

## **LJUBLJANA QUALITY SELECTION (LQS) – INNOVATIVE CASE OF RESTAURANT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

Scientific paper

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### **Abstract**

**The purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to briefly present the most well-known restaurant assessment systems where restaurant are assessed by experts. The aim is to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each system.

**Design** –The special focus is to give answers on questions: how are the restaurants assessed by experts, which are the elements and standards of assessment and whether they are consistent with the quality dimensions as advocated in the theory of service quality.

**Methodology** – The methodology of the research include a case study methodology. Using case studies, it shows the characteristics of three well-known systems (Michelin, Gault Millau and AAA Diamond Rating) and the development of an unknown local restaurant assessment system.

**Approach** – There are plenty of restaurants in the world and countless numbers of guests who wish to visit them. It is hard to figure out which one is best or most appropriate. In order to find this out, guests search for reference sources. These reference sources are regarded as restaurant reviews, restaurant assessments, restaurant ratings, restaurant quality systems and similar. The question arises regarding what scientific methodology and instruments on restaurant assessment stand for and why and how they develop. The question is again who should assess restaurants – experts or guests. These provocative questions surpass the scope and aim of this paper.

**Findings** – The paper provides detailed information on the methodology and instruments for restaurant assessment and an in depth comparison of them. For the first time, it also explains in detail the development of the LQS regional restaurant assessment system.

**Keywords** restaurant assessment, Michelin, Gault Millau, AAA Diamond rating, Ljubljana Quality Selection

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

There are plenty of restaurants in the world and countless numbers of guests who wish to visit them. Within this endless selection, it is hard to figure out which one is best or most appropriate. In order to find this out, guests search for reference sources that could help them answer that question. In the literature, these reference sources are regarded as restaurant reviews, restaurant assessments, restaurant ratings, restaurant quality systems and similar. For the purpose of this paper, the term restaurant assessment system will be used.

Markovic, Raspor and Šegarić state that service quality in the restaurant industry is difficult to evaluate, because the assessments are made not only based on the service outcome but also on the process of service delivery.<sup>1</sup> In the world, there are many restaurant assessment systems. Through the examination of a variety of literature, it can be concluded that there are:

- systems where experts assess restaurants (such as Michelin, Gault Millau and AAA Diamonds),
- systems where restaurants are assessed on the web by guests (such as Yelp, Zagat or Trip Advisor)
- systems where restaurants are assessed by journalist/culinary critics and published in journals and
- systems where restaurants are assessed on the basis of various academic models and instruments (e.g. SERVQUAL, DINESERV).

Although the last-mentioned system was widely used and results were published in major scientific publications, it was established through the development of the LQS that restaurant service cannot be fully assessed by strict scientific methodology and instruments. In particular, that refers to intangible elements of SERVQUAL and its derivatives. Assessment of the service delivery process and service dimensions are important but not sufficient criteria for restaurant assessment.

This fact is also supported with numerous studies. Andaleeb and Conway stated in their research that because the “product offering” for a full service restaurant is likely to be assessed by evaluating an actual product (the meal) and by where it is delivered (physical place), they decided to separate the tangibility dimension in SERVQUAL into its two aspects: food quality and the physical design/decor of the restaurant.<sup>2</sup> Markovic, Raspor and Šegarić also made an excellent review of different restaurant assessment instruments. They developed their own instrument based on theoretical concepts on service quality. Markovic et al. came to the conclusion that their measurement of restaurant service quality was limited to 35 restaurant attributes/elements.<sup>3</sup> Even though these attributes were included in other studies and their validity is tested, there could be other relevant restaurant attributes that are likely to influence customers’ expectations and perceptions about overall dining experience.

Although scientific journals devoted much attention to the measurement of customer satisfaction in the restaurant, not that much attention was given to systems where restaurants are assessed by experts. If we take a more thorough look at the methodology of systems, it is often observed that there is little data on how exactly the restaurants are assessed. This represents a peculiar paradox. On the one hand, guests rely on restaurants reviews but actually do not know on what this assessment is based.

