

DETERMINANTS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND SERVICE QUALITY – THE CASE OF ROMANIAN PUBLIC SERVICES –

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The present study portrays customer satisfaction and service quality as a multi-dimensional construct and investigates the link between customer satisfaction determinants and service quality determinants. Based on arguments that customer satisfaction should be operationalized along the same determinants/factors and dimensions (and the corresponding items) on which service quality is operationalized, the results of study indicate that the two constructs are indeed independent but closely related, implying that an increase in one is likely to lead to an increase in another.

I. INTRODUCTION

Services quality and customer satisfaction have been for over a decade two important topics both for the academic world and for the researches in the field of marketing.

The attention directed to these two concepts, services quality and customer satisfaction is mainly due to the harsh competition among private companies on the market, as well as to the pressure of political factors and of the population, over organizations in the field of public administration. The key to the competitive advantage is to deliver high-quality services, services that in exchange will generate the customer satisfaction. (Sureshchandar et. al., 2002)

If the preoccupation of the private companies for the two concepts „service quality” and „customer satisfaction” is a major factor in maintaining an advantage over the competitors, an advantage that in the end will generate the economic success of the company, the preoccupation of the organizations in the field of public administration and public services, respectively, vis-à-vis service quality and customer / citizens’ satisfaction derives from the changes due to the implementation of new philosophies regarding administration, known as “New Public Management”, changes that are based on the interest in measuring performances and revitalizing the public and the nonprofit organizations and that are generated by the convergent result of two forces: (1) the pressure of demand for a higher responsibility of the organizations, coming from the political factors, the public and

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the media, (2) the deliberate growth of the organization leaders' engagement towards results and performance. (Poister, 2003)

One of the important preoccupations related to the service quality regards the relationship and the construction of this concept with the concept of "customer satisfaction". Thus, regarding the construction of the two concepts, generally the researchers' opinions converge towards the following theory: quality of services and customer satisfaction can be seen as conceptually different things but very close to each other for the point of view of their construction (Parasuraman et.al.1994; Shemwell et. al., 1998; Sureshchandar et al, 2002).

If in the case of product delivery (products being tangible objects) the difference between the two concepts is obvious enough (in this case quality can be defined as the degree of perfection related to the quality standard of the object and satisfaction as a fulfillment or the satisfaction of certain previous expectation related to the product), in the case of delivery of services (and in the case of public services as well) the definition of quality by the quality standards of the object is no longer valid, and this fact is mainly due to the „immaterial” feature that a service implies, the short time of production and consumption and the client's subjectivity in assessing the service. (Gronroos, 1990)

Also, although there are studies that highlight the fact that: customer satisfaction and the service quality, in the case of certain public services, are different and distinct concepts from the customer perspective (*Athiyaman A.*, 1997; Sureshchandar et al, 2002), the difference between them becomes unclear and it grows dim in the case of old or traditional clients (Bigne, 2003), there is still no agreement regarding the clear and consistent definition of the relationship between them, these concepts being often used unclearly.

Oliver (1997) suggests the fact that the difference between the concepts "service quality" and "customer satisfaction" can be synthesized from the perspective of three major aspects:

- Assessment of the service quality can be done by the assessment of different attributes and aspects specific to the service, whereas the assessment of satisfaction is more general and more global.
- Expectations regarding service quality are based on the perception of perfection, whereas the satisfaction is done by assessments that include certain reference aspects, as: personal necessities and requirements, the equitable treatment to which it is subjected.
- Analysis and assessment of service quality is a more cognitive thing, whereas the analysis and assessment of satisfaction has a largely emotional side.

The aim of this work is to highlight the relationship between service quality offered and customer satisfaction, from the perspective of the construction of concepts, within a public organization (the Romanian customs system) and to investigate, at least for some public services, if the two above-mentioned concepts are close as far as the conceptual structuring form is concerned and / or if they can be seen as different but strongly related concepts or not.

Also, the conclusions and the results of the investigation suggested by this work, in my opinion, have to give an answer to the following two questions:

- 1) Can service quality and customer satisfaction be regarded as two conceptually opposed constructions in the case of services in the public sphere?
- 2) In case the answer to the first question is affirmative, can the two concepts be correlated or not?

