Malta, tourists mostly used public transport bus services (39%), others rented cars (28.8%), while 15 (24.4%) used taxi transport. 4 of them (6.8%) had transport provided by relatives and friends. When it comes to comments related to transportation, public city transportation was mostly assessed negatively, with comments that it is unreliable, slow and that buses are often late. Taxi transport is satisfactory, but is marked as expensive.

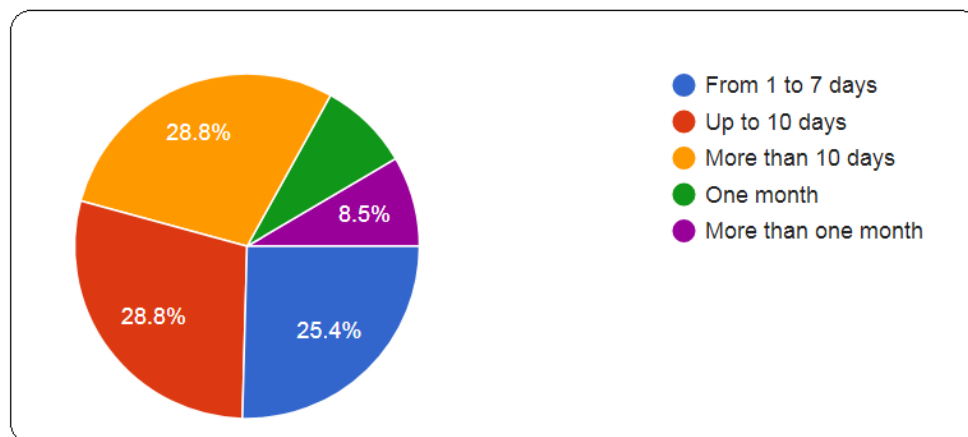
Choice of accommodation while in Malta.

Tourists staying in Malta stayed at the following hotels: Seabank Mellieħa (34; 17 men, 15 women and 2 undecided) and Antonio Hotel St .Pauls Bay (25; with 15 men, 9 women and 1 undecided).

Duration of stay.

The most frequent length of stay was 10 days (28.8%) or longer. (28.8%). Immediately after that with a very small difference in the number of respondents was a stay of between 1 and 7 days (25.4%), while a small number stayed in Malta for a month (8.5%) and more than a month (8.5%).

Graph 5. Length of stay in Malta



The choice of the northern region while in Malta.

To the question "*What makes the northern area attractive to you?*" respondents answered differently. Some of the most common answers mentioned attractive sandy beaches, beautiful nature, quieter places without crowds, sunny days, sights, local pubs and atmosphere, souvenir shops and cheap prices as well as kind people.

Respondents cited the following reasons for choosing St Paul's Bay and Mellieħa over other parts of Malta:

- friends and their opinion
- closer to nature and Gozo
- beautiful area
- very clean hotels and attractive tourist sites

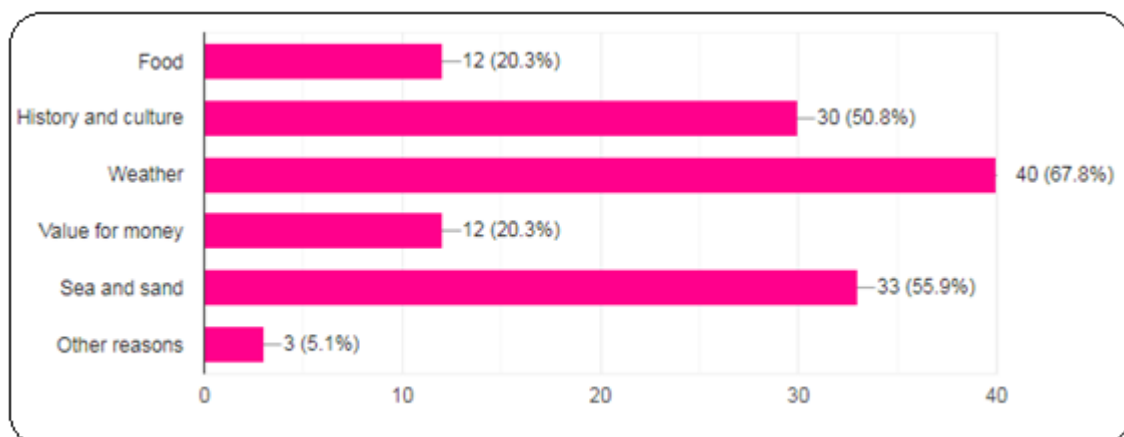
- really nice view and great accommodation
- good parts
- peaceful, familiar
- local pubs and good local restaurants
- a lot of pubs, nice restaurants and landscapes
- fields and beaches
- the beautiful beaches and nature of Mellieha
- easy access to the beach
- historical sites
- good seafood
- closer beaches
- quiet area, beach is not far from hotel
- family friendly place and very nice coast with pedestrianised area
- big concentration of British people
- sandy beaches, many bars and souvenir shops
- quiet and clean
- value for money.

Particular reasons for choosing Malta:

As specific reasons for coming to Malta, the respondents stated, among other things, that they came to visit friends or visited on the recommendation of friends who had come earlier and who had chosen Malta because of the beautiful landscapes and beaches, sunny days and historical sites. The reasons for choosing Malta as a destination were also the fact that English is spoken and that prices are affordable.

The answers to the question “If you have to choose what attracts you about Malta, what would be from the following?” shown in the following chart.

Graph 6. The most attractive determinants of Malta



As can be seen in Graph 6, the most attractive determinants of Malta are: the weather (67.8%), the sea and sand (55.9%) and, finally, history and culture (50.8%).

Malta in comparison to other Mediterranean islands.

The answers to the question regarding what Malta offers in relation to other islands in the Mediterranean coincide with the answers to the question about the special reasons for visiting Malta. One of the specific answers of British tourists about the unique offer of Malta is: "For someone coming from United Kingdom I would add the historical connection, speaking English and safety as 3 top things that this island separate from other islands in this part of the globe."