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<sup>1</sup> Marković, S., Raspor, S. in Šegarić, K.. Does restaurant performance meet customers’ expectations? An assessment of restaurant service quality using a modified DINESERV approach. *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 16 (2), 181–195, 2010, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> Syed Saad Andaleeb, Carolyn Conway, "Customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry: an examination of the transaction-specific model", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 20 Iss: 1, 2006, pp. 3–11.

<sup>3</sup> Marković, S., Raspor, S. in Šegarić, K. Does restaurant performance meet customers’ expectations? An assessment of restaurant service quality using a modified DINESERV approach. *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 16 (2), 181–195, 2010, p. 193.

Some authors did address the topic of so called restaurant reviews. In Ferguson's taxonomy of restaurant reviewers, Zagat is a plebiscite and Michelin is a tribunal. According to Ferguson, one of the major distinctions of the plebiscite is that "ratings depend on the luck of the draw and the disposition of the consumers."<sup>4</sup> An alternative to the Zagat plebiscite, both in physical form and in ideology, hit the book shelves in 2006 when the first Michelin Guide to restaurants arrived in America,<sup>5</sup> Ferguson describes the sort of tribunal that Michelin represents as "collective decrees, rendered anonymously by a corps of dedicated inspectors."<sup>6</sup>

Although other restaurant tribunals had at one time held some sway in America, such as the Mobil Travel Guides and the AAA Tour Book series, due to poor management, inconsistent ratings, antiquated criteria and changes in the field of gastronomy, over the last 20 years or so these rating programs lost favour among the dining public and lost respect in the eyes of professionals in the industry. In New York City, one of the Meccas of the world's foodies, these American tribunals were never paid much attention to anyway.<sup>7</sup>

The question arises regarding what scientific methodology and instruments on restaurant assessment stand for and why and how they develop. The question is again who should assess restaurants – experts or guests. These provocative questions surpass the scope and aim of this paper, but it should be answered on some other occasion.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to briefly present the most well-known restaurant assessment systems where restaurant are assessed by experts. The aim is to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each system. This paper represents an attempt to answer the following scientific questions:

- how are the restaurants assessed by experts,
- which are the elements and standards of assessment and
- whether they are consistent with the quality dimensions as advocated in the theory of service quality.

To find the answers to the stated questions, it was decided to use a case study methodology. According to Baxter and Jack the researcher should use a case study approach when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. "Michelin in America." *Gastronomica* 8, No. 1, 2008: 49–55.

<sup>5</sup> Davis, M. *A taste for New York: restaurant reviews, food discourse, and the field of gastronomy in America*. Doctoral dissertation. New York: New York University, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. "Michelin in America." *Gastronomica* 8, No. 1 2008: 49–55.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Baxter, P. and Jack, S. *Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers*. The Qualitative Report Volume 13 Number 4 December 2008: 544-559.  
<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-4/baxter.pdf>

In this case, the research method was chosen because most of the data is qualitative in nature and also there is much descriptive information and details on restaurant standards to answer how the restaurant assessment systems work.

The case study includes those that are internationally recognised and LQS as the new regional system, which is made on the basis of these systems. There are limited scientific resources on the topic, so mostly internet pages were chosen as resources. In the case of the LQS, the case is presented based on experience of the authors, since they were involved in the project since 2000.

LQS is a local restaurants assessment system that arose from a need to provide independent information to tourists about which are the best restaurants at the destination. Through a case study, we will demonstrate the development of LQS from 2000 till today as an attempt to create a dynamic and innovative restaurant assessment system, especially for those destinations that are not included in known restaurant assessment systems.

### **3. EXPERT RESTAURANT ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS**

The following section is dedicated to in-depth case study presentation and description of restaurant assessment systems where restaurants are assessed by trained and professional experts.

