

Article

The Efficiency of Cooperation between the Participants in the Supply Chain in the Tourism-Related Branch of Industry in Relation to Client Satisfaction

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Abstract: Managing a tourism supply chain is predominantly focused on managing a tourism-specific product that can be perceived as all kinds of goods and services utilized by tourists during their trips. The predominant goal of this article is to empirically identify the level of engagement of entities operating in the tourism-oriented branch of industry concerning the satisfaction of end-customers with the offered tourism-related services and products. Within the scope of this study, the statistical relevance of elements of active cooperation within a tourism-specific supply chain was analyzed. Empirical examinations covered the assessment of the cooperation within the framework of the tourism-oriented supply chain and its impact on consumer satisfaction. A research questionnaire was utilized to meet examination-specific goals. Theoretical considerations and the analysis of branches of industry in relation to the available statistical data showed that tourist-oriented supply chain covers various entities, the engagement of which may have a factual impact on the efficiency of managing the entire chain, as well as on the overall client satisfaction, improving tourism sustainability. The obtained results clearly showed that the examined entities considered the analyzed cooperation aspects to be very important with regard to the supply chain management. Said aspects included the total length of cooperation within the framework of a particular supply chain, which, according to the examined entities, directly translated into the quality of cooperation—to either significant or very significant extent, as well as making it much easier to solve certain problems that were strictly connected with the provision of tourism-oriented services. Yet another aspect of cooperation that was touched upon was the transfer of the so-called know-how between the entities engaged in a given supply chain. As proven by the examination, 70% of the surveyed entities claimed that it was of significant or very significant importance. The last analyzed aspect of cooperation were relations between the supply chain-specific partners and their impact on the satisfaction of end customers. According to over half of the sample (61.54%), decent relations between supply chain participants affected the satisfaction of end customers to a notable extent.

Keywords: tourism; supply chain; cooperation; efficiency; tourism supply chain

1. Introduction

Tourism is understood as a branch of industry that has remarkable potential when it comes to stimulating both local and national development. As can be concluded after familiarizing oneself with the available statistical data, tourism results in the creation of new jobs, engaging foreign investors and shaping the GDP of a given country. From the local point of view, with the increase in tourists visiting a particular destination, there is increased interest in the regional culture, tradition, and monuments, as well as more funds being spent on logistics-oriented infrastructure.

The last aspect is based on a complex and comprehensive circulation of goods and information between various branches of the industry. The basic processes of exchange and cooperation of numerous business entities and organizations result in the creation of a tourism-based supply chain, the major focus of which is to ensure a proper level of satisfaction of the final client as a tourist. Requirements and expectations of the market determine changes in the available assortment, price, quality, and way of promoting tourism-related goods and services. The basic issue is, therefore, providing tourists with such products that will satisfy their needs. At the same time, the dynamic development of the tourism-related branch of industry, resulting predominantly from the development of new IT technologies, requires entities engaged in tourism-specific undertakings to change the way the offered goods and services are provided. It changes the management practices of the tourism supply chain. It is, therefore, claimed that for a tourism product supply chain to operate efficiently, not only the entities being parts of the chain but also the relations between them and the end client are of exceptional importance.

The process of tourism-specific planning and organization is determined by the globalization and integration phenomena that are of the utmost importance when it comes to the international economy. The observable changes require entities operating in the market to change their approach towards competitiveness and managing tourism-specific products. To ensure efficient and sustainable management, all the entities involved in a given branch of industry have to work together to ensure the growth and satisfactory development of tourism. For tourism-related products and the entire tourism-oriented branch to fully meet the needs and expectations of customers, close cooperation of tourism-based companies is paramount.

The predominant goal of this article is to empirically identify the level of engagement of entities operating in the tourism-oriented branch of industry in relation to the satisfaction of end-customers with the offered tourism-related services and products.