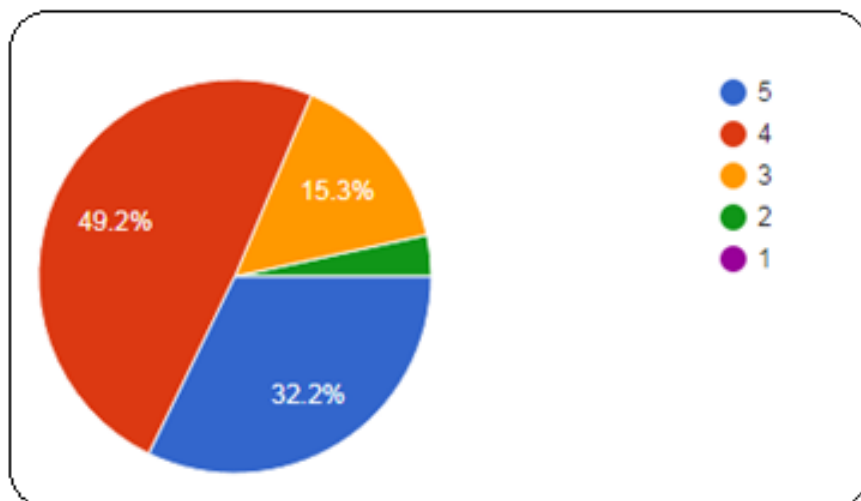
Historical and Cultural connections.

When it comes to the historical and cultural connection between the citizens of Britain and Malta, almost all respondents believe that this is one of the reasons for the large number of tourists from the UK to Malta and that there is still a strong connection between the two places. This connection is still present and noticeable. According to the most frequent answers, the historical and cultural connection between the UK and Malta is reflected in the driving, which is on the left, the use of English and presence of British food in restaurants. Three respondents answered that they were not sure about the connection between the two countries, while only one answer was negative.

Rating the Maltese Hospitality.

Respondents rated Maltese hospitality on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 highest mark and 1 lowest mark). The largest number of respondents rated Maltese hospitality as 4 (49.2%), 19 of them (32.2%) gave a rating of 5, 9 of them (15.3%) 3 and two (3.4%) gave a rating of 2. No answer ranked Malta using the lowest grade.

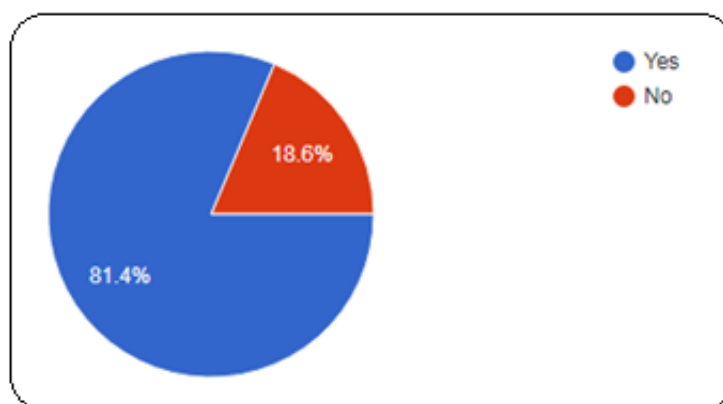
Graph 7. Rating for Maltese hospitality



Why is Malta attractive to the British Market?

As many as 48 (81.4% of respondents) think that Malta is attractive to the British market because it is an English-speaking country.

Graph 8. Answers to the question: "Do you think that Malta being English speaking country makes it attractive for the British market?"



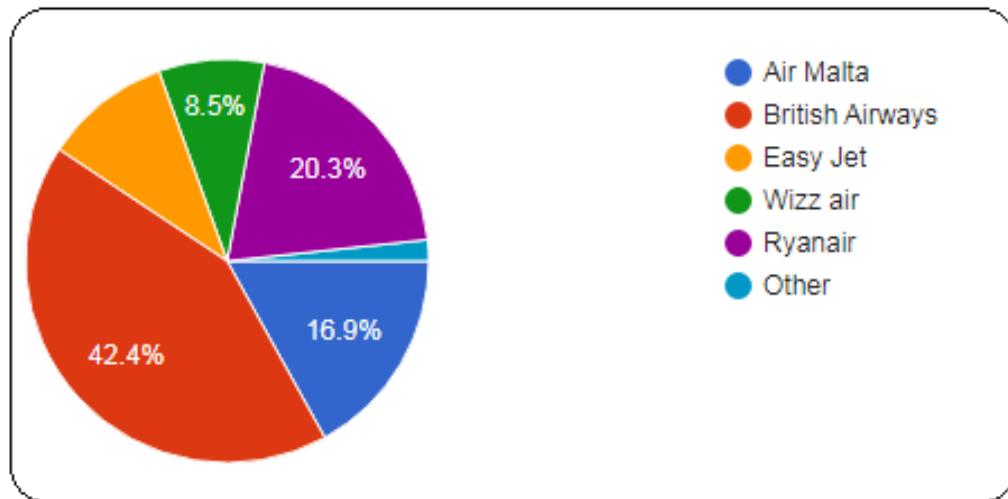
This question was answered in the affirmative because, according to the respondents, British tourists feel at home and can communicate more easily. This reason is important for people who are 65+ years old, because many of them do not speak a language other than English.

Choice of airline:

To travel to Malta and back, British tourists use the following airlines:

- Air Malta (10 respondents; 16.9%)
- British Airways (25; 42.4%)
- Easy Jet (6; 10.2%)
- Wizz Air (5; 8.5%)
- Ryanair (12; 20.3%)
- Other (1; 1.7%)

Graph 9. Use of airline services



42.4% of respondents (25) decided to use the services of British Airways. The reasons for this choice of company are that it is a national company that guarantees security and low ticket prices.

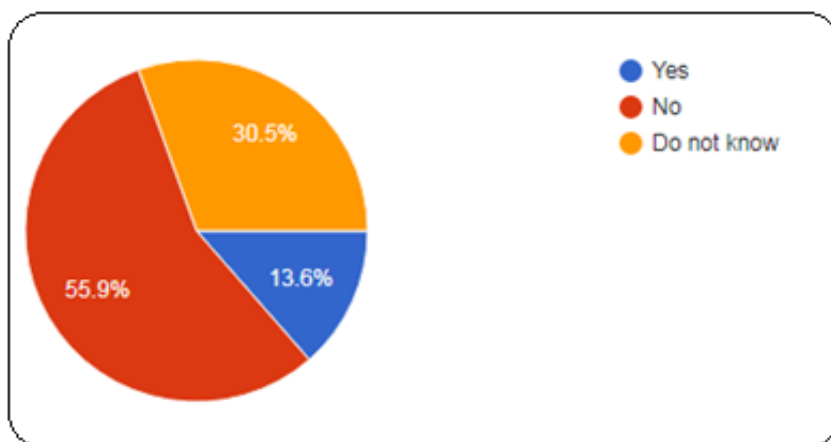
Impact of currency.