#### **3.1. Michelin**

In Europe, quality gastronomy is synonymous with the Michelin Guide. Johnson, Surlmont, Nicod and Revaz define a Michelin star as the "most recognisable and long-established international system of categorisation of haute - cuisine restaurants and superior quality."<sup>9</sup>

Restaurants with at least one Michelin star are presented in the Guide for gourmet travellers and culinary experts Guide Rouge.<sup>10</sup> In 1900, Michelin, otherwise engaged in the manufacture of tires, first announced the so called The Red Guide. The first guide book intended to boost the demand for car tyres, almost 35,000 copies were published and were distributed for free to motorists and car owners as the guide included maps, instructions to repair and change tyres, pit stops, hotels and petrol stations around France.<sup>11</sup> This initially contained mostly technical information about the nearest car service stations along the way, but in 1930 tourism and culinary information prevailed.

Restaurants' assessment to obtain a Michelin star and ranking in the Guide Rouge is carried out by a qualified and experienced team of strict reviewers that visit restaurants anonymously. They analyse the service quality based on different unpublished and

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson, C., Surlmont, B., Nicod, P. in Revaz, F. Behind the Stars: A Concise Typology of Michelin Restaurants in Europe. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 46 (2), 170–187, 2010, p. 170.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Michelin Corporation. History. available at: URL: <http://www.michelin.com/corporate/group/history>

unknown criteria. According to Michelin, such an assessment enables the independence of the Red Guide and encourages the creativity and individuality of chefs.

Culinary professionals and the general public appreciate the information contained in the Red Guide; its only downside would be the absence of written quality criteria for each star.<sup>12</sup>

The evaluators decide which restaurant deserves one and which one, two or three stars, as we stated before, without known, published or written criteria. The lack of standardisation means that the chefs of restaurants competing for a Michelin star do not know exactly what they need to improve, upgrade or eliminate in order to gain a star.

They, too, are guided by the feeling. Although the Michelin system is complex and often extremely expensive for the would-be Michelin star establishment, they all crave to gain the star(s). To be considered requires (among other things) a substantial investment in real estate, hiring high-quality personnel, use of first-rate ingredients and securing extensive and expensive wines. In Europe, the guide is widely accepted as the definitive reference for gourmets and followers of haute cuisine. It would be fair to say that its influence on restaurant choice is both impressive and fearsome. For example, the consequences of gaining or losing a star can result in enormous changes in a restaurant's sales and profitability.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.2. Gault Millau

This is, besides Michelin's, the second most influential guide in Europe. In March 1969, Henry Gault, Christian Millau and André Gayot established a monthly magazine devoted to food and wine. It quickly became the most influential French restaurant guide. It has been taken very seriously in the restaurant business.<sup>14</sup> Later, it developed to include Germany, Benelux, Austria and Switzerland.<sup>15</sup> No payment is required for restaurants to register in Gault Millau.

This rating system is strictly based on the quality of the food. Service, price and ambience are commented on separately. The Gault Millau wishes to promote good kitchens - that inspire the chefs to do their job better and guests are encouraged to demand ever higher. The Gault Millau accepts any style of cooking; it does not matter if someone cooks classic, modern, regional, cross - cultural, vegetarian or exotic cuisine.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Johnson, C., Surlmont, B., Nicod, P. in Revaz, F. Behind the Stars: A Concise Typology of Michelin Restaurants in Europe. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 46 (2), 2005.,170-187.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Fine dining explorer. Influential restaurant guides available at:  
[http://www.finediningexplorer.com/influential\\_restaurant\\_guides\\_gault\\_millau.php](http://www.finediningexplorer.com/influential_restaurant_guides_gault_millau.php)

<sup>15</sup> Swiss holiday company. Gault Millau Switzerland available at: <http://www.swissholidayco.com/gault-millau.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> Gault Millau Österreich - Guide für Gourmets."Gault Millau Österreich - Guide für Gourmets, Available at: <http://gaultmillau.at>

The rating is on a scale of 1 to 20 and restaurants below 10 points are never listed. Since 2010, in Gault Millau France restaurants are recognised by a chef's toque with a maximum of five toques.<sup>17</sup> Toques are also used in Austria.