2. Literature Review

In the literature, tourism supply chain management is defined as “a set of methods taken advantage of to efficiently manage operations performed within the scope of a tourism-specific supply chain. Such operations are aimed at meeting the needs of a customer being a tourist and are to facilitate reaching business goals of various enterprises being participants of said supply chain” [1]. Managing a tourism supply chain is, therefore, predominantly focused on managing a tourism-specific product that can be perceived as all kinds of goods and services utilized by tourists during their trips [2]. To provide a customer with satisfactory quality tourism-specific goods, it is vital for at least several entities operating in the discussed branch of industry to cooperate efficiently. Hence, it can be stated that the efficacious meeting of tourism needs is determined by proper management of the tourism supply chain in terms of both business and client relations [3].

Tourism is a branch of industry that requires remarkable coordination of operations performed by individual entities that combine their services to provide the client with a tourism-specific product. The need to cooperate requires every entity to accomplish particular tasks while at the same time, taking into account their impact on the operation of other companies [4]. Sensible cooperation allows for reducing the number of repeatable actions to achieve a sustainable and competitive supply, and thanks to that, increase the efficiency and profitability of individual parties involved in the process [5].

The awareness of the interdependence of the individual members of the supply chain and the necessity of creating joint strategies play an important role when it comes to efficient integration of various supply chain management-related solutions. Thanks to performing actions aimed at making supply chain-specific actions more efficacious, it is possible to utilize the existing relations and dependencies to improve the performance of the entire supply chain when it comes to its sustainable development [6].

Coordinated cooperation between individual parties is one of the customer satisfaction determinants and is, therefore, a success factor for the tourism-related branch of industry. The relations between various entities being members of a given supply chain affect the level of satisfaction of a client from services or products they are provided with. The functioning of every single member of the supply chain in question affects the experiences and memories of every tourist [7]. At the same time, due to the specificity of tasks that are to be performed by tourism organizers, they have the highest impact on the efficiency of the tourism-related branch of industry, as they affect the undertakings of suppliers and distributors, as well as the level of tourist satisfaction [8].

In many cases, the efficiency of the supply chain is strictly connected with the support provided to suppliers that is the result of long-term business relations and a stable customer market. Cooperation within a particular tourism-oriented supply chain is mainly focused on integrating the available resources and increasing the likelihood of the successful operation of individual suppliers [9]. Relations occurring within the scope of a tourism-specific supply chain can be characterized by taking advantage of the following criteria:

- Approach to individual supply chain members
- Relation specificity (cooperation or competition)
- Type of entity functioning coordination
- Features of a tourism system (relations between the public and private sector, relations with the society inhabiting tourist destinations, relations with tourists)
- Approach to a tourist as a member of the supply chain (direct, indirect) [10]

Business goals resulting from relations between entities operating on the tourism-oriented market are directed towards the increase of generated income, cost reduction, maintaining relations with clients, increasing competitiveness, boosting efficiency, and ensuring satisfactory human resource management. The occurring changes and goals connected with them are affected by information and communication technologies (ICT) [11] that allow for direct contact between partners using a two-way circulation of information in real-time. They are a vital tool allowing for cost reduction and increasing the efficiency of business processes [12]. ICT is an effective method for boosting branch efficiency by allowing for real-time information circulation regarding product availability. It allows service suppliers to monitor, manage, and control their capabilities by contacting intermediaries, especially trip organizers and travel agencies. The utilized technologies allow for cooperation, planning, and forecasting, thanks to the possibility of disclosing information on forecasted demand and production schedules [13].

G. Hankinson (2009) identified a partnership with local entrepreneurs as one of the key factors having an impact on the perceived attractiveness of a given destination [14]. What is more, the interaction between the public sector and the local community is also important, for it motivates the latter to participate in the process of tourism development. According to D.L. Edgell et al. (2008), tourism-oriented partnerships are a form of cooperation that increases comparativeness and efficiency of the realized processes [15]. Such projects should additionally consult with and be controlled by the society, as the inhabitants of a given region should be allowed to create, promote, and manage a specific tourism-specific product [16]. The efficiency of regional promotion is the outcome of relations between partners and the types of resources they utilize. R.E. Freeman (2004) explained that partnership management is based on proper communication, negotiations, agreement conclusion, relations management, and motivation [17]. Managing the parties involved requires an integrated approach to strategic decision making that combines the interests and prospects of cooperating partners.

