

THE QUALITY OF THE AIRPORT'S PRODUCT

DARIUSZ TŁOCZYŃSKI

University of Gdańsk, Department of Transportation Market, Sopot, POLAND
e-mail: dariusz.tloczynski.ug.edu.pl

RECEIVED 8 August 2017
ACCEPTED 15 December 2017

JEL
CLASSIFICATION R49

KEYWORDS air transport, airport, airport product, quality

ABSTRACT

The air transport market is followed by the development of competitive processes. One of the instruments of competition is broadly understood as aviation service. Most often it is defined as a typical transport service. However, due to the specific nature of the branch, it is necessary to indicate the services that accompany the transport service, including airport services. They are carried out by airports and all parties cooperating with the airport.

Airports, increasing the catchment area, increasing the network of air connections, must manage the quality policy. The quality policy should be analyzed by the airports at the level of: passenger satisfaction, customer retention, passenger loyalty, and loss of customers.

The main purpose of the article is to assess the quality of services offered by airports in Poland. In accomplishing such a goal, the work structure was defined.

In the first part, quality issues in air transport were analyzed, then airport services were determined, and then in the last part, based on author's research, opinions of passengers using Polish airports on airport quality were presented.

Introduction

The air transport market is followed by the development of competitive processes. One of the instruments of competition is broadly understood aviation service (Tłoczyński, 2016, pp. 123–172). Most often it is defined as a typical transport service. However, due to the specific nature of the branch, it is necessary to indicate the services

that accompany the transport service, including airport services. They are carried out by airports and all parties cooperating with the airport.

Airports, increasing the catchment area, increasing the network of air connections, must manage the quality policy. The quality policy should be analyzed by the airports at the level of: passenger satisfaction, customer retention, passenger loyalty, and loss of customers. And then analyzed in each area of activities related to the operation of air transport.

Quality in air transport

There is a varied approach to quality in world literature. It can be defined in a number of different ways, such as utility, conformance, or lack of standard deviation (Quality: the UD..., 1982, pp. 68–80; Quality Programs..., 1992, p. 81), but most often the literature provides the definition of the American Society for Quality. This is a subjective term in which quality is defined as the totality of characteristics and characteristics of a service that determine its ability to meet actual or implied needs. (A subjective term for which each person or sector has its own definition. In technical usage, quality can have two meanings: the characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs and the product or service free of deficiencies. According to Joseph Juran, quality means “fitness for use;” according to Philip Crosby, it means “conformance to requirements.”) (Basic Concepts).

This definition focuses on the client. The manufacturer takes care of the quality when the service fully meets the needs of the purchaser or when the service quality exceeds the buyers expectations. The enterprise creates quality when the good or service satisfies the needs and requirements and expectations.

Total Quality Management (TQM) is implemented in all areas of the economy, regardless of the areas of activity. With regard to air transport the company delineates the quality of the operation from the quality of service adjustment to the needs of the purchaser. Quality-related activities relate to the level at which the air service performs its functions. Examples air transport services offered to passengers by traditional and low cost carriers. On the other hand, the quality of service customization means no faults and constant delivery of a specific level of service.

The quality of passenger service should be defined as an element defining standards from one part, on the other – passenger expectations, as well as the requirements of operators handling air transport. Customer service includes all activities related to the implementation of the air service and additional activities accompanying this service, as well as actions aimed at repairing errors committed at any stage of the order execution. The passenger handling process in passenger air transport consists of four aspects.

Phase I	• before check-in
Phase II	• in airport
Phase III	• on board
Phase IV	• after arrival

Figure 1. Handling in airport

Sources: my research.

The natural character of air transport services is diverse. However, due to the specific nature of air transport and its features, that the need to offer high quality service is highlighted, especially since operators are well known and have a good position in the market. Air transport companies provide:

- appropriate selection and improvement of staff qualifications (good health, ability to deal with unusual situations, language skills, etc),
- specification of any services associated with the primary service – transport, specific services offered by traditional, low cost carriers or a particular class of travel,
- passenger satisfaction analyzes (carrying out systematic surveys, guest reviews, use of suggestions and complaints to improve service imperfections).

In many air transport companies, quality managers perceive it through own assessment criteria rather than from the perspective of the air carrier. Therefore, any customer service initiatives should be closely linked to quality improvement programs.

In the process of managing the quality of passenger service, there are three segments that define the competencies:

a) managing airlines:

- traditional requirements analysis and quality control measurement,
- internal analysis of employees' views on quality and performance,
- the management's view on the quality of service,
- internal marketing of quality specifications and expected performance,
- marketing activities;

b) employees:

- employee view of service quality,
- ability and willingness to perform tasks in accordance with high quality,
- interpretation of expected quality,
- demand analysis and quality control,
- manufacture and sale of air services;

c) travelers:

- market quality evaluation of services (expected quality, experienced quality, perceived quality) (Stryś, 2003, p. 30).

