

# ANALYSIS OF HOTEL STANDARDS AND CLASSIFICATION IN THE SARAJEVO CANTON

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**Abstract:** The tourism industry and hotel sector are global industries facing increasing customer expectations in the dynamic tourism market environment. Sarajevo Canton attracts a large number of tourists, especially during the summer season, with tourism playing a crucial role in the economic development of the destination. Quality management is a key element for the long-term success of hotel establishments. This paper highlights the importance of quality management systems, standardization, and categorization, and their contribution to improving service quality in the hotel industry. The aim is to analyze quality management systems and the categorization system within the hotel sector in Sarajevo Canton, providing insight into the current state of the industry, identifying problems, and recommending measures for improving and enhancing the tourism offer. The analysis revealed inconsistencies in legal regulations at the federal and lower government levels and a lack of national legislation for hospitality activities, leading to overlapping or conflicting rules. Although Sarajevo Canton has achieved certain successes in tourism, the hotel sector requires improvement. Comparison with international standards and practices indicates the need for investment in facility modernization, enhancement of professional services, legislative harmonization, and staff education. Recommendations include strengthening inspection controls, reducing the informal economy, encouraging the implementation of ISO and international standards, re-categorization of 4 and 5-star hotels, defining jurisdiction over hotels with 3 or fewer stars, and appropriate reconstruction and modernization aligned with global trends.

**Keywords:** Hotel sector; classification; standardization; Sarajevo Canton

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## INTRODUCTION

The quality of service in today's hotel industry is a key factor that sets hospitality businesses apart from their competitors. Both the overall standard of services offered and the quality of customer care play a crucial role in meeting guests' expectations, which in turn strongly influences their satisfaction and loyalty (Panasiuk, 2019; Suhartanto et al., 2020; Yum & Yoo, 2023).

In light of the need to safeguard both competitive market dynamics and, most importantly, consumer rights within the hotel industry, public authorities have implemented measures to standardize hotel service quality. Categorization serves as a regulatory tool of state policy, developed in collaboration with professional associations within the hotel sector. This mechanism is closely linked to the broader concept of service quality offered by hotels, encompassing not only consumer-facing services but also other critical elements such as pricing, quality standards, terms of sale, and the physical environment in which services are delivered (Wszendybył-Skulska & Panasiuk, 2024).

Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the Sarajevo Canton, possesses significant potential for the development of tourism. As a rapidly growing industry, tourism represents one of the key drivers of economic development for the Sarajevo Canton (Čaušević, 2023; Čaušević & Osmanović, 2023). Standardization in tourism and hospitality, as part of a broader global process, has yet to be fully realized in Sarajevo Canton. In recent years, the Canton has experienced significant tourism growth, however, a noticeable gap remains between local economic actors and contemporary trends, as well as the expectations of modern tourists. One of the key factors contributing to the inadequate response of both businesses and government institutions to evolving tourism dynamics is the improper implementation or complete absence of hotel industry standards.

Effective participation in the competitive tourism market requires the adoption of international quality and safety standards, including the ISO 9000 series (such as ISO 9001, ISO 9004, and ISO 19011) which pertain to quality management systems, ISO 22000 which addresses food safety through the implementation of HACCP systems, and the ISO 14000 series which focuses on environmental management practices (Lokvančić, 2025).

The categorization of hospitality establishments is a formal process used to assess and define the level of standards achieved in terms of facility design, equipment, and service quality within the hotel sector. Through this process, hotels are classified into specific categories based on the nature and quality of services provided, as well as the fulfillment of minimum technical requirements and criteria necessary to determine the type and classification of the establishment.

Globally, there are more than 30 different hotel classification systems in use. These systems typically represent service quality levels using stars or diamonds, although in some countries, alphabetical grades ranging from 'A' to 'F' are also employed (Lokvančić, 2025).

According to the Hospitality Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Regulation on Classification, Minimum Requirements, and Categorization of Hospitality Establishments within the Hotel Group, hotels are classified as hospitality facilities subject to mandatory categorization. Each hotel is evaluated and categorized individually. Existing hotel establishments are classified into four categories: two-star, three-star, four-star, and five-star hotels. In contrast, newly constructed hotel facilities are categorized into three tiers: three-star, four-star, and five-star hotels. Categorization is indicated by a standardized sign placed on the facility, displaying both the designation "Hotel" and the corresponding number of stars reflecting the hotel's category. Additionally, reclassification of a hospitality establishment may occur if it is determined that the facility no longer meets the prescribed standards for its assigned category. In such cases, an official decision is issued to revoke the previously granted categorization status (Lokvančić, 2025).