The development of sustainable tourism projects requires the engagement of local partners on several levels [18]: joint discussions, sharing feedback, and constant engagement of the key parties. L. Sheehan et al. (2007) believed that reaching an optimal balance is possible when tourism of a given region plays an important role in the local economy [19]. P. Burns (2008) claimed that effective planning and ensuring sustainable growth results from inter-sector cooperation between interested parties with regard to societal and political matters [20]. H.C. Choi and I. Murray (2010) added that if the government does not integrate and coordinate actions performed by the involved parties, sustainable growth will not be guaranteed [21]. Its input should be predominantly oriented towards the sustainable growth of tourism by means of identifying potential business undertakings, engaging key groups of people to focus on them, as well as perform actions ensuring some profits to all the parties involved [22].

Destination management is the sign of a network of independent organizations having access to common resources and sharing common business goals. I. J. Chen and A. Paulraj (2004) claimed that the success of organizations operating in tourist destinations is highly dependent on the ability to reorient their organizational strategies towards pursuing cooperation-related edge rather than the competition-based one [23]. As stated by M. E. Zaei (2013), destination management is oriented towards development and exercising supervision over destinations to ensure the visitor's satisfactory experiences without, at the same time affecting, the local culture and environment in a negative manner [24].

The systematic and efficient management of a destination that has sufficient material and non-material resources is also the solution to various problems connected with relations established and maintained between groups pursuing different goals. It is the so-called concept of multi-entity destination management that should include all the interested and influential groups while planning future tourism development. The success of the aforementioned concept is highly dependent on the mutual communication, cooperation, and understanding between various groups and experts. The key idea behind multi-entity cooperation is to connect and coordinate entities pursuing different goals to ensure the high quality of the product offered and a recognizable image of the destination. Achieving a long-term and sustainable market competitiveness is also of importance in this case [25].

In every region, there are entities engaged in performing tourism-oriented undertakings and generating profit thanks to such actions. What is more, proper cooperation with the local entities, to some extent, affects the efficiency and attractiveness of a given tourist destination [26]. The concept of partnership assumes the cooperation of all the engaged groups aimed at achieving common goals and creating joint solutions basing on effective communication and mutual understanding.

The very notion of the involved party relates to any individual or group of people engaged in the realization of business undertakings and allows for the achievement of certain goals [27]. Such parties are of exceptional importance for the tourism-related branch of industry. Four major groups of the aforementioned entities can be distinguished, namely—government, industry, or entrepreneurs (business entities), tourists, and local citizens. Aside from that, one also has to take into account the actions and interests of religious and educational organizations, as well as various associations and foundations [28].

To assess the level of cooperation, it is vital to specify the level of engagement, and the capabilities of partners understood as operation effects in so far as obtained knowledge and experience and engagement in the creation and provision of tourist services, as well as the approach to sustainable growth in tourism [29]. Some actions of the involved parties cover working to achieve a specific result, issuing secondary data, as well as the participation in open discussions, interviews, meetings, discussion groups, workshops, etc. Involved parties differ from one another in terms of their role, engagement, and tourist region. The basic division distinguishes between external and internal entities that affect the functioning of a given destination [30].

A properly established and maintained relation may constitute a key resource for companies involved in a given supply chain while working towards achieving a stable competitive edge [31]. An important aspect of the cooperation process is the sensible selection of business partners responsible for creating a tourism product. The lack of engagement and willingness to cooperate may decrease the level of possible tourism-related benefits in a given region [32–34].