Most tourists stated that there are no problems with the currency when travelling and staying in Malta (55.9 %). However, they recommend changing to the desired currency in the UK, because it seems that banks in Malta do not provide exchange services.

Impact of Brexit.

33 (55.9%) respondents answered that Brexit did not influence their choice to visit Malta. 18 (30.5%) answered that they "do not know", while for 8 (13.6%) Brexit had an impact.

Graph 10. The impact of Brexit on the choice of Malta



Preferred months to visit:

According to the respondents, the most favourite months to visit Malta are: May (35%), June (24%), July (18%) and September (14%).

Visiting Interesting Places:

Among the most interesting places to visit are: Valletta (55%), Mellieħa (30%), Gozo (47%) and Rabat (26%).

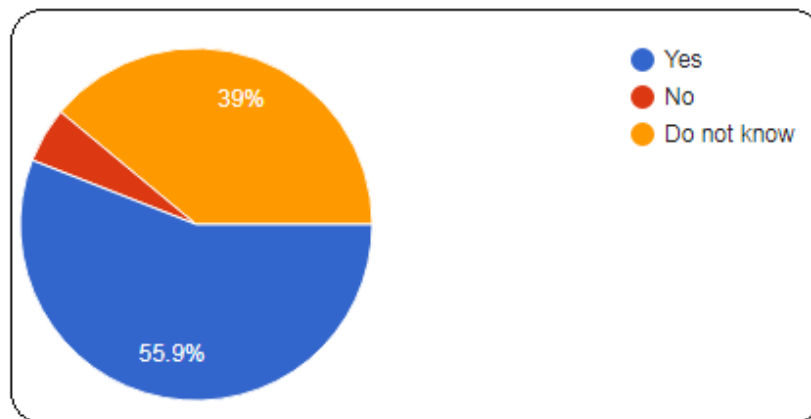
Impact of International / regional conflicts and Political situation.

The question "*Do you think that any international conflict or different political situation around Europe can affect the holiday in the coming years for British tourists?*" received both affirmative and negative answers, with more opinions that there would be no impact or reduction in British visitors (70%).

Security on the Maltese Islands.

When it comes to security on the Maltese Islands, more than half of the respondents 33 (55.9%) think that this is one of the greatest attributes of Maltese hospitality and tourism in the coming years. Only 3 of them (5.1%) do not agree with these, while the rest are not sure or gave the answer "I do not know".

Graph 11. Security in Malta as an attribute of Maltese hospitality



Competing Destinations:

As far as competing destinations to the Maltese Islands are concerned, respondents cited the following: Sicily, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Corsica, Ibiza, Crete, Croatia, Tenerife, Spain, Mallorca, Egypt, Sardinia, Spain, Monaco, the South of France, Turkey, Portugal, Iceland, Canary, Bulgaria and Tunisia. The Greek Islands were voted the most competitive destination (69% of the answers include the Greek islands).

Recommendations for improvement.

Recommendations for the attractiveness of Malta as a tourist destination are related to transport, primarily public transport, which received the highest number of negative reviews. These criticisms referred to the delay of public transport or the complete absence of a certain line on the schedule. Criticisms also applied to traffic jams, as well as speeding drivers.

In this chapter, the results obtained by the research are presented in percentage form and descriptively, while the next chapter will include their analysis.

5. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

A survey was conducted about British tourists staying in four-star hotels in the northern part of Malta using a sample of 59 tourists. 34 of the latter stayed at the Seabank Mellieħa (17 men, 15 women and 2 undecided), while 25 stayed at the San Antonio Hotel in St Paul's Bay (with 15 men, 9 women and 1 undecided). The northern region was selected as the part of Malta where the most popular seaside resorts and sandy beaches are located. Larger beaches are equipped with cafés, snack bars and other facilities. In the north of Malta there are also smaller, unusual beaches. This region is, therefore, suitable for entire families, as well as for visitors who exhibit a preference for water-based adventurous activities. (Olsen, 2021).

The previous chapter first presented the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The survey examined the following socio-demographic characteristics of visitors to the northern region of Malta: gender, age and place or country of residence. Demographic data on the consumer are objective and quantitatively expressed characteristics of the population. They are easy to identify, collect, measure and analyse. These are factors that have a long-term impact on marketing activities and define the micro and macro environment of the company. Demographic characteristics are innate physical, social, economic and geographical characteristics that make up an individual and describe the place of that individual in their environment (Solomon, 1995). According to (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004) demographic characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, income, occupation and education are most commonly used as the basis for market segmentation. Proper segmentation is an important factor in choosing a product or service positioning strategy. According to demographic characteristics, the habits of consumers or users of services, their needs, desires and requirements, but also the advantages and disadvantages of supply compared to competition can be determined (Solomon, 1995). Demographic information provides data related to research participants and is necessary to determine whether individuals in a particular study constitute a representative sample of the target population for generalisation purposes. Demographic information also allows for a better understanding of certain background characteristics of the audience, be it the age, race, ethnicity, income, employment situation or marital status concerned. Demography explains who makes up the respondent group and helps to segment

respondents according to individual characteristics and needs (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004). Geodemographic analysis of lifestyle appeared in the 1950s and expanded significantly in the 1970s, with the application of computer processing of demographic and geographical data. Starting from the theory that the combination of these factors significantly affects people's behaviour and consumption, the value system in a geographically defined and differentiated market is investigated. One of the critiques of the geodemographic system is the assumption that they are all the same as their neighbours (Weiss, 1988). After that, the results of descriptive statistics were presented; that is, a description of the data collected through a questionnaire distributed to the respondents.

Out of 59 respondents, 24 were female and 32 male. Three respondents did not declare their gender. The largest number of tourists was from England (33), then Scotland (16) and finally Wales (6) and Ireland (5). Gender structure is very important for planning marketing activities, because the sexes differ in terms of the purchase of products and services that are specifically intended for them, although many product categories are used equally. However, Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) point out that today gender roles are losing clear boundaries, so gender is no longer a precise way of differentiating consumers in some product categories.