The presented systemic approach to the quality of services in air transport makes it easier and more efficient to manage companies operating on the air transport market and to provide services in line with buyers' expectations.

Airport product

Quality is one of the major tools for positioning aviation. One of the features of aviation service is high quality, that is to provide customers with reliable, safe, reliable, high-travel and additional services.

In the marketing concept service is understood as an intangible product. Such a broad definition stems from the fact that the term "product" in marketing is everything that gives the consumer or buyer specific benefits. This means that consumers do not buy goods or services, but only make payments for selected benefits and value from the entire supply of benefits offered (Payne, 1994, p. 159).

An aviation service should be seen through its:

- external (formal) functions,
- basic usable value (Rucińska, Ruciński, Wyszomirski, 2004, p. 161),
- total usability, ie, a service enriched by the inclusion of additional services in the primary transport service (Rucińska, Ruciński, Tłoczyński, 2012, pp. 202–203).

Airlines are increasingly offering service packages (Głowacki, Kossut, Kramer, 1984, pp. 55–56):

- a network of convenient connections,
- timetable and coordinated timetables and departures in various relationships,
- type of aircraft operated,
- accessibility to the varying levels of quality of travel conditions,
- comprehensive and efficient service of airport service recipients (Czownicki, Kaliński, Marciszewska, 1992, pp. 48–49).
- catering on board aircraft,
- ensuring adequate leisure onboard aircraft (long-haul routes) and at airports (children's play areas),
- sale in duty-free shops, on board aircraft,
- possibility to carry luggage,
- bilateral agreements, alliances,
- other facilities (Wensveen, 2007, pp. 263–266).

The features of the aviation service should be synchronized with the objectives and production capacities of carriers, airports, market conditions of their macro and microcosm. There are two main market segments for the aviation service:

- carriage services performed by air carriers,
- services supporting the transport service performed at airports.

The airport product consists of a supply of services, both tangible and intangible, to meet the needs of different market segments. Marketing theory often divides the product into the core, actual or physical, and augmented elements. The core product is the essential benefit that the consumer is seeking, while the actual product delivers the benefits. Product features, quality level, brand name, design, and packaging make up the physical product. The augmented product is the additional consumer services and benefits that will distinguish the product from others (Kotler, Armstrong, 2006, pp. 243–244).

The airport product has tangible elements such as the physical infrastructure and intangible elements such as the provision of services. B. Urfer and R. Weinert classify the tangible features as the airside infrastructure, landside infrastructure, airport support infrastructure and support areas such as industrial areas and duty free zones. The intangible components are defined as the organisational, structural and operational aspects such as state support administration, operations, airport maintenance and external factors such as regulations and the environment (Urfer, Weinert, 2011).

It's common to differentiate between business-to-consumer (B2C) products purchased to satisfy personal and family needs, and industrial or business-to-business (B2B) products bought to use in a company's operations or to make other products (Dibb, Simkin, Pride, Ferrell, 2005). The airport industry has both types of product (Figures 2 and 3). For instance, it offers a B2B product to airlines and B2C product to its passengers. For the airline, the core is the ability to land and take off a plane, while for passenger it will be the ability to board or disembark an plane.

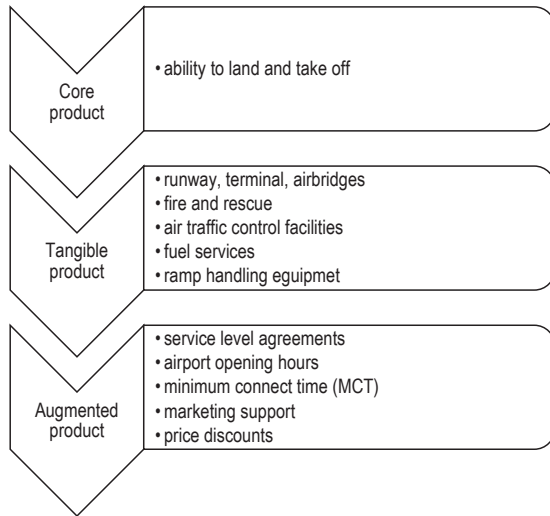


Figure 2. The airport product for airlines

Source: Halpern, Graham (2013), p. 118.