3. Methodology

Within the scope of this study, empirical examinations relating to the assessment of the functioning of a tourism-related supply chain as perceived by suppliers was carried out. The statistical relevance of elements of effective cooperation within a tourism-specific supply chain was analyzed. Empirical examinations also covered the assessment of the impact of the management of a tourism-specific supply chain on the level of customer satisfaction. To achieve the research goal, a research questionnaire was taken advantage of. It was presented to the following tourism-specific service providers, namely:

- Travel agency employees
- Junior and senior managers employed in tourism-specific enterprises
- Hotel managers cooperating with tour operators
- Aviation workers
- Tour operator's contractors operating in a given destination
- Transport company representatives operating in a given destination

The second group included Polish tourists staying in Crete and Spain during their holidays.

Sample of 600 entities was made up by utilizing available databases, from which contact data of service providers were taken. Data were processed by opting for a statistical analysis-specific method, covering the analysis of basic values and statistical correlations.

The research questionnaire was provided to tourism-specific service providers, the goal of which was to create a tourism-related offer adjusted to the needs of their customers. The predominant aim of the questionnaire was to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the efficiency of information and knowledge circulation in the examined tourism-oriented supply chain?
2. What is the level of engagement of the individual members of the chain?

Three hundred seventy-seven companies took part in the examination. Among them, the majority were small-scale businesses employing between 10 to 49 workers, which constituted 60.21% of the entire sample (Table 1).

Table 1. Sample Structure According to the Employment Size.

Employment	Frequency	Percentage
10 to 49	227	60.21%
50 to 249	124	32.89%
>250	26	6.90%
Total	377	100.00%

Source: Author's elaboration based on the survey.

Figure 1 shows the sample structure based on the period of operation on the market.

Data presented in a graphic form in Figure 1 make it possible to notice that almost half of all the service providers have been operating on the market for over 15 years. Less than three years of operation of the entities were the least numerous group.

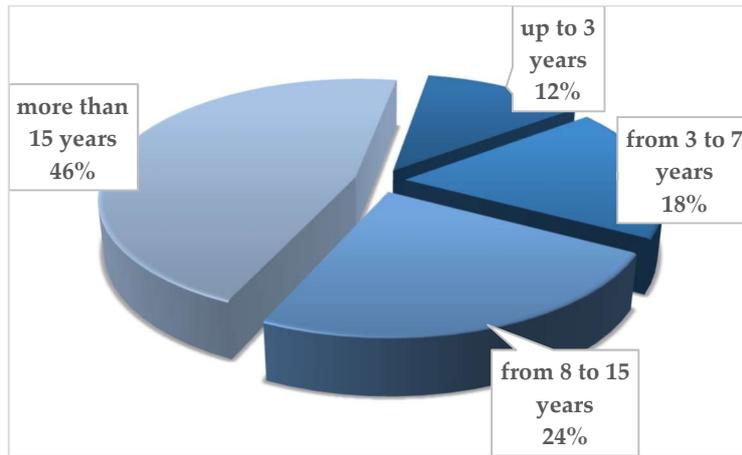


Figure 1. Sample structure based on the period of operation on the market.

Within the framework of the examination, the positions of individuals who completed the questionnaire were identified. Four significant positions were identified. They are presented in Figure 2.

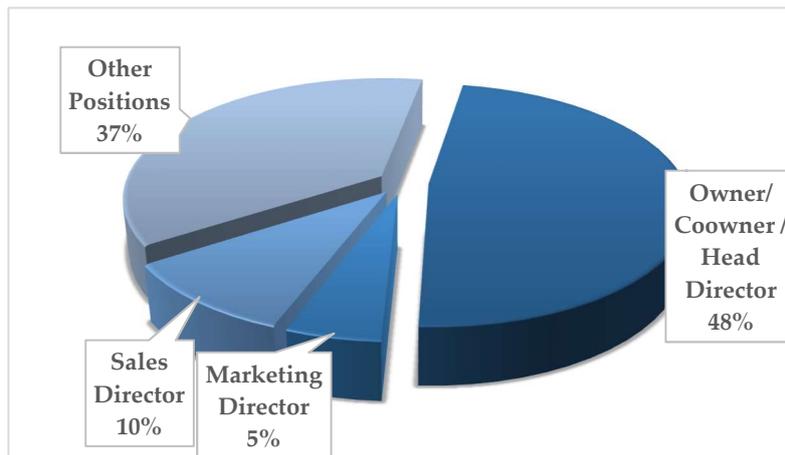


Figure 2. Sample structure based on professional position.