Most of the participants are between 60 and 65 years of age (34). 12 of them are between 65 and 70, 10 of them between 70 and 80 and three are 80 and over. An individual's age influences interests, tastes, purchasing power, political preferences and investment behaviour. Consumers in different age groups have very different needs and desires, but also different financial possibilities. Age has a significant impact on the differences in the process of purchasing products and services; in other words, behaviour in consumption. Each age represents a potential market for specific products and services and varies in size (Maričić et al., 2008). Therefore, it is especially important to identify differences in consumer behaviour depending on age.

Based on their preferences and desired values (Van der Haar et al, 2001), the tourist chooses the destination to visit, considering the factors of expected benefits and expected costs. During the visit, a perception of the value of a specific destination is created in their consciousness and the result of the visit is satisfaction or dissatisfaction with that tourist destination. If the value perceived by the tourist during and after the visit is not less than expected and if the realised benefits are greater than the costs, the result is satisfaction (Woodruff & Gardial, 1996). A tourist destination can further encourage the desire to visit the same destination again or lead the

travellers to advocate visiting the location in question on the basis of their positive travel experiences. Since the number of destinations competing to attract tourists is extremely large, a particular tourist destination must offer the precise value that its target segment of tourists wants in order to strengthen and improve its position in the market. In the research conducted for the purposes of this research, the respondents were also asked how many times they had visited Malta so far. 14 tourists had visited the island for the first time and 10 of them were in Malta for the second time during the research, while as many as 35 had visited Malta more than twice. Given these results, it can be concluded that British tourists have a positive perception of Malta, although further research with a larger sample of participants is required to confirm this.

The largest number of respondents 43 (72.9%) stated that they have no family or social ties with Malta. It follows that the primary reasons for their visit are historical and cultural ties with Malta, which apparently still play a role (Cassar, 2000). This is indicative of the value that culture and history play in the tourism product. Family and friendly ties are another reason for the visit of the British, and a total of 14 respondents stated that they have such ties with people living in Malta.

During their stays in Gozo and Malta, tourists mostly used bus public transport services (39%), stating that buses are often late and that traffic is slow. Others rented cars (28.8%), used taxi transport (24.4%), or had transportation provided by relatives and friends (6.8%). Respondents' criticisms of the cheapest public transport coincide with findings from available sources. According to Magri (2021), the most urgent problems related to the use of public transport in Malta are not related to price, but to the unreliability of the service, schedule and, to a lesser extent, network design (routes). To improve the quality of service, buses would have to be more frequent and accessible, as well as improve transport times and this requires, among other things, law enforcement to remove illegal parking from roads and better infrastructure at bus stops (Magri, 2021). According to Scicluna (2021), what is really needed to promote more efficient and effective public transport is the creation of dedicated bus lanes and high-speed bus networks on the main corridors. Moreover, buses must be punctual, more regular and with feasible routes. He states that the everyday difficulties that bus users face are: inadequate or non-existent bus shelters; buses that do not show up and congestion that cars create because many places don't even have bus lanes (Scicluna, 2021). In line with Malta's National Transport Vision (2017) for 2050 and the Operational Plan to 2025, the government is improving the road network (especially TEN-T roads) by removing bottlenecks in traffic and introducing measures aimed at achieving greater sustainability in the way of travel. Eliminating traffic bottlenecks aims to reduce traffic congestion in urban areas, thus enabling more sustainable transport. To solve

the problem of congestion and pollution, the government has also invested 700 million euros in a period of 7 years to improve the road network, starting in 2019. By 2021, more than 400 million euros of works had been completed. As part of the budget measures for 2022, a new grant has been launched for the installation of photovoltaic panels on minibuses, buses and trucks. Two more new schemes encourage operators of these vehicles to reduce exhaust emissions from their vehicles through the installation of diesel particulate filters (DPFs) and selective catalytic reduction (SCR) systems, while another scheme promotes power recovery for electric vehicles, the Ministry of Finance and Employment. 2022).

The most common length of stay of tourists in Malta was 10 days (28.8%) or longer than 10 days (28.8%); immediately after that, with a very small difference in the number of respondents remains a stay of 1 to 7 days (25.4%) , while a small number stayed in Malta for a month (8.5%) and more than a month (8.5%). Stays that are longer than the ones usually included in the tourist packages (7-10 days) indicates that the prices of accommodation and food - as well as the services provided by the hotel where they are staying - suit tourists and are readily available at the place of visit. The hotel company needs to establish a clear role of prices in the overall positioning strategy. Defining a given role is accomplished in the process of building a pricing strategy. The strategy determines the real role of prices in achieving the long-term position of the hotel company and its sales facilities on the market. There are three important strategies: below, above and at the level of market prices (Lewis, 1995). The key goals in the pricing strategy should derive from the general goals of positioning the hotel business. These have their expression in turnover and profit. The company must be sure that the pricing policy will be highly correlated with the selected market segments, with the image and other elements of the marketing mix. A decision needs to be made regarding whether prices will be lower, higher or equal to the prices of the competition. The hotel company's pricing strategy can be based on operating costs, market and other aspects of consumer sensitivity to prices and competition. The relationship between prices and tourist demand is intricately linked. Price is an important motivating factor in the demand for hotel services, which is most pronounced in the hotel industry with seasonal business (Kosar, 1998). Given that frequent flights from Malta to the UK are available (MIA, 2021), the organisation of the airline's flights cannot be considered a reason to stay longer on the island.

Respondents cite value for money, historical and cultural sites and favourable climatic conditions as Malta's main strengths. According to them, there is still a strong cultural connection between the UK and Malta. The common characteristics of these two countries are: driving on the left-

hand side, speaking English and traditional food in restaurants. The fact that Malta is an English-speaking country is also considered by as many as 81.4% of tourists as the main trump card for attracting Britons. These are especially important for people who are 65+ years old, because many of them do not speak any language other than English, thus communication is, consequently, rendered easier for this age group. However, this perception can be negatively affected by the employment of third-country nationals in hotels and other tourism-related jobs with barely basic English. Buttle (1996) emphasises that language barriers in the hotel industry separate the buyer from the seller, thus encouraging the development of mediation, which includes the following forms of intermediaries:

- hotel representatives
- travel agencies
- tour operators
- reference organisations or consortia
- tourist organisations
- air traffic
- computerised reservation services
- the Convention Bureau and
- car rental companies and auto-moto associations.