Only a select few restaurants can receive a high Gault Millau rating. Out of 5,000 reviewed restaurants in Gault Millau France 2013, only 15 received five chef's toques.<sup>18</sup> The Swiss guide was established in 1982 and the 2014 guide features 800 restaurants and 80 hotel restaurants throughout Switzerland that have been awarded between 12 to 20 points.<sup>19</sup>

In assessing the kitchen performance, the following criteria are considered primary.<sup>20</sup>:

- how fresh, seasonal and quality are the products used,
- how useful are the products used,
- how freshly prepared is each dish,
- how much is retained in the preparation of the natural flavour of the products,
- how clear are the flavours,
- how well harmonised are the used products,
- how exactly are the optimum cooking times considered,
- how digestible are the dishes,
- how are the dishes presented,
- how to enhance the flavours of a menu.

In addition, they consider how tasty the appetizers and desserts are. They assess the menus for their length and how informative and understandable they are. They evaluate the price / performance ratio.

For all the careful attention to these objective criteria, the Gault Millau is committed to honest restaurant reviews that cannot be entirely free of subjectivity as well as literature, theatre, music or movie reviews.

As mentioned before, service and decor elements are assessed separately. In the report, experts describe the following elements<sup>21</sup>: special location, history and clientele of the restaurant, interior decoration, tableware and atmosphere, service (reception, counselling, simultaneous serving, billing, complaints handling, basic equal treatment for all guests), wine cellar, structure and clarity of the wine list...).

The Gault Millau testers are trained gourmet experts. They are not professionals in the sense that they are doing this job as a profession, but they are professional in term of their own experience. The Gault Millau testers are all freelancers who like to eat often and for different reasons. They assess restaurants for appropriate compensation. They

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<sup>17</sup> Fine dining explorer. Influential restaurant guides available at: [http://www.finediningexplorer.com/influential\\_restaurant\\_guides\\_gault\\_millau.php](http://www.finediningexplorer.com/influential_restaurant_guides_gault_millau.php)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Swiss holiday company. Gault Millau Switzerland available at: <http://www.swissholidayco.com/gault-millau.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> Gault Millau Österreich - Guide für Gourmets. "Gault Millau Österreich - Guide für Gourmets, Available at: <http://gaultmillau.at>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

go often to a restaurant until they are sure of their judgment. They behave in their visits as regular guests and do not identify themselves as Gault Millau employees.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3. AAA Diamond Ratings

Since its inception in 1902 as a federation of independent motor clubs, the American Automobile Association - AAA has existed to provide information, safety, security and peace of mind to its now more than 51 million members.<sup>23</sup> They assess properties in United States, Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean, and according to their newsletter besides accommodations more than 27000 restaurants.<sup>24</sup>

AAA distributes more than 64 million copies of printed travel-related materials to members and consumers annually – including regional Tour Book® and Camp Book® guides, retail guidebooks, atlases and maps. In addition, AAA distributes online information and services to travellers who account for 40 million AAA.com visits annually.<sup>25</sup>

AAA diamond ratings represent a combination of the overall quality, the range of facilities and the level of hospitality offered by an establishment. These widely recognised and trusted symbols help AAA members choose restaurants that will meet their needs and expectations.<sup>26</sup>

AAA inspectors are responsible for determining a restaurant's Diamond Rating based on established standards that are developed with input from trained professionals, AAA members and various restaurant industry professionals. AAA inspectors visit and anonymously dine to observe the basic foundation of the establishment. The inspectors check how well the restaurant performs in term of a set of Diamond Rating guidelines that represent objective criteria prevalent throughout the restaurant industry. In addition, the inspector includes key subjective elements experienced at the time of the evaluation. This evaluation process includes the review of these key dining essentials pertaining to the following five areas: food, service, décor and ambiance, cleanliness and condition and management and staff.<sup>27</sup>

Diamonds are assigned based on the average of all restaurant characteristics, with a focus on overall guest impression rather than on individual elements. Therefore, not meeting a guideline (in one area) may not necessarily affect the overall Diamond Rating.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Diamond Ratings, Available at: <http://newsroom.aaa.com/diamond-ratings>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