For practical reasons, the investigation of difference / similitude of the construction of the two concepts has been carried out via the inquiry method, in which economic agents within the range competence of the Cluj Regional Customs Inspectorate took part. The territorial competence includes the following counties: Alba, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Mureș, Sălaj. The economic agents included in the inquiry were those who asked for a permit of perfecting to be delivered in 2004, a document that

is mandatory for the economic agents in order to carry out customs operations in the perfecting system (in compliance with the regulations for Applying the Customs Code of Romania, approved by the Government Decision No. 1114/2001).

II. THE DETERMINANTS OF THE SERVICE QUALITY

Although there is no general agreement in defining the concept of “service quality”, the general conclusion that can be drawn from the specialist literature is based on the following remarks: (1) certain authors suggest that: service quality is associated with providing a certain material or immaterial “something” in a way to create pleasure to the consumer and that leads either to the fulfillment of a need and/or to the creation a certain value. (Bryslan, 2001), (2) other authors suggest that: the definition and the description of the service quality should be done by means of the notion of attitude – long-term general assessment that drafts the general appreciation of the service. (Sureshchandar et al, 2002)

Certain authors have suggested the introduction of the “perceived service quality” term, term defined as “a difference, which the consumer seizes between the perception of the service and the expectations of the service”, „ ..., a generalization of the discrepancy between the customers’ expectations or wishes and their own perceptions” (Parasuraman et.al, 1991)

Other authors again (Cronin et Taylor, 1994; Asubonteng et al.; 1996, Haksik et.al, 2000), criticizing the above-mentioned approach consider service quality a kind of conceptualized attitude, rather as the “perceived quality performance” than “the difference between the perceived quality and the customer a priori expectations related to it” (Haksik et. al, 2000).

Service quality, from the clients’ or the customers’ point of view, appears as a multidimensional concept (Parasuraman et. al, 1991; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; McDougall and Levesque, 2000; Sureshchandar et al., 2002; Kang and James, 2004; Hakis et. al., 2000; Bigne et.al, 2003) even though there is no general agreement regarding the number and the nature of the dimensions that the service quality concept implies.

If certain service quality models have been conceived around two major elements, which in their authors’ opinion, (Gronroos, 1990; McDougall and Levesque, 2000; Kang and James, 2004), are the basis for the conceptualization of the service quality: (1) the content or the resulting (contractual) aspects of the service – “what” is actually delivered by the service (the technical aspect) and (2) the relational or process aspects (customer – employee relationship) of the service – “how “and “in what way” is the service delivered (the functional aspect), most models try and define the dimensions of quality from the perspective of those aspects/factors of assessment that form, from the customers’ point of view, the general and essential appreciation of the service (Parasuraman et.al., 1991; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Sureshchandar et al, 2002).

As far as the public organizations are concerned, referring to the organizations in the sphere of public services, the problem of clearly and comprehensively defining the dimensions of service quality, as well as the causality of the factors which it depends on is made difficult, even more than the issues described above, by the appearance of two major elements that the organizations needs to take into account:

- 1) The feature of social responsibility both vis-à-vis the customers themselves and the population or the socio-professional strata.
- 2) The “multi-service” feature, characteristic for a large number of public organizations, the “multi-service” features implying the simultaneous delivery of a large number of diverse main and auxiliary services, with a high level of complexity.

Among all models of conceptualizing the service quality, applied by public bodies, the model based on the instrument of measuring quality “SERVQUAL” developed by Parasuraman A, Zeithaml

V. and Berry L.L. (1991, 1994) can be considered the most usual and most frequently used by the researchers, being under certain aspects the fundament and the starting point for several other studies in the field.

Although in time, SERVQUAL has been the object of controversies and criticism (Asubonteng et.al., 1996; Buttle,1996; Cronin and Taylor, 1994, Haksik et al., 2000), this tool measures the perceived quality of the service from the perspective of the five dimensions of service quality: trust, safety, physical aspects, empathy, promptness (Buttle,1996), dimensions of service quality, which are generally accepted in the academic world (however, there are studies that refute the existence of the dimensions as defined by the authors of the SERVQUAL instrument).

Another model referring to the dimensions of service quality, which can be applied to public bodies is the model of “multiple service organizations” suggested by Bigne (Bigne et al., 2003) who introduces two service concepts for the organizations the provide multiple or complex services (as for example, the services offered by town halls, universities and hospitals):

- 1) The main service offered by the organization – the service, which is the main aim.
- 2) Peripheral or related services offered by the organization – the services that are offered related with the main service and that helps providing the main service under good conditions.