The offer of hospitality services is inelastic, conditioned by the existing catering possibilities (spatial, material, personnel,), but the demand for hospitality services is unlimited, diverse and elastic (Ali et al., 2015). The mission of the hospitality industry is not only to offer accommodation, food and drinks in its facilities in a certain quantity and of a particular quality, but also hospitality. The result of any work should be to meet not only the material but also psychological needs of hospitality consumers (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Hospitality and tourism companies offer a combination of tangible and intangible products (Kandampully, 2007). For example, a hotel room or meal in a restaurant both have features. Of course, there are big differences between the budget type of hotel and luxury hotels or between fast food restaurants and elegant restaurants in terms of the tangibility and intangibility of the quality on offer. However, services are often ideas, concepts, interactions, relationships and experiences that most often cannot be patented (Ali et al., 2015). It is especially important to keep in mind that the aspect of intangibility of services offered by hospitality companies is key to consumer satisfaction, because the main difficulty with intangibility of services is that consumers often cannot see, feel, or try the services in question when these are recommended, or buy them (Gronroos, 2007). Before purchasing services, consumers may try to evaluate them based on

observations of hotel or restaurant interiors and the appearance and behaviour of employees (Baker & Crompton, 2000). It is well-known that the requirements and expectations of clients are constantly increasing, which increases the pressure on hospitality and tourism companies to improve their services and management practices. The British tourists surveyed were mostly seen to rate the quality of Maltese hospitality as a 4 (49.2%). 19 of them (32.2%) offered a grade of 5, 9 of them (15.3%) 3 and two (3.4%) delivered a rating of 2.

To travel to Malta and back, British tourists use the following airlines:

- ☐ Air Malta (10 respondents; 16.9%)
- ☐ British Airways (25; 42.4%)
- ☐ Easy Jet (6; 10.2%)
- ☐ Wizz air (5; 8.5%)
- ☐ Ryanair (12; 20.3%)
- ☐ Other (1; 1.7%).

Each airline has its own way of doing business, but there are broadly two distinct types of airlines that focus on civil travel; that is, commercial traffic. The first type consists of national airlines that are state-owned and financed by state funds, while low-cost airlines are privately owned by one or more persons or companies, depending on the size of the company. In Malta the national airline is Air Malta, which competes against other airlines, amongst which can be found low-cost carriers such as Easy Jet and Ryanair.

Low-cost airlines currently carry more than one-third of scheduled traffic in Europe and will continue to act to boost air transport growth in the future. Although very vulnerable to rising fuel prices, low-cost carriers in Europe are not discouraged and many airlines have strengthened their positions. Even a negative economic cycle provides some new opportunities; for example, business travellers are increasingly flying using low-cost companies as travel operators' budgets are reduced. Eventually, opportunities for integrations and acquisitions among low-cost airlines are moving towards a smaller number of larger groups, while enabling the strengthening of their flight networks by accessing a larger number of markets, with involvement in the long-distance segment. Three quarters of the capacity of low-cost carriers today falls on flights within Europe, where the offer of low-cost airlines already exceeds 50% of the market share in large markets without regulatory and other restrictions. The market share of low-cost airlines in the European domestic sector is 22% (Krajnovic & Nekic, 2016).

At the outset, it should be determined why a certain airline can offer particular flights at low prices, while another airline offers such a flight for the same route at a much higher price. The

answer is in several items listed below and explained in more detail in Appendix 6 (Krajnovic & Nekic, 2016):

1. A unique type of aircraft
2. Economy class for all
3. Auxiliary airports
4. Selling directly through the website
5. Airline staff.

42.4% of respondents (25) decided to use the services of British Airways. The reasons why they chose this company are that it is a national company, which guarantees security and low ticket prices. The national airline is part of a country's transport infrastructure. It exceeds the purely financial results of an airline because its impact is much wider - on the economy, society and countries, especially Malta, which is far away. Malta is an airline destination. There is the role of the national airline to participate in the transport infrastructure, but of course, other airlines are also there to further connect the network.

There are several factors that affect the tourism industry at the macro level. Authors of textbooks and papers in the field of tourism tend to highlight the following factors (Singer & Prideaux, 2006):

- economic growth / decline,
- access and price of transport,
- political stability and security,
- technological changes,
- demographic change,
- exchange rate,
- open borders,
- air conditioning.

According to tourists, the most interesting places to visit are Valletta (55%), Mellieħa (30%), Gozo (47%) and Rabat (26%). The British mostly think that security in Malta is satisfactory (55.9%), and that possible international conflicts or political situations will not affect the number of visits to the island (70%). As the biggest competition to tourism in Malta, 69% of British tourists cite the Greek islands.

Political stability and security are crucial factors in tourism development. Without a politically stable environment, tourism cannot function. Any kind of tension and instability in the country

threatens the chances of the country developing in terms of tourism. Whether it is internal unrest or international conflicts, tourists today massively avoid countries affected by civil wars, protests, terrorist attacks and so on. (Grimm et al., 2009).

Tensions exist on all tourist destinations, whether among local politicians, various stakeholders and between hosts and guests. Politicians often support the development of destination tourism, as stakeholders tend to see so-called positive benefits from tourism (such as job creation and earnings) and prioritise them over negative impacts. It is increasingly recognised that tourism is not only one of the most influential human phenomena in the social, economic and environmental development of society, but brings remarkable results in the development of culture and awareness of people (Hollinshead & Suleman, 2017). Tensions arise when the interests of all stakeholders cannot be met, which is often the case and then the destination suffers.

In this chapter, the results obtained on the basis of the conducted research have been analysed and theoretically explained. Apparent coincidences or differences that have arisen have been compared to the results obtained in previously conducted research on the basis of available literature.

The next chapter contains the conclusions reached on the literature review and research conducted, as well as recommendations for further research.

6. CONCLUSION

The tourist market can be said to have been relegated to the category of extremely dynamic markets over the last few years. This dynamism is primarily reflected in the turbulent changes taking place on both the supply and demand sides.