Almost half of the examined individuals were owners/co-owners and directors of the examined business undertakings. Other directors taking part in the examination accounted for 15% of the sample. Over a third of the analyzed entrepreneurs had a different position than the ones proposed within the questionnaire. The presented structure, characterized by 63% of individuals involved in managerial tasks, makes it possible to consider the outcome of the research to be valid and reliable.

The statistic correlations between individual cooperation-specific elements within the chain were examined to assess the relations between the individual members of the supply chain. To specify the power of variable pairs assessed using a five-level scale, and as it was qualitative data, the Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient test was used. A correlation test was based on ordering the examined X and Y variables to make an increasing sequence and then assigning a number (rank) to each measurement which reduced a negative impact of remarkable deviations and the lack of normality of distribution of the examined data.

4. Results and Discussions

Within the scope of the discussed examination, the frequency of making certain choices in relation to the assessment of the functioning of the representatives of the tourism-related supply chain was analyzed.

The basic cooperation aspect in the supply chain is the duration of cooperation between the supply chain members that may also translate into its quality. The structure of the responses is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Impact of the length of cooperation between supply chain representatives on its quality.

Structure of Answers to Question 1: To What Extent Does, in Your Opinion, the Duration of Cooperation between Supply Chain Members Translate into Its Quality?	N	Percent
Not at all	11	2.92%
To a small extent	40	10.61%
To a medium extent	72	19.10%
To a remarkable extent	180	47.75%
To an extreme extent	74	18.63%
Total	377	100.00%

Source: Author's elaboration based on the survey.

According to almost half of the examined entities, the length of cooperation affects its quality to a remarkable (47.75%) or extreme extent (19.63%). One-fifth of the examined respondents specified the impact on the length of cooperation on its quality to be an average one (19.10%). Only a minority of examined entities assessed the correlation to be of minor importance or no importance whatsoever (13.53% in total).

The need to cooperate in a long-term manner is caused by the diversification and fragmentation of the tourism-specific offer, as well as by a complex demand for tourism-specific services that can be satisfied especially by means of professionalism, reliability, and time-efficiency. Long-Term cooperation requires a common set of basic values and procedures that are in line with the course of tourism development and widely acceptable societal norms, which directly translates into its quality.

The cooperation between entities may be an opportunity to expand the scope of operation, so the respondents were also asked to what extent cooperation between supply chain members grants access to new markets (Table 3).

Table 3. Impact of cooperation between supply chain representatives on access to new markets.

Structure of Answers to Question 2: To What Extent Does, in Your Opinion, the Cooperation between the Members of a Given Supply Chain Grant the Access to New Markets?	N	Percent
Not at all	21	5.57%
To a small extent	38	10.08%
To a medium extent	68	18.04%
To a remarkable extent	175	46.42%
To an extreme extent	75	19.89%
Total	377	100.00%

Source: Author's elaboration based on the survey.

While analyzing the answers, the author noticed their remarkable variety. The examined entities had different opinions on the impact of cooperation on access to new markets. Over half of the respondents (66.31%) positively assessed cooperation, indicating that it may make it possible to enter new markets to a remarkable or an extreme extent. However, over 15% of examined entities stated that

mutual relations within the supply chain do not make entering new market easier or that their impact is minimal.

Cooperation between parties may also have an impact on solving certain problems resulting from the provision of services within the tourism-oriented supply chain. Opinions of respondents on that topic are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Impact of cooperation between supply chain representatives on solving particular service provision-related problems.