Basically, the above-mentioned model suggests the following fact: the general quality of a multi-service relies on both the perception of the main provided service and on the peripheral or related services, and the quality of peripheral services can be considered a major factor in the general assessment and appreciation of the service.

Another reference model that tries to conceptualize the dimensions of service quality from the customers’ perspective is the model suggested by G.S. Sureshchandar (2002) who considers that the defining dimensions of the service quality from the customers’ perspective are those presented in the following table: (table I)

No.	Dimensions (Factors) of the service quality	Dimension (factor) description of the service quality
1	The content of the service or the product of the offered service	– It refers to the content of effective elements provided by the service and is made up of the features of all the things a service offers
2	The human element in providing the service	– It refers to all aspects related to the human factor
3	Systematization of providing the service	– it refers to the aspects made up of procedures, proceedings, standards and systems that systematize the process of service delivery.
4	Tangible aspects of the service	– It refers to the tangible aspects of service delivery, aspects that are not related to the human factor and which are made up of: what the surrounding in which the service delivery takes place, looks like, ease and accessibility in the building, accessibility to the utilities in the building, the existence and/or the way in which the materials necessary for the service delivery are presented – proper forms and petitions, information and descriptive material.
5	Social responsibility	It refers to those aspects that contribute to the ethical and moral feature of the organization vis-à-vis its clients as well as towards the members of the community in general. These aspects that contribute to the formation and maintenance of the image and of the opinion about the organization have a significant influence on the assessment of the general service quality.

Source: G.S. Sureshchandar, C. Rajendran, R.N. Anantharaman, (2002), The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction – a factor specific approach, Journal Of Service Marketing, vol.16 nr.4, pp.365

III. THE DETERMINANTS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Defining customer satisfaction for public bodies as opposed to private organizations, generally imply certain different aspects, aspects, which are based on the very much different and more complex “customer” concept for public bodies as opposed to private organizations (Bryland and Curry, 2001; Şandor and Raboca, 2004), and the role the customers play in the process of providing/offering certain services.

The customers’ role, particularized for public organizations in the process providing/delivering services takes up one of the following aspects (Bitner et al., 1997):

- Customers as a productive source – for example: the patient of a health organization that contributes with specific and real information to the diagnosis effort becomes part of the process of service production. Thus the quality of the patient’s information by the quality of the treatment results suggested by the doctors can largely affect the quality and performance of the health service offered by the organization.
- Customers, as contributors to quality, satisfaction and value creation – by the contribution of one’s own satisfactions/dissatisfactions on the service quality. Generally customers do not care about the productivity growth registered by the organization but they certainly do pay attention to the way in which their demands and/or their needs are fulfilled by the service. In this case, customers become an integral part of the service.
- Customers as competitors of the organization that offers/provides services – from certain points of view, customers can have the role of competitors for certain companies that provide services, especially in cases when the organization holds the monopole or if the offered service is of low quality and/or extremely expensive (the relationship between price and quality is extremely high).

Also, besides the above-mentioned roles, the customers of public government services can be considered as “bosses” of these organizations (with certain restrictions, certainly), keeping in mind the “citizen” character, tax payer, respectively, that they have, characteristic that confers to the customers both the right of referring to the said service for free, and their legal right to be informed, to supervise and control the way in which the organizations administers, earmarks and spends its funds. (Şandor and Raboca, 2004)

Gilbert (2004) notices the fact that: “the measurement of customer satisfaction depends and varies regarding the presumptions and hypotheses made concerning what satisfaction means”, identifying three main approach directions in measuring and defining customer satisfaction:

- the “expectations confirmation/disconfirmation” approach “ – an approach that stands at the basis of the ACSI models (American Customer Satisfaction Index) and ECSI (European Customer Service Index) regarding the measurement of customer satisfaction, an approach that defines customer satisfaction as a function (a comparison) of the quality that customers perceive in relationship with their expectations (confirmation/disconfirmation of the expectations regarding the perceived quality);
- “performance” approach, an approach in which customer satisfaction is defined and measured by the level of quality performance perceived by the customers;
- “the importance of attributes” approach, an approach that focuses on the levels of relative importance that customers grant to those attributes, which in their opinion can be associated with service or product satisfaction;

Generally speaking, the majority of studies highlight and confirm the following fact: just as in the case of service quality, customer satisfaction can also be seen as being complex and multidimensional and can be defined both as a general assessment of the service/product and a specific-transitory assessment

(for example: the immediate and episodic assessment of certain aspects and features of quality, without long-term implications as far as the general service/product assessment is concerned.