When it comes to hospitality, tourists may have specific requirements that relate primarily to the decoration of the room, type of furniture, specific staff ratio, technological elements on offer, type and quality of food, parking and other additional services provided by the hotel (Baker & Crompton, 2000). Creating an offer according to specific expectations and preferences is extremely important to achieving a high level of satisfaction and developing the loyalty of

business travellers (Ali et al., 2015). The attitude of employees towards guests and the quality-of-service provision are important factors that have a significant impact on the choice of a particular hotel. Technological equipment and the comfort of the hotel are important factors in decision-making and form a technical part of the service (Baker & Crompton, 2000). However, the experience of service users is significantly influenced by the way in which services are provided by employees (efficiency, professionalism, competence, etc.) and the attitude that employees have towards guests (kindness, helpfulness, established interpersonal relations, etc.). The staff should provide services in accordance with the defined standard of the hotel in an efficient manner and respect the time of the guest, as well as be maximally oriented to the guest, kind, helpful and personalise services according to individual requirements (Gronroos, 2007).

The difference between a hotel with a different number of stars is in the level of quality and the level of luxury that a particular hotel offers. The quality of hotel service stands out in numerous empirical analyses as a basic decision-making factor (Ali et al., 2015). Quality gives a competitive advantage in the market, as all hotels offer quite similar services. Hotels are differentiated in the market based on the quality of services provided (Ali et al., 2015). If guests perceive hotel services as better or the hotel has a higher category, guests expect a higher level of benefits and comfort during their stay. Quality refers to various characteristics of services such as cleanliness of the facility, technical characteristics of inventory (quality of lighting, comfort of mattresses, bathroom equipment, quality of cutlery in the restaurant, and so on), variety of food, taste and preparation of meals, degree of kindness and helpfulness of staff obtaining services in accordance with individual requirements, etc. (Kandampully, 2007). Hotel comfort is also a significant determinant of the quality of hotel service that allows for a greater degree of enjoyment during the guest's stay. The comfort of the hotel consists of the size of the room, interior design, comfort of the furniture, etc. As a basis for positioning and achieving high quality of service, many hotel chains use the concept of total quality management (Gronroos, 2007).

In addition to quality, an increasingly crucial factor in making decisions about choosing a hotel is the level of luxury (Ali et al., 2015). A five-star luxury hotel is usually considered, but in practice it is quite a common situation for many four-star hotel to meet all the criteria to obtain a fifth star. However, many hotels not prioritise this and elect to retain their four-star status, offering their service at the level of five-star hotels. Managers justify this by saying that many companies, especially those in the field of finance and pharmacy, have smaller budgets for these needs or

even have a formal ban on their employees staying in five-star hotels, except in the case of the highest level of management (Ali et al., 2015).

The research in this study was conducted by collecting information from guests staying at four-star hotels; in the case, the Seabank Mellieħa and San Antonio Hotel in St Paul's Bay. The hotels are located in the northern region of Malta, in the villages of Buġibba and Mellieħa.

The historical and cultural connection between Malta and Great Britain dates back to the period when Malta was a British colony. However, even after Malta's independence in 1964, many British features are noticeable on the island. Traditional British cuisine, such as British breakfast, is served in all restaurants in Malta. Moreover, the island features English-speaking areas and driving on the left. These, together with various historical monuments and sights, are some of the main features that attract visits by British tourists. Along with these connections between the two countries, Malta as a tourist destination is characterised by excellent climatic conditions (many sunny days), as well as beautiful sandy beaches. Additionally, the acceptance of low-cost flights to large British markets by the Maltese government has contributed to the increase in tourist visits to Malta (Malta Independent, 2007).

As a tourist destination, Malta is particularly attractive to older British tourists, aged 65 and over, due to the possibility of visiting various historical sites and cultural events, communication in English and the availability of frequent and affordable flights. The northern region of Malta is especially attractive to older tourists because of the quieter places without noise and crowds. The stated reasons were concluded based on the conducted research and also the same assumption that the visits will increase to a greater extent because most tourists return to Malta and recommend it to friends.

In future research, it would be interesting to examine perceptions and experiences derived from meetings between older British tourists and older residents in Malta. It is likely that these two groups would have a lot in common and enjoy conversing on a number of topics of shared interest.

This chapter has presented general conclusions on the topic based on the results of the research and relevant theoretical facts. At the end of the chapter, a proposal for future research related to this topic has been given.

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APPENDICES

1.1 Appendix 1

Table 1. Definitions of customer satisfaction (Raspor, 2012, pp. 13-14)

Autor	Definition
Howard & Sheth (1969)	The client's knowledge of the appropriate or inappropriate reward for the experience.
Hunt (1975)	Evaluation of the experienced service that is in line with expectations.
Swan & Combs (1976)	Evaluation or knowledge of end users about a satisfactory or unsatisfactory product.
Churchill et al. (1982)	Purchase and use result based on the client's comparison of expected benefits and purchase costs. It is an attitude that can be measured as total satisfaction with different elements of a product and service.
Westbrook (1980)	Emotional reaction to the experience with a purchased product or service.
World Travel Organization (1986)	A psychological concept that includes good feeling and comfort, which is a consequence of getting what is desired and expected from a product and / or service.
Tse& Wilton (1988)	The customer's response to the difference between expectations (or some standard of performance) and the actual perception of the purchased product.
Parasuraman et al. (1988)	The client's emotional reaction to the experience with a particular service in relation to expectations.

Halstead (1994)	Emotional reaction to the comparison of the obtained product and previously set standards.
Gundersen et al. (1996)	Post-purchase evaluation of a particular product or service.
Gilbert & Horsnell (1998)	Client's reaction to the received quality of service.
Baker & Crompton (2000)	Emotional state after the experience.
Zeithaml & Bitner (2003)	The customer's subjective assessment of the product or service as to whether those products or services meet his expectations and needs.
Chang (2008)	Subjective comparison of expected and perceived experience with a product or service.
ISO 9000	The user's perception of the degree to which his requirements have been met (ie expressed needs or expectations).
Raspor (2012)	The result of the client's subjective assessment of each element of the service and the overall service process, based on his knowledge, feelings and experience.
Kotler & Armstrong (2012)	Feelings of pleasure or disappointment resulting from a comparison between product / service performance and expectations.
Ha & Park (2013)	Cumulative affective response resulting from the consumption of products and / or services.
Kim et al. (2014)	Perceived customer image or impression of the product.
Kashif et al. (2015)	A sense of the client's happiness when his expectations of the service provider are met.
Jiang & Zhang (2016)	Customer satisfaction is a post-purchase experience.