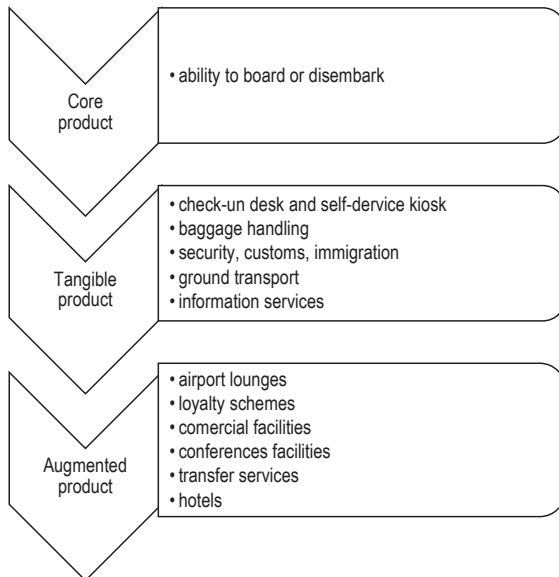


Figure 3. The airport product for passengers

Source: Halpern, Graham (2013), p. 118.

For each customer there will be a core product: for instance, for freight forwarders it will be the ability to load and unload freight on the aircraft. In order to provide the core product for airline, the actual product consist of the runway, the terminal building, the equipment, and so on, as well as the expertise to provide all these facilities efficiently and safely. For passenger, the actual product include check-in, luggage and other facilities, and immigration control, security, gate. The actual product will also include adequate transport services to/from airport and airport bridge, information desk and toilets.

At the augmented level the airport may, set service level agreements with its airlines to speed up processes or open for longer hours to improve accessibility. For passenger, the range and diversity of shops, catering and other commercial facilities, and loyalty programs (Halpern, Graham, 2013, pp. 117–119).

There are many factors that affect the choice of an airport. Between the enterprites comes competition. By competing with other airports, they want to attract new carriers, get the right seats in apron, and have a base for airline operators. The competitive position of airports is largely dependent on the economic potential of the region.

Airports are characterized by very similar developmental conditions. In handling the needs of the international market, the airports towards oneself are highly competitive. Competition between airports should be analyzed on two levels.

Table 1. Tools for analysis of competition between airports

From the point of view of air carriers	From the point of view of passengers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – catchment area, – potential demand, – slots – time slots for performing flight operations, – network of air connections, – competition between handling agents, fuel agents, etc., – port charges, – quality of handling (passenger and ground), – the possibility of receiving public aid, subsidies, – basing aircraft carriers, – presence of major aviation competitors and their grid connections, – guaranteed operating time of air carriers, – aviation and non-aviation infrastructure and access to it, – possibility of further development of the port 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – destination airports, – frequency and flexibility of the offered connections, – possibility of transfer to other airports, – air transport links efficiency, – duty free area, – costs of transportation to and from the airport, – terminal functionality

Source: Kaliński (1998), p. 42 and Vogel (2001), p. 7.

Ultimately most decisions concerning the choice of airport will be based primarily on the air services available at the airport and the proximity of the airport to the potential consumer. It is very important for the airport to remember this and to focus its marketing on the air services on offer and the airport's convenience rather than giving every fact about the facilities on offer. Similarly, when marketing to airlines, it is information about the nature of catchment area and potential demand rather than small details about the airport infrastructure that will most probably sell the airport. No amount of money spent on improving facilities will attract airlines to the airport inless they consider that there is a market for their services.

Quality research airport product

Quality of service results from the ability of airlines to meet customer expectations or even to exceed them. The measure of this capacity is the actual quality of the air transport service assessed from the point of view of:

- technical quality of passenger handling,
- functional quality of passenger service (Hooley, Saunders, Piercy, 1998, p. 147).

Passenger in relation to the quality of services is expected:

- achieve the benefits,
- implementation of the acquired service on the offered high level of services rendered,
- save time and quickly resolve the problem of acquiring services,
- individual and efficient handling while ensuring a buyer's sense of uniqueness,
- loyalty, confidentiality, honesty and integrity,
- competence and empathy of distribution staff (Rosa, 2006, p. 142).