Bitner and Huber (1990, 1994) suggest in their studies that customer satisfaction is highly determined by the way in which their contact with the organization providing the service takes place, the operationalization of satisfaction being made by the concept of “contact/meeting satisfaction” – the satisfaction of contacts established by the customer with the organization, by its employees, in the process of service offering and reception. Otherwise, according to the model they suggest, general satisfaction and contact/meeting satisfaction are two distinct concepts, which together determine service quality. (Duffy and Ketchand, 1998)

Other interesting theories (approaches), applicable in the field of providing public services, regarding the factors that can determine customer satisfaction are those in which general customer satisfaction is regarded either as being influenced by: the managerial style and the managerial team as well as by the company policy (Madill et al., 2002), or in which the content/discontent state concerning the customer’s life (together with the service quality) is the determinant factor for the general service satisfaction (Duffy and Ketchand, 1998), and service satisfaction depends on certain immaterial-intangible factors, as for example: the satisfaction of the patients in a hospital determinately depend on immaterial-intangible factors, as: doctors’ professionalism, professional skills and knowledge (Sharon et al., 1998).

However, keeping in mind the existence of obvious relationships between service quality and customer satisfaction, a large number of studies in the matter have a slightly different approach as to those mentioned above, in the sense that, although they see customer satisfaction as a multidimensional concept, the factors/dimensions according to which one can operationalize this concept are the same as in the case of service/product quality measuring. Some researchers introduce the term “quality dimensions” in a tight relation with customer satisfaction, “quality dimensions” being the dimensions that characterize a product/service from the point of view of satisfying the customers’ demands, dimensions that are at the basis of creating an opinion about the product/service and that lead to the occurrence of the satisfaction phenomenon.

In this respect, Bitner and Hubert (1994) stated that SERVQUAL can be seen from the perspective of two situations: (1) as an tool that measures the level of service quality within a company – situation in which SERVQUAL can be considered as a good predictor of service quality and (2) in the situation in which SERVQUAL is seen as a measure of the customer-company multiple experience function, situation in which, it can be considered a good predictor of general satisfaction.

Also, G.S. Sureshchandar, C.Ranjendran and R.N. Anantharaman (2002a; 2002b) in their studies concerning the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, operationalize the concept of customer satisfaction according to the same dimensions, according to which they operationalize the concept of service quality. (Table I).

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

a) Methodology

This study starts from the premise that:

Customer satisfaction and quality are operationalized according to the following dimensions-factors (table II):

No.	Dimensions	Factors
1	Systematization of service delivery (F1+F2+F3)	(1) the duration of obtaining a permit. (F1) (2) the number of documents necessary to obtain the permit.(F2) (3) the procedure (ease, complexity of the procedure) of obtaining the permit .(F3)
2	The human element in service delivery (F4+F5+F6)	(1) the staff's attitude (politeness, courtesy).(F4) (2) the professional training level of the staff .(F5) (3) promptness in the assistance granted to customers.(F6)
3	Tangible (material) aspects of product delivery (F7+F8+F9)	(1) environment conditions.(F7) (2) volume and variety of materials: guidance, information and documentation .(F8) (3) quality of guidance, information and documentation materials. (F9)
4	Social responsibility (F10+F11+F12)	(1) fairness of the treatment to which the economic agents are submitted (F10) (2) corruption of the staff.(F11) (3) responsibility towards the citizens – the employees' awareness of the fact that they work for the citizens (F12)

At the same time, one has to mention that the inquiry was carried out via the questionnaire and for this study two sets of questions are relevant, that for the answers uses the continuous scale of 10, each set of questions being meant to investigate and measure the dimensions and the factors of operationalizing the two concepts (investigation of the dimensions and factors presented in table II). Of a total number of 320 questionnaires given to the subjects (economic agents) only a number of 270 can be considered valid for the analysis of the proposed matters, a number that covers about 83% of the entire segment of economic agents.

b) Hypotheses of the study

In order to test the constructive difference/ similitude of the concepts: “customer satisfaction” and service quality” we formulated a set of hypotheses, presented below: (1st set of hypotheses):