#### 4. LJUBLJANA QUALITY SELECTION

The City of Ljubljana and its local tourism destination organisation took the initiative in 2000 to enhance the tourism products in Ljubljana, especially to stimulate the tourism organisations to produce products recognised as top quality tourism products. They gathered the majority of tourism experts in Ljubljana to prepare the criteria for measuring service quality in Ljubljana's tourism organisations. The project is known as Ljubljana Quality Selection – LQS. In the beginning, it was meant to assess not just restaurants but also other tourism suppliers. Unfortunately, the methodology and assessment instruments were developed just for restaurants up to this point.

At the beginning, the restaurants were not assessed anonymously. The first instrument was based on SERVQUAL, which was not well adapted for restaurant assessment. Assessment was mainly about service delivery process and service dimensions. It was expected in 2000 that the Slovenian government prescribed categorisation of restaurants. In practice, that meant that a set of technical standards, so the LQS criteria was meant as an upgrade, just to assess service delivery process.

Assessments were paid for by restaurants themselves. The assessment was carried out every year. Annually, there were less than 20 assessed restaurants. Not all reviews were published in the media, just the best ones. A printed guide was not issued.

In 2008, the project underwent a major renovation. The assessment methodology was completely changed as well as the criteria. As the basis and starting point, the AAA diamond methodology was chosen that had been adapted to local characteristics. In 2010, the existing methodology and criteria were set. At that time, a division on objective and subjective criteria was omitted.

Currently, LQS 2014 is underway. The Commission for Quality in Tourism in Ljubljana Tourism (hereinafter referred to as the Commission), which is a professional body consisting of experts from various disciplines (food, catering, hospitality, design, architecture, marketing ...), submits a list of nominees. Altogether, there are around 1000 establishments in the restaurant and bar business in Ljubljana, so not everyone can be assessed. The Commission suggests the list of nominees that are the best in their category and for every assessment adds a few new ones. From 2008 to 2014, every two years around 150 restaurants were assessed.

The nominated restaurants in each category are assessed at least twice by experts anonymously. All costs of the LQS project are covered by the local tourism destination organisation. Each establishment is visited by at least 2 persons, with the exception of fine dining restaurants. Nominations are collected until the beginning of January.

Although the assessors are trained professionals and foodies, before the assessment there are workshops for assessors to refresh their knowledge of the criteria. The list of assessors is approved by the Commission based on the proposal of the head of assessors. Assessors are certified for the current year. Assessment is carried out between March and August. After completing the assessment, the Commission



confirms the winners of Ljubljana Quality Selection. In November, the winners in each category are solemnly proclaimed. This activity is followed by promotional activities (promotion in print media, printed guide Top Ljubljana restaurants and on the website [www.visitljubljana.si](http://www.visitljubljana.si)). Assessment is carried out in the following categories<sup>29</sup>:

- Category 1 - world-class fine dining restaurants,
- Category 2 - Slovenian cuisine,
- Category 3 - foreign national cuisine,
- Category 4 - international cuisine, the trend of urban facilities and hotel restaurants
- Category 5 - patisserie.

Nominated restaurants are anonymously visited by assessors and assessed according to the criteria in the evaluation sheets. Every restaurant can get a maximum 100 points. The score includes restaurant quality in four basic groups: food, service, design /ambiance and price. In Table 1, the share of each group in the overall score is presented.

Table 1: **The importance of individual groups in the overall score**

<b>GROUP</b>	<b>SHARE (IN %)</b>
FOOD AND BEVERAGES	50
SERVICE	25
DESIGN/AMBIANCE	15
PRICE	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Uran Maravić, M. (2014). Ljubljana Quality Selection - LQS 2014. Ljubljana: Tourism Ljubljana

The score of each of the above groups of elements (other than price) consists of two parts. The first part refers to the detailed elements of the group (food or service or ambience) and that part can vary from one assessment to the next. The second part presents general satisfaction with the group of elements (food or service or ambience). The final grade is the average score of the two groups. Each element is assessed with the grade from 1 to 5, where 5 means excellent grade. In this way, scores from year to year can be compared.

