11 Quality Evaluation

Learning objectives

- ☐ Define 'service quality' in marketing terms, but be able to explain the important differences between event programme and service quality and how they can be measured.
- ☐ Learn the SERVQUAL approach and the five gaps model and how they can be adapted to event evaluation (e.g., FESTPERF).
- ☐ Be able to measure satisfaction augmented by importance-performance measures.
- ☐ Understand the principles of service blueprinting and mapping and their usefulness for experience design and quality control.

11.1 How people evaluate service quality

Knowing how visitors evaluate programme and service quality is crucial for marketing and design, and for continuous improvement of the co-created event and tourism experience. It goes beyond the visitor, as Derrett (2015:333) described various stakeholder perceptions of festival quality, demonstrating how it means different things depending on one's interests and goals. The attendees, organisers, suppliers, government, grant givers, sponsors, the public (non users) all should be evaluated – especially when determining overall worth. But even when examining service quality, there might very well be big differences in what stakeholders find to be important and in their evaluation of performance or quality.

The evaluation of service quality is a big topic in the marketing, tourism and events literature, with several theoretical foundations being relevant. The classic articles by Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) set the tone and remain essential reading. Regarding leisure and events, Mackay and Crompton (1988) examined "search, experience and credence" factors that pertain to customer evaluation of quality. Note that in this context, programme and service quality are not separated – the event or the tourism experience IS the service.

Search: When searching opportunities, such as attending events, there are certain tangibles that can be identified, and information found, that might affect the decision to attend or influence expectations. These will include the location and

site, programme, organisations and people participating, cost, and services available. Importance-performance evaluation will reveal what was considered to be most important, although the method cannot cover every possible consideration. Pre-evaluation, such as through focus groups and searching media accounts of the event, will help in formulating a comprehensive list of factors to include and these can be refined through experience or by examining what was found at other events.

Experiences: You cannot know in advance what experiences you will have at an event, although expectations will usually exist for a level of quality. These are in part shaped by reputation, social media interactions, and marketing. Special evaluation methods are required to explore experiences, although many evaluators simply ask about satisfaction with programme and service quality.

Credence factors: Customers might be unable or unwilling to evaluate the professionalism or technical competence of people and equipment they encounter. This applies to artists and athletes as well, although people can report on what they like. Event evaluators will use some input from customers, but additional expert opinion and the feedback of peers will be needed to assess competence.

Equity: Applied to public services, such as government supported events, and probably the not-for-profit sector's events, many people will consider equity principles in their evaluation of quality. While the private sector seeks profits, and sometimes produces events unaffordable to large segments of the population, there is little or no justification for government events and service-oriented events to exclude people on the basis of price. On the other hand, if events are free or easily affordable the attendees might very well modify their expectations of quality, be less demanding and critical. This remains an hypothesis to test!

Figure 11.1: Visitor experiences and satisfaction

Recommended goals for visitor experiences and satisfaction	Sample KPIs
■ Understand the experiences desired and realized by guests	■ High satisfaction on all highly important elements using importance-performance analysis
■ Satisfy our visitors with the event overall, and with all elements of programme and service quality	■ Zero or reduced complaints
■ Determine ways to improve the event	■ High level of recommendations by word of mouth
■ Determine future intentions (loyalty) and the likelihood of word of mouth recommendations	■ Increasing or high level of return visits and expressed loyalty

11.2 Measuring quality: SERVQUAL

There are two measurement models in widespread use: one simply asks about customer satisfaction with service attributes, and the other compares expectations with perceived performance to identify discrepancies (as in the Importance-Performance method). The discrepancy model, including I-P measures, generates

more information with multiple potential uses. Both approaches have their supporters and critics.

Regarding why visitors attend, the underlying theory for SERQUAL and Importance-Performance measures is 'expectation-confirmation'.

From Wikipedia: **"***Expectation confirmation theory is a cognitive theory which seeks to explain post-purchase or post-adoption satisfaction as a function of expectations, perceived performance, and disconfirmation of beliefs."*

The popular SERVQUAL discrepancy-based model by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) consists of five distinct dimensions to measure consumers' expectations and perceptions of service performance: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Each of these give rise to evaluation questions that can be included in visitor surveys or interviews, with analysis augmented by service mapping or less systematic observation.

Figure 11.2: SERVQUAL Dimensions

SERVQUAL Dimensions (Source: Parasuraman et al., 1988) **and recommended goals**	Suggested KPIs for events and event tourism
TANGIBLES ■ Ensure that all tangible aspects of the event site (design, appearance of personnel, and visitor services like toilets, food, parking, comfort, merchandise) are of the highest possible standard ■ Ensure accessibility is adequate for all visitors ■ Reduce or eliminate waiting times	■ Zero deviations from specifications ■ High customer satisfaction
RELIABILITY ■ Get everything right (to specifications) and accurate the first time ■ Honour our promises (as communicated in media and signage) ■ Visitors must have confidence in the organisation (it is reassuring when there are problems), the schedule (produce the event on time) and delivery of what was promised (i.e., the programme) ■ Ensure that patrons understand different levels of service provided (related to price, location or time) ■ Treat all visitors as honoured guests	■ Zero complaints and/or all complaints dealt with immediately and to the customers' satisfaction ■ Zero departures from the published schedule and programme ■ Satisfaction with responses to service failure ■ High degree of trust among stakeholders
RESPONSIVENESS ■ Staff and volunteers will always be prompt, and willing to help, when responding to requests and solving problems ■ Empower staff and volunteers to "go the extra mile" in delivering quality services and satisfying customer needs	■ High customer satisfaction with recovery from service failures ■ High satisfaction on staff/volunteer helpfulness and on information provision ■ Satisfaction of staff and volunteer (self-assessment) ■ Supervisor satisfaction with workforce