Structure of Answers to Question 3: To What Extent does, in Your Opinion, the Cooperation between the Members of a Given Supply Chain Make Solving Certain Service Provision-Specific Problems Easier?	N	Percent
Not at all	13	3.45%
To a small extent	1	0.27%
To a medium extent	94	24.93%
To a remarkable extent	70	18.57%
To an extreme extent	199	52.79%
Total	377	100.00%

Source: Author's elaboration based on the survey.

Results presented in Table 3 show that the cooperation of members of the supply chain may make it easier to solve certain service-provision problems. Seventy percent of respondents agreed, which made it possible to assume that they have experienced a problematic situation and have been supported by their business partners. One-quarter of the respondents assessed the impact of the discussed factor to be a moderate one. In the market, there were also some entities that claimed that cooperation did not help in solving service-provision problems.

The change in the number of participants, the failure to plan tourist destinations, as well as other events directly and indirectly connected with trip participants impact the economy of the entire tourism-related service. The cooperation of individual entities and informing one another of the occurring changes is a logistic requirement when it comes to ensuring the efficiency of organizing a particular event and optimizing its costs.

It can be assumed that solving problems and exchanging information is connected with transferring knowledge and know-how between entities. The scope of the exchange of such resources within the tourism-related supply chain is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Level of knowledge and know-how transfer between supply chain representatives.

Structure of Answers to Question 4: To What Extent Does, in Your Opinion, the Cooperation between the Members of a Given Supply Chain Allow for Transfer of Knowledge and Know-How?	N	Percent
Not at all	13	3.45%
To a small extent	31	8.22%
To a medium extent	73	19.36%
To a remarkable extent	201	53.32%
To an extreme extent	59	15.65%
Total	377	100.00%

Source: Author's elaboration based on the survey.

Answers to the question on the transfer of knowledge and know-how were similar to the ones provided for the last question. According to almost 70% of enterprises, cooperation affects said transfer to a remarkable or an extreme extent. One-tenth of the respondents did not notice such a correlation. It can be assumed that the exchange of knowledge and know-how between entities has made it possible to solve service-provision problems easier.

The quality of relations between the representatives of the same supply chain, may also have an impact on the satisfaction of the end client, namely, a tourist. Therefore, the examined individuals were asked to what extent decent relations between the representatives of a supply chain affect the satisfaction of the end client. Answers provided are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Impact of decent relations between supply chain partners on end client satisfaction.

Structure of Answers to Question 5: To What Extent Do, in Your Opinion, Decent Relations between the Representatives of a Supply Chain Affect the Satisfaction of an End Client?	N	Percent
Not at all	0	0%
To a small extent	3	0.80%
To a medium extent	73	19.36%
To a large extent	232	61.54%
To an extreme extent	69	18.30%
Total	377	100.00%

Source: Author's elaboration based on the survey.

According to over half of the respondents (61.54%), good relations between the representatives of a given supply chain affect the satisfaction of the end client to a large extent. Only 18% of the examined individuals stated that the impact was extreme. Every fifth answer (19.36%) pointed to an average impact of the said factor. The obtained results show that proper relations between business partners notably affect the quality of end-customer servicing.

The analysis of the value of the examined coefficient for the questions asked showed that for some variable pairs, there were no correlations. The p level for $N = 377$ for said variables was greater than 0.05. The variables for which there were no statistically relevant correlation are as follows:

1. The extent to which the current flow of information between the members of the supply chain meets their expectations;
2. The extent to which the undertakings performed by the supply chain partners are consistent with strategic goals and mission of a given enterprise;
3. The extent to which the exchange of informal information is important for suppliers within the supply chain;
4. The extent to which the communication between supply chain-specific contractors affects the efficiency of cooperation;
5. The extent to which proper relations between supply chain members affect the satisfaction of the end client;
6. The extent to which personal relations between individuals contacting one another directly during tourist-specific service provision impact the efficiency of the entire chain.