Two assessors jointly fill out the evaluation sheet. In such a way, we are trying to reduce subjectivity. Each of the assessors orders a different appetizer, main dish and dessert. Each assessor orders for the main course one meat dish or a vegetarian dish. Assessors are instructed that their behaviour should not stand out, and that they must behave like ordinary guests. At the end of the evaluation sheet, they have space for a descriptive assessment. If scores in the first and second round are too different, the restaurant is assessed for a third time. The groups and elements of the evaluation sheet are presented in Table 2.

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<sup>29</sup> Uran Maravić, M. (2014). Ljubljana Quality Selection - LQS , 2014. Ljubljana: Tourism Ljubljana.

**Table 2: The groups and elements in the evaluation sheet**

GROUPS	ELEMENTS
A1 . FOOD AND DRINK	1 DIVERSITY OF DISHES
	2 INGREDIENTS
	3 DISH PRESENTATION
	4 PORTION SIZES
	5 SIDE DISHES AND SEASONING
	6 TASTE AND HARMONY
	7 SEASONAL OFFER
	8 FRESHNESS
	9 TEMPERATURE
	10 RELIABILITY IN THE PREPARATION
	11 DRINK
A1 . AVERAGE SCORE ( $\Sigma A1 - A11$ ) / 11	
A2 . GENERAL SATISFACTION WITH APPETIZER	
A3 . GENERAL SATISFACTION WITH MAIN DISHES	
A4 . GENERAL SATISFACTION WITH DESERT	
OVERALL SCORE ( A1 + A2 + A3 + A4 ) / 4	
B1 . SERVICES	1 BOOKING BY PHONE OR WEB
	2 ARRIVAL / WELCOME GUESTS / SEATING THE GUEST
	3 SETTING OF THE TABLE
	4 RECOMMENDING MENUS
	5 SERVING FOOD AND BEVERAGES
	6 CLEANING THE TABLE
	7 GUEST COMPLAINTS HANDLING
	8 PAYMENT, GUEST DEPARTURE
	9 APPEARANCE OF THE EMPLOYEES
	10 FRIENDLINESS OF EMPLOYEES
	11 RESPONSIVENESS OF THE EMPLOYEES
	12 KNOWLEDGE OF THE EMPLOYEES
	13 WILLINGNESS TO PLEASE SPECIFIC GUEST REQUIREMENTS
	14 VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL

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GROUPS	ELEMENTS
	COMMUNICATION WITH THE GUEST
	15 INDIVIDUAL APPROACH
B1.AVERAGE SCORE ( $\Sigma B1 - B15$ ) / 15	
B2 . GENERAL SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES	
OVERALL ASSESSMENT ( B1 + B2 ) / 2	
C1 . RESTAURANT AMBIANCE	1 ACCESSIBILITY OF RESTAURANTS
	2 APPEARANCE OF THE AREA
	3 BAR
	4 RESTAURANT INTERIOR
	5 FURNITURE / TABLES / CHAIRS
	6 FLOWERS
	7 PRINTED MATERIALS - MENUS
	8 TABLECLOTHS AND TABLE LINEN
	9 TABLEWARE AND CUTLERY, TABLE ACCESSORIES
	10 GLASSWARE
	11 AVAILABILITY OF TABLES
	12 TEMPERATURE AND VENTILATION
	13 LIGHTING
	14 VOLUME / MUSIC / ENTERTAINMENT
	15 RESTAURANT OCCUPANCIES
	16 TOILET
	17 CHILD FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT AND EQUIPMENT
	18 PARKING
	19 ACCESS FOR DISABLED
	20 WEBSITE
C1. AVERAGE SCORE( $\Sigma C1 - C20$ ) / 20	
C2 . GENERAL SATISFACTION WITH RESTAURANT'S APPEARANCE	
OVERALL SCORE ( C1 + C2 ) / 2	
D. PRICE / QUALITY RATIO	