H1.1. – There is no significant difference between the concepts customer satisfaction” and service quality” from the point of view of dimension – “Systematization of service delivery”

H1.2. –There is no significant difference between the concepts customer satisfaction” and service quality” from the point of view of dimension – “The human element of service delivery”

H1.3. – There is no there is no significant difference between the concepts customer satisfaction” and service quality” from the point of view of dimension – “Tangible (material) aspects of service delivery”

H1.4. – There is no there is no significant difference between the concepts customer satisfaction” and service quality” from the point of view of dimension – “Social responsibility”

In order to test the strength of the link and relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, we formulated a set of hypotheses, presented below (2nd set of hypotheses)

H2.1. – There is no significant correlation between the concepts customer satisfaction” and service quality” from the point of view of dimension – ”Systematization of service delivery”

H2.2. – There is no significant correlation between the concepts customer satisfaction” and service quality” from the point of view of dimension – ”The human element of service delivery”

H2.3. – There is no significant correlation between the concepts customer satisfaction” and service quality” from the point of view of dimension – “Tangible (material) aspects of service delivery”

H2.4. – There is no there is no significant correlation between the concepts customer satisfaction” and service quality” from the point of view of dimension – “Social responsibility”

c) The interpretation of the resulting data

Thus, for testing the first set of hypotheses (1st set of hypotheses) we used the “paired t test”, test by which we checked the difference (the difference between means) between service quality and customer satisfaction from the point of view of the 12 factors that define the 4 dimensions mentioned-above:

The systematized results for the 4 dimensions are presented below (Table III):

No.	Dimension	Paired	Differences	
		Mean	Standard deviation	“t” value
1	Systematization of service delivery (F1+F2+F3)	,904	3,009	4,74*
2	The human element in service delivery (F4+F5+F6)	,652	2,149	4,79*
3	Tangible (material) aspects of service delivery (F7+F8+F9)	1,27	3,586	5,62*
4	Social responsibility (F10+F11+F12)	,728	2,387	4,82*
	Remark: * results are significant at p<0.05			

The above-mentioned results highlight the fact that customer satisfaction and service quality significantly vary from the point of view of the four dimensions.

Also, the results of testing the first set of hypotheses (H1.1.-H1.12) totally refute the hypotheses of this set of hypotheses, underlining the fact that: customer satisfaction and service quality are two distinct concepts as conceptual constructions, concepts, which from the customers’ point of view appear as distinct concepts.

In order to test the second set of hypotheses (2nd set of hypotheses: H2.1-H2.2) we turned to the calculus of correlation between customer satisfaction and service quality regarding the 12 factors, and the four-operationalization dimensions, respectively. The correlation results between the dimensions are systematized and presented below (Table IV)

	Dimension	Correlation
1	Systematization of service delivery	0,805*
2	The human element in service delivery	0,812*
3	Tangible (material) aspects of service delivery	0,793*
4	Social responsibility	0,788*
	Remark: * results are significant at p<0.05	

The correlation coefficients between the two concepts are rather high (keeping in mind the distinctiveness of the two concepts), fact that demonstrates that between service quality and customer satisfaction there is a rather important relationship.

In order to further illustrate the relationship between the two concepts, we resorted to crosstabs. In this sense we used the transformation of measurement scales both regarding service quality and customer satisfaction, in the sense that the above-mentioned data were transformed from a continuous

measurement scale of 10 into an ordinal measurement scale with three hierarchical levels. (1 = low, 2 = medium, 3 = high)

The result of the crosstabs (tables: V-VIII) provide important information concerning the degree of matching / agreement between the ordinal levels of the answers (degrees of association among ordinal levels: 1 = low, 2 = medium, 3 = high). Thus, we wished to emphasize, for each dimension/factor separately, the percentage of answers that grant the same ordinal level both for service quality and for customer satisfaction, and the percentage of answers that gave totally different levels for quality in relationship with customer satisfaction.