Jing et al. (2017)	The result of the client's satisfaction with the quality and price of the service.
Sitourus&Yustisia (2018)	A post-consumerist assessment in which the chosen alternative meets or exceeds expectations.
Ahrholdt et al. (2019)	The final state of the cognitive process in which the client compares his expectations with the subjective perception of the value obtained by consumption.

1.2 Appendix 2

The specific characteristics of the services are:

- **Intangibility of the service** - the services do not deliver materialised items, but experiences. The services cannot be seen or tried before the purchase. They can only be evaluated during or after their consumption. So, buying services carries higher risks than buying tangible products. In the tourism industry, consumers do not buy tangible material products, but realise the benefits at their destination. Intangibility is the primary source from which other characteristics of services emerge. Due to its intangibility, the service cannot be seen, tasted, heard or felt before purchase. In many activities, including tourism, most of the products sold are intangible, such as enjoyment, unforgettable events, memories and recollections that can be shared with others, all of which reflect this quality (Senić&Senić, 2008).

- **Heterogeneity of service** - unlike tangible products whose production is based on standardised criteria that should ensure their uniformity, services are difficult to standardise. The reason is that the delivery of the service involves many individual entities and is performed in different temporal and spatial situations. Although the hotel company can set specific standards of services, the delivered service mostly depends on the individual, i.e., the employee, who is in direct contact with guests during the act of service. This means that it is difficult for services to set standardised criteria for the assessment of their quality (Senić&Senić, 2008).

- **Simultaneity** - simultaneity and the connection of production and consumption of services. Consumers cannot assess the quality of the service before its delivery, which means

that the quality is manifested during and after consuming the service. Also, services cannot be stored to be delivered later.

"Decay" - due to the simultaneity of production and consumption of services mentioned, if services are not sold, they "fail". In that case, their value is lost. Since the demand for services is variable due to the impact of seasonality or crisis, catering companies lose their income under such circumstances. (Vukosav, 2016).

- ***Inseparability of consumption and production of services*** - services are usually produced and used simultaneously. The outcome of the service is influenced by both the provider and the recipient of the service (Senić&Senić, 2008). Consumers are, therefore, simultaneously participants in the service process. It also means that it is not possible to separate production from marketing functions (Vukosav, 2016).

- ***Cost structure*** - many luxury catering companies have high maintenance costs. Sometimes, in the case of low demand, it is difficult to reduce costs. Also, the facilities must be renovated to be competitive on the market (Vukosav, 2016).

- ***Intensity of work*** - for catering companies, this is characterised by many employees. Employees play a major role in the service delivery process, due to personal communication and experience, which is why catering companies are labour intensive (Vukosav, 2016).

It is characteristic of tourist services to contain both tangible and intangible elements, i.e., elements that can be standardised, as well as those pertaining to consumer satisfaction. Quality in tourism cannot be built on a partial approach to only one of the mentioned groups of elements, because the definition of quality has a complex character and must include both aspects, i.e., service elements (the usual, standard, technical-technological and functional characteristics) and meeting the needs of tourist expectations (Olsen, 1996).

1.3 Appendix 3

Connectivity of hotel product components:

- a. The components of the quality of the hotel product (spatial, technical-technological, organisational-process) correspond to the basic bearers of its structure and cannot be observed in isolation.

- b. The choice of the most suitable location determines the technical-technological essence of the hotel product, according to which the organisation of the process is conceived.
- c. The interconnectedness and conditionality of the basic components of the quality of the hotel product is realised in the opposite direction.
- d. The range and manner of providing services imposes appropriate technical and technological solutions in terms of capacity, internal organisation, equipment and functional connectivity of spatial units for different purposes, which, in turn, requires the selection of an appropriate location (Kosar, 2005).

1.4 Appendix 4

When measuring the quality of services provided, numerous difficulties arise, and universal, generally accepted models and methods for measurement do not exist. To assess the quality of services, the most common criterion is one that includes the following ten main features

(Parasuraman et al., 1988):

1. Reliability in providing services,
2. Business and responsibility of employees when providing services,
3. Competence - the expertise of the staff, with certain knowledge and skills,
4. Accessibility - easy availability of the service,
5. Empathy - cordiality, kindness, high level of respect and understanding of the staff,
6. Communication with guests at a high cultural and reasonable level,
7. Credibility - honesty, professionalism, reputation and trust,
8. Security - the guests are insured by the hotel where they stay in all segments (danger, risks, finances, violence, theft),
9. Understanding for the guest - personalisation of the service,
10. Tangible elements - appearance of employees and facilities, equipment, promotional materials, etc.

1.5 Appendix 5

Questionnaire: British experiences of Maltese islands

1.What is your gender?

- Male (insert Tick box)
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

2.From which part of United Kingdom you are coming from?

- England
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland

3.Please tick the age group you are part of:

- (60- 65 years old)
- (65-70 years old)
- (70-80 years old)
- 80+ years old

4.How many times did you visit Malta?

- My first time

- My second time
- More than 2 times

5. Do you have any family or social history related to the Maltese islands?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

6. (If yes to question 5) Can you please give me more details?

-

7. When in Malta and Gozo, do you?

- Rent a car
- Book a taxi
- Do you use public transport buses?
- Rely on friends /relatives for transport?
- Prefer to Walk
- Stay within the preferred locality of the paid accommodation

7a. Do you have any comments on the transportation means?

-

8. Please indicate in which hotel you are staying?

-

9.How long you will stay in Malta?

- From 1 to 7 days
- Up to 10 days
- More than 10 days
- One month
- More than one month

10.What makes the Northern area attractive for you?

-

11.Why do you choose St'Pauls Bay and Melliha rather than rest of Malta?

-

12. Do you have any particular reason for coming to Malta? (Please write at least one to two sentences)

-

13.If you have to choose what attracts you about Malta, what would be from the following options?

- Food
- History and culture
- Weather
- Value for money

- Sea and sand
- Other reasons:

14. What would Malta offer compared to those other islands in the Mediterranean Sea? (Please describe)

-

15. Do you think that the historical and cultural connection between British and Maltese citizens attracts tourists from the United Kingdom? Is this connection between the two countries still relevant?