Results of the correlation of the impact of the length of cooperation between supply chain members on its quality and other variables are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Correlation between answers to *Question 1* and answers to other questions.

Correlated Answers	N	R Spearman	t (N-2)	p Level
Question_1 & Question_2	377	0.0110	0.2130	0.8314
Question_1 & Question_3	377	-0.0036	-0.0698	0.9444
Question_1 & Question_4	377	0.1705	3.3501	0.0009
Question_1 & Question_5	377	-0.0135	-0.2622	0.7933

Source: Author's elaboration based on the survey.

There was a statistically relevant correlation between the impact of the length of cooperation between supply chain members on its quality and the scope of knowledge and know-how transfer. The Spearman r -value of 0.1705 suggested a marginal positive correlation for the examined pair of variables, which means that together with the increase in the length of cooperation, the scope of knowledge and know-how transfer also increases.

Results of the correlation of access to new markets and other variables are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Correlation between answers to *Question 2* and answers to other questions.

Correlated Answers	N	R Spearman	t (N-2)	p Level
Question_2 & Question_3	377	−0.0364	−0.7054	0.4810
Question_2 & Question_4	377	0.1294	2.5264	0.0119
Question_2 & Question_5	377	0.0134	0.2593	0.7956

Source: Author's elaboration based on the survey.

There was a statistically relevant correlation between access to new markets and the scope of knowledge and know-how transfer. The Spearman r -value of 0.1294 suggested a marginal positive correlation for the examined pair of variables, which means that together with the increase in knowledge and know-how transfer, access to new markets increases as well.

Results of the correlation of the extent to which the representatives of the supply chain engage in solving certain service provision-related problems and the assessment of the impact of decent relations between partners on customer satisfaction are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Correlation between answers to *Question 3* and answers to other questions.

Correlated Answers	N	R Spearman	t (N-2)	p Level
Question_3 & Question_4	377	0.0447	0.8658	0.3872
Question_3 & Question_5	377	−0.1193	−2.3262	0.0205

Source: Author's elaboration based on the survey.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, an effective cooperation between the representatives of a supply chain was perceived by the examined companies to be a key to ensuring consumer satisfaction. According to over half of the sample (61.54%), decent relations between supply chain participants affected the satisfaction of the end customer to a notable extent. It might be caused by the specificity of business relations, the length of which directly translated into their quality. Over half of the examined entities was of such an opinion. Research outcomes showed that cooperation between supply chain participants also increased the likelihood of particular partners entering new markets. Said aspect was assessed positively by as many as 66.31% of all respondents. The transfer of both knowledge and know-how was also assessed positively. Almost 70% of the examined entities claimed that the transfer of both knowledge and know-how was commonplace and that the cooperation allowed to solve a myriad of problems that were strictly connected with service provision. Proper cooperation between the supply chain members was a key factor when it came to servicing the end-customer, allowing for the creation of consistent strategic goals and missions. Vital aspects increasing the efficiency of the supply chain were also the level of communication between the individual entities and their personal relations, frequently involving the exchange of informal data. It allowed the formulation of the conclusion that tourist-oriented supply chain members were highly engaged in undertakings allowing the improvement in the functioning of the entire chain, which caused an increase in customer satisfaction.

Theoretical considerations and the analysis of branches of industry in relation to the available statistical data showed that tourist-oriented supply chain covers various entities, the engagement of which may have a factual impact on the efficiency of managing the entire chain, as well as on the overall client satisfaction, improving tourism sustainability.

Each and every entity has different development prospects and goals to achieve, which translates into different expectations regarding sustainable development. That is why the accuracy in the selection of entities adjusted to the potential of the market and the role they serve in the tourism-oriented system cannot be neglected.

It has to be stated at this point that due to a relatively small sample, the outcome of the examinations may only present the specificity of the entire branch to a limited extent.

Furthermore, the carried-out examination did not exhaust a subject and will be elaborated on in the future together with the performance of a more detailed analysis characterized by the division of entities operating in the tourism-related branch of industry into groups.

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