Source: Uran Maravić, M. (2014). Ljubljana Quality Selection - LQS 2014. Ljubljana: Tourism Ljubljana

There are 11 specific and 3 elements to assess food quality, 15 specific and one general element to assess service quality, 20 specific and one general element to assess restaurant ambience and one general element to assess THE ratio between price and overall quality of dining experience at the restaurant. Altogether, there are 52 elements. To get 100 points, the average scores are used and then accompanied with weights as shown in Table 1. For calculation, the following formula is used<sup>30</sup>:

$$\text{Points} = (\text{total score} * \text{possible score}) / \text{max score}$$

The LQS case is an attempt at anonymous and objective assessment of restaurants. Throughout its development, the authors tried to establish reliable and time-equivalent instruments. They are also trying to reduce the disadvantages of known systems.

### CONCLUSION

A detailed overview of the main features of the different systems allows us to make a comparison of the systems. Through comparison, we will be able to draw main conclusions. Table 1 presents the main characteristics of the system in terms of:

- visibility,
- scope,
- ratings,
- method of assessment,
- instrument for assessment,
- publishing ratings,
- how often restaurant are assessed,
- how to apply for assessment.

Table 3: Comparison of the expert restaurant assessing systems

ELEMENT OF COMPARISON /SYSTEM	MICHELIN GUIDE	GAULT MILLAU	AAA DIAMOND	LQS
VISIBILITY	Known worldwide, popular in Europe	Known in Europe	Known in North America	Known regionally
SCOPE	Only top quality restaurants for fine dining	Top to casual	All restaurants that are members of AAA	Selection of restaurants by region (up to 150)

<sup>30</sup>ibid

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ELEMENT OF COMPARISON /SYSTEM	MICHELIN GUIDE	GAULT MILLAU	AAA DIAMOND	LQS
RATINGS	3 stars 2 stars 1 star	20,19 points: 4 toques 18,17 points: 3 toques 16,15 points: 2 toques 14,13 points: 1 toques	5 diamonds 4 diamonds 3 diamonds 2 diamonds 1 diamond	100-0 points
METHOD OF ASSESSMENT	Mystery guest-inspectors	Mystery guest-inspectors	Mystery guest-inspectors	Mystery guest-inspectors
INSTRUMENT FOR ASSESSMENT/ STANDARDS	Not known	No known, according to their web page oriented on food quality, services and decor are commented on separately. Limited knowledge – just groups of criteria	Fully known and published standards	Fully known and published standards
PUBLISHING RATINGS	In printed guide and online	In printed guide and online	In printed guide and online	In printed guide and online
HOW OFTEN RESTAURANT ARE ASSESSED	Annually at least once, more known restaurant several times	Annually at least once	Annually at least once	Biannually at least twice
HOW TO APPLY FOR BASEMENT	Restaurants do not apply	Restaurants do not apply	Members apply for assessment.	Restaurants do not apply
WHO PAYS FOR ASSESSMENT ?	Michelin company	Gault Millau	Members pay a fee to be assessed	Destination organisation

Source: authors

So, through this case study we presented how the restaurants are assessed by experts and which are the elements and standards of assessment. It is difficult to argue whether these elements are consistent with the quality dimensions as advocated in the theory of service quality, because there is little data about these elements. It can be concluded that those that are more transparent (AAA and LQS) put more emphasis on tangible elements and address service delivery as a part of overall assessment.

To conclude, in each of us there is a desire to assess quality. But unfortunately, not every assessment is relevant. It takes tradition and time for restaurant guests to adopt a single system of restaurant assessment. It is true that Michelin remains the most respectable restaurant assessment system, but it is unfortunately the least transparent and is inaccessible. Michelin is inaccessible in the sense that in their guides a very small number of countries and destinations are covered. Everywhere else, guests are left at the mercy of restaurateurs. Through this prism, it makes sense to develop and support local assessment.

LQS is an example of such a local restaurant assessment. In 14 years, the team of authors closely evaluated and monitored progress in order to complete the system. This paper presents some of the results of their work.

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