Two dimensions of service quality represent the subjective character of quality assessment. The most commonly used criteria for assessing the quality of services in air transport include:

- rolling stock operated by the carriers – quality, number of seats in each class in the aircraft, spacing between seats, offered catering,
- capacity of the terminal, quantity, quality and location of service points, number of check-in counters, checks, number of gates, technical and technological solutions (moving stairs, moving platforms, sleeves, bus or passenger train),
- reliability – assurance that the service will be carried out in accordance with standards and time,
- professionalism and qualifications – having the relevant knowledge, experience and skills needed to solve a variety of problems,
- sensitivity – willingness to offer passengers the necessary help,
- attitude and behavior – passengers must be aware that carrier personnel, handling agents will be interested and friendly, polite in solving problems, and showing willingness to know the needs of passengers,
- availability – free hotline, website, directions to the airport, possibility to buy air tickets at the airport, check-in at the city,
- reputation and credibility – the image of the air carrier, trust, honesty,
- security – not to expose customers to danger, airport control systems and procedures, safety to air transport and onboard aircraft,
- communicability – maintaining contacts with customers by sending understandable messages to them and listening to them,
- speed of response air carrier, and handling agent (Payne, 1994, p. 268; Gronross, 2007, p. 47).

In 2013, thirteen airports operating at that time researched marketing to passengers' evaluation of the implemented instruments of competition. The survey evaluated 2.4 thousand passengers, (0.1% of traffic in each of the analyzed airports). In order to conduct the study, the sample was stratified on the basis of the number of passengers and the specificity of traffic in each airport. Adoption of such division was necessary due to the inability to obtain complete information from all airports on the air traffic structure, age, occupied position and destination of passengers and other key criteria. One in every 18–80 year old passenger was surveyed in each port surveyed at

the time of the safety audit. The study was not carried out only at Modlin Airport, because during the study period the Modlin Airport didn't operate.

In primary studies, the top scores were obtained by the flight scheduling system – 86% of the passengers surveyed and the directional information system (visual and voice) – 80% of the respondents. The most objectionable passengers had to trade services – 25% of respondents and gastronomic – 24% of respondents (Figure 4).

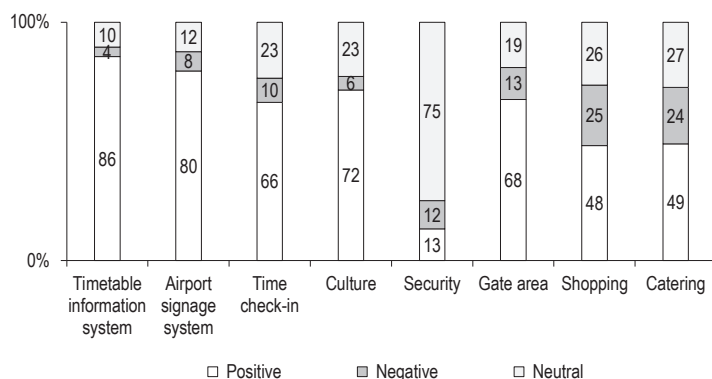


Figure 4. Evaluation of quality airport product in Poland

Source: my research in Polish airports.

The way to get to the airport is closely related to the nature of travel and social status. In Europe, passengers using low cost and charter carriers and traveling by air of traditional carriers in economy class, usually use public transport services for airport transport. In Poland only every 10 passengers use public transport services.

Passengers most often assessed the travel time to the airport as good (Figures 5 and 6).

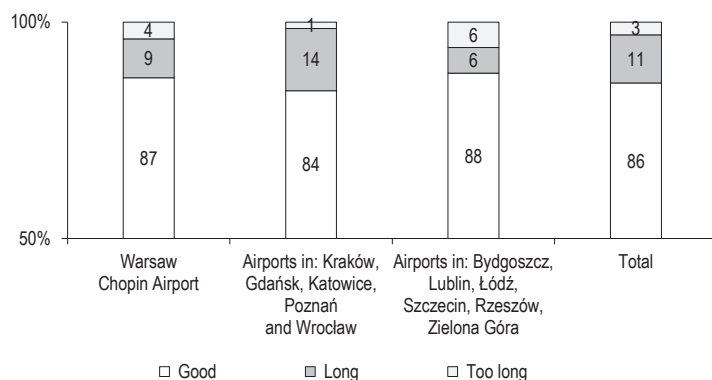


Figure 5. The opinion of passengers traveling business about airport links in Poland

Source: my research in Polish airports.

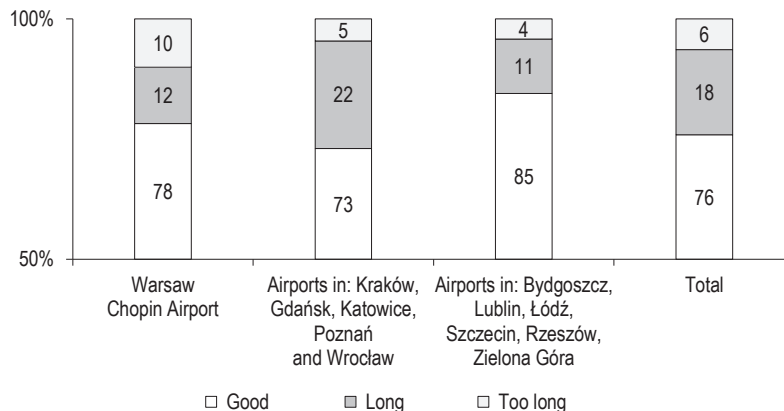


Figure 6. The opinion of passengers traveling non-business about airport links in Poland

Source: my research in Polish airports.