Table V

		Satisfaction referring to systematization of service delivery			Total
		1 = Low	2 = Medium	3 = High	
Systematization of Service delivery	1 = Low % of Total	7,33	0,8	0,00	8,13
	2 = Medium % of Total	1,2	39,06	7,73	47,99
	3 = High % of Total	1,2	11,62	31,06	43,88
	Total % of Total	9,73	51,48	38,79	100

Table VI

		Satisfaction referring to systematization of service delivery			Total
		1 = Low	2 = Medium	3 = High	
The human element	1 = Low % of Total	1,47	0,15	0,00	1,62
In service delivery	2 = Medium % of Total	0,00	20,8	3,4	24,2
	3 = High % of Total	0,27	6,91	67,00	74,18
	Total % of Total	1,74	27,86	70,7	100

Table VII

		Satisfaction referring to systematization of service delivery			Total
		1 = Low	2 = Medium	3 = High	
Tangible (material)	1 = Low % of Total	13,86	1,6	0,95	16,41
Aspects of service delivery	2 = Medium % of Total	3,4	35,73	3,06	42,19
	3 = High % of Total	2	14,4	25	41,4
	Total % of Total	19,36	51,73	9,67	100

Table VIII

		Satisfaction referring to systematization of service delivery			Total
		1 = Low	2 = Medium	3 = High	
Social responsibility	1 = Low % of Total	4,2	0,2	0,4	4,8
	2 = Medium % of Total	0,00	20,6	4,5	25,1
	3 = High % of Total	0,5	10	59,6	70,1
	Total % of Total	4,7	30,8	64,5	100

For a more appropriate interpretation, the data regarding the results were centralized in accordance with the degree of matching/agreement among the ordinal levels of the answers. (Table XVII)

No.	Factor	The total degree of matching/agreement (%)	The total degree of non-accordance/disagreement (%)
1	Systematization of service delivery	$7,33 + 39,06 + 31,06 = 77,45$	1,2
2	The human element in service delivery	$1,47 + 20,80 + 67,00 = 89,27$	0,27
3	Tangible (material) aspects of service delivery	$13,86 + 35,73 + 25,0 = 74,59$	2,95
4	Social responsibility	$4,2 + 20,6 + 59,6 = 84,4$	0,9

From the data centralized in table XVII, one can notice that the values referring to the total degree of matching/agreement of ordinal levels among the answers regarding service quality and customer satisfaction vary along the 12 factors of operationalization (the 4 dimensions) between the percentage limits of: 74.5-89.2%, whereas the total degree of non-accordance/disagreement of the ordinal levels of the same answers is situated within the percentage limits of: 1.2-2.95%.

These data indicate the following fact: the subjects whose perception on service quality is bad have a low level of satisfaction, the subjects whose level of on service quality is medium have a medium level of satisfaction and the subjects whose perception on service quality is high have a high level of satisfaction. Approximately 2/3 of the subjects have a total degree of matching/agreement of the ordinal levels, whereas the percentage of those who have a total degree of non-accordance/disagreement of the ordinal levels is extremely low (max. 2.95%).

Consequently, both the correlation coefficients and the result of the crosstabs calculus among the ordinal levels of the answers regarding service quality and customer satisfaction confirm the second set of hypotheses, that is to say, they confirm the fact that there is an important dependence between service quality and customer satisfaction and a growth of the service quality will most probably lead to a growth in customer satisfaction.

V. CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the majority of researches anterior to this study confirm the multidimensional character of the concepts: “service quality” and “customer satisfaction” the relationship and the link between them are not very clear. While customer satisfaction appears as a reflection of the customers’ feelings regarding the numerous contacts/meetings between customer and employee, and the experiences they had in the process of service delivery within the organization, respectively – a combination between affective and cognitive, service quality is defined at the level of the cognitive, taking on a more abstract form than customer satisfaction, being influenced both by the perception and the level of service quality itself and by the customers’ previous experiences.

The results of the investigation concerning the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, undertaken by this study, confirm the fact that: for a part of public services service quality and customer satisfaction are two different and independent issues (as constructions) from the customers’ point of view. The results of the study also reveal the fact that, although the two concepts mentioned above can be seen separately, they are strongly correlated between themselves regarding the operationalization dimensions and/or factors (a fact proven by the relatively high correlation coefficients and the crosstabs of the ordinal levels of the answers).

From the point of view of managerial implication, where clear quality standards and levels can be defined, any (manager’s or his team’s) initiative concerning the improvement of the service quality should focus both on improving the perception and the level of service quality itself and on improving customer satisfaction.

In exchange, in the case of organizations in the field of public services – where standards or quality levels cannot be defined or are rather difficultly observed (being influenced by different factors), customer satisfaction is an important and inevitable constituent for the improvement of service quality.

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