- Yes (If Yes please explain below)
- No
- Do not Know.

16. Any place / location that you would like to visit in Malta, or you would like to visit again? And why?

-

17. How would you rate the Maltese hospitality from 1 –5? (5 highest mark and 1 lowest mark)

- 5 (Excellent)
- 4 (Very good)
- 3 (Good)
- 2 (Not good)
- 1 (Not satisfied at all)

18.What would you suggest to someone who is coming from United Kingdom and that they must know about Malta before they choose Malta as their next tourist destination?

-

19.Do you think that Malta being English speaking country makes it attractive for the British market?

- Yes

- -No

- Do not know

19a.If your answer is yes, please explain why?

-

20.Which airline/s do you use to buy tickets when traveling to and from Malta?

- Air Malta

- British Airways

- Easy Jet

- Ryanair

- Other

21.Which airline do you prefer? (From the question above)

-

22.Can you explain why you chose that airline in your previous answer?

-

23. Do you encounter any currency related issues (Sterling- Euro Currencies) when traveling and staying in Malta?

-

24. Did the impact of Brexit influence your choice of visiting Malta?

- Yes

- No

- Do not know

24a. Kindly can you explain what was the Brexit related impact/s?

-

25. What is your favorite month for coming to Malta and do you think that this will influence your decision to book your stay in Malta?

-

26. Name three places of interest that you were attracted to visit when coming to Malta?

-

27. Do you think that any international conflict or different political situation around Europe can affect the attraction towards the Maltese islands for British tourists?

-

28. Is the safety of Maltese islands one of the biggest attributes of Maltese hospitality and tourism in coming years?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

28. Please explain your answer below?

-

29. What other destinations may be competitive for the Maltese islands?

-

30. Can you recommend any improvements which need to be implemented to improve the Maltese islands as a destination?

-

1.6 Appendix 6

A certain airline can offer a certain flight at a lower price than the prices of other airlines for the same route for several reasons (Krajnovic & Nekic, 2016):

1. A unique type of aircraft

Few passengers who travel on average or below average notice what type of aircraft it is during their flight because most believe that each aircraft is adapted to each possible flight, but airlines carefully choose the type of aircraft that would be suitable for flights on a particular route. If we look at the company Easy Jet, which is headquartered at London's Luton Airport, which was founded in 1995, and it offers only Airbus A319, Airbus A320 and Airbus A320 Neo in its range of aircraft. Thanks to this, Easy Jet has ensured that the service of their aircraft is significantly facilitated in the event of a breakdown or regular service. Also, when buying an aircraft or leasing, which will be discussed later, there are certain discounts if the company buys only from one aircraft manufacturer. Also, each individual aircraft is designed for a specific airline, which means that if the company wishes, it can always make some adjustments for specific aircraft, such as seat spacing, legroom, luggage space and the like. Moreover, there is one thing related to a single fleet, and that is that pilots for each type of aircraft must be licensed, which in this case means that a pilot licensed for aircraft types 320 and 319 can operate on all existing routes of this companies of that type of aircraft without additional tests and exams at the expense of the airline.

2. Economy class for all

Until a few years ago, this practice was valid for almost all low-cost airlines, but today there are exceptions. When buying a ticket from a low-cost carrier, it can be noticed that it is not possible to choose which class you want to stay in during the flight because the airline assumes that if the passenger opted for a low-cost ticket, it does not matter what class he will stay in during the flight. Recently, there are some airlines that can be classified in a segment between low-cost and national companies. Such companies have started to offer their passengers economy class plus, which differs in that it offers various additional facilities such as screens for watching movies, an auxiliary table that unfolds during meals, more legroom and the like. The reason for this change is that these airlines also operate overseas flights and there is a certain proportion of

passengers who are willing to pay 30% to 50% more than the relatively low price for a more comfortable flight.

3. Auxiliary airports

It can be said that there are two low-cost models in Europe, Easy Jet, on the one hand, and Ryanair, on the other. Ryanair serves secondary airports, relatively less frequently and focuses on new tourist markets without direct competition, while easyJet serves primary, expensive, airports, very frequently and focuses on existing markets (travelers traveling for business and leisure). and leisure), but also new markets, accepting competition from existing carriers. Other carriers mostly try to follow one of these models. Low-cost companies are focusing on shorter routes (mostly below 1,500 km). To achieve the required low operating costs per passenger, it is necessary that the aircraft has as many seats as possible. The competitive advantage derived from higher aircraft productivity is of paramount importance and is achieved by combining the use of ancillary airports and offering point-to-point connectivity services exclusively. Ancillary airports have two main advantages over larger airports: they charge cheaper fees to airlines for using their services and, as they are less frequent, the delays caused by "congested" airports are lower.

4. Sell directly through the website

All low-cost airlines sell their tickets directly through their website to allow passengers to avoid the additional costs that may arise when tickets are sold through another broker who would take a commission. It should also be emphasized that they also sell their tickets through several agencies, but these tickets are much more expensive, so the cheapest and easiest way to buy this type of ticket is directly from the airline. Also, such airlines often offer discounts and additional benefits, and it is possible to receive them if passengers subscribe to their news. Such discounts can happen several times a year where airlines want to charge their flights even if they make no money just so that the plane does not fly empty and to cover at least the fixed costs they have. Such marketing activities are much more frequent with low-cost airlines than with national ones because their price is extremely flexible, which means that their agents observe how much demand has increased if the price falls by, say, 50%. If it is more than 50%, then these pay off on the market. Also, web check in is available online for free, while it is charged at the airport (for passengers without luggage) because the airline wants to be sure how many passengers will board the flight and how much luggage will be carried.

5. Airline staff

Low-cost airlines employ workers from all fields, so workers who have never had experience in air traffic before are welcome. The key thing is that there are 3 types of class in national airlines: economy, business and business class. Each of these requires a certain level of schooling and training before a person gets the opportunity to work in any of these classes. To transfer to each

specific class, it is necessary to complete the set number of flights and meet some criteria, and then the steward or flight attendant receives salary supplements depending on which class he is in. Of course, this pushes out the airline's costs, so low-cost carriers avoid any type of class except economy.