The respondents highly valued the competence and quality of handling agents. 55% of respondents were very satisfied, 33% were rather satisfied, 9% were travelers who had a neutral attitude to handling and 2% were dissatisfied. The respondents who were not satisfied with the service at airports were only 1% of travelers.

Summary

Airports need to understand and manage quality policies. Major areas of airport product quality include:

- service contact – the passenger is in contact with the staff of the airport operators and with the terminal infrastructure,
- service structure – core product, tangible product and augmented product,
- organization and culture of service – efficiency and quality of infrastructure and staff involvement in the handling of passengers,
- the connection between the airframe and the quality of service provided to carriers and passengers at airports.

Based on the research conducted, the following conclusions were drawn:

- airport product quality is assessed by passengers and carriers. Both the first and second groups evaluate the quality airport product in the functional and technical area,
- The highest scores were obtained in airport surveys: 86% of passengers surveyed and 80% of respondents (visual and voice guidance). The most objectionable passengers had to trade services – 25% of respondents and gastronomic – 24% of respondents,
- Passengers most often assessed the travel time to the airport as good,
- respondents rated the competence and quality of handling agents very highly; 55% of respondents were very satisfied,
- marketing research must be conducted systematically and in accordance with internally accepted rules.

References

- Basic Concepts, ASQ. Available at: www.asq.org.
- Czownicki, J., Kaliński, D., Marciszewska, E. (1992). *Ekonomika transportu lotniczego*. Warszawa: Szkoła Główna Handlowa.
- Dibb, S., Simkin, L., Pride, W., Ferrell, O. (2005). *Marketing: Concepts and Strategies*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Głowacki, R., Kossut, Z., Kramer, T. (1984). *Marketing*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Graham, A. (2008). *Managing airports. An international perspective*. Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Gronross, Ch. (2007). *Service Management and Marketing: Customer Management in Service Competition*. Wiley India Pvt. Limited.
- Halpern, N., Graham, A. (2013). *Airport Marketing*. London–New York: Routledge.
- Hooley, G.J., Saunders, J.A., Piercy, N.F. (1998). *Marketing Strategy & Competitive Positioning*. Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- Kaliński, D. (1998). Uwarunkowania polsko-niemieckich powiązań w zakresie infrastruktury transportu lotniczego. In: H. Brdulak (ed.), *Konkurencyjność transportu – wybrane zagadnienia*. Warszawa: Szkoła Główna Handlowa.
- Kotler, Ph., Armstrong, G. (2006). *Principles of marketing*. Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Stryś, A. (ed.) (2003). *Marketing usług*. Warszawa: Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne.
- Payne, A. (1994). *The Essence of Services Marketing*. London: Prentice Hall.
- Quality Programs Show Shoddy Results (1992). *Wall Street Journal*, 14 May.
- Quality: the UD Drives to Catch Up (1982). *Business Week*, 11.
- Rosa, G. (2006). *Usługi transportowe. Rynek konkurencja marketing*. Szczecin: Uniwersytet Szczeciński.
- Rucińska, D., Ruciński, A., Tłoczyński, D. (2012). *Transport lotniczy. Ekonomika i organizacja*. Gdańsk: Uniwersytet Gdański.
- Rucińska, D., Ruciński, A., Wyszomirski, O. (2004). *Zarządzanie marketingowe na rynku transportowym*. Gdańsk: Uniwersytet Gdański.
- Tłoczyński, D. (2016). *Konkurencja na polskim rynku usług transportu lotniczego*. Gdańsk: Uniwersytet Gdański.
- Urfer, B., Weinert, R. (2011). Managing airport infrastructure. In: A. Wittmer, T. Bieger, R. Muller (eds.), *Aviations Systems: Management of the Integrated Aviation Value Chain*. Heidelberg: Springer.
- Vogel, H.A. (2001). Airport Competition and Marketing, Airport Economic and Finance Symposium, University of Westminster, 4 February.
- Wensveen, J.G. (2007). *Air Transportation. A Management Perspective*. Farnham–Burlington: Ashgate.

Cite this article as: Tłoczyński, D. (2018). The quality of the airport's product. *European Journal of Service Management*, 2 (26), 273–282. DOI: 10.18276/ejsm.2018.26-34.