The primary objective of this paper is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the processes of standardization, the application of international standards, and the categorization of hotel facilities within the Sarajevo Canton. By exploring these themes, the study provides insight into the current state of hotel infrastructure and the key challenges faced by stakeholders in the hospitality sector. The analysis encompasses various dimensions of standardization and classification, including physical infrastructure, service delivery, and staff quality.

Given that the Sarajevo Canton is a highly popular tourist destination, the quality of hotel services plays a critical role in ensuring competitiveness and long-term success. This study offers a comprehensive overview of the hotel sector's current conditions, identifying existing shortcomings, areas in need of improvement, and best practices that could enhance the quality of accommodation services. Consequently, the findings of this research may have practical implications for the strategic development and strengthening of the tourism offering in the Sarajevo Canton.

## METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH RESULTS

The research involved visits to randomly selected 4- and 5-star hotels in the Sarajevo Canton, using a quantitative research method, the survey method. The questionnaire consisted of questions related to the current level of quality and standards in the selected hotels. The chosen hotels in the Sarajevo Canton were Courtyard by Marriott (4-star) and Malak Regency Hotel (5-star).

The hotel selected for this research is Courtyard by Marriott, located in the Skenderija area. The profile of the respondent who participated in this survey is as follows:

| Respondent Profile     |                                    |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Hotel</b>           | Courtyard by Marriot               |
| <b>Position</b>        | Human Resources Department Manager |
| <b>Education Level</b> | University Degree                  |

Source: Lokvančić, 2025.

The aim of this research, was to collect direct and precise data on the presence of international standards and the level of quality in the selected 4-star hotel. The survey responses are presented in tabular form as follows:

| <i>Hotel Courtyard by Marriot</i> |                                                                                                                             |             |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
|                                   | QUESTIONS                                                                                                                   | RESPONSES   |
| 1.                                | How would you rate the current service standards in the hotel?<br>– Excellent<br>– Good<br>– Satisfactory<br>– Poor         | – Excellent |
| 2.                                | On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do you think the current standards and conditions in the hotel align with its 4-star rating? | – 5         |
| 3.                                | Which standards (ISO or international) are currently implemented in the hotel?                                              | – HACCP     |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                              |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4. | What additional services or amenities do you believe could contribute to improving the quality of service in the hotel?<br>(Open-ended question)                                           | – More conference and restaurant space                                                                       |
| 5. | Do you believe that the current criteria for standards and categorization at the Sarajevo Canton level align with market needs and the growth of tourism?<br>– Yes<br>– No<br>– No opinion | – yes                                                                                                        |
| 6. | How would you rate the competitiveness of hotels in Sarajevo Canton compared to other destinations in the region?<br>– Excellent<br>– Good<br>– Satisfactory<br>– Poor                     | – Excellent – the hotel<br>– Satisfactory – Sarajevo Canton                                                  |
| 7. | Do you have any information on how the categorization of the property was conducted after its construction?                                                                                | – Based on the categorization criteria prescribed by the Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism (FMOIT) |

Source: Lokvančić, 2025.

The hotel selected for this research is Malak Regency Hotel, located in Ilidža. The profile of the respondent who participated in this survey is as follows:

| Respondent Profile     |                   |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Hotel</b>           | Malak Regency     |
| <b>Position</b>        | Sales Manager     |
| <b>Education Level</b> | University Degree |

Source: Lokvančić, 2025.

The aim of this research, was to collect direct and precise data on the presence of international standards and the level of quality in the selected 5-star hotel. The survey responses are presented in tabular form as follows:

| <i>Malak Regency Hotel</i> |                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                    |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                            | QUESTIONS                                                                                                                                                                                  | RESPONSES                                                                          |
| 1.                         | How would you rate the current service standards in the hotel?<br>– Excellent<br>– Good<br>– Satisfactory<br>– Poor                                                                        | – Satisfactory                                                                     |
| 2.                         | On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do you think the current standards and conditions in the hotel align with its 5-star rating?                                                                | – 5                                                                                |
| 3.                         | Which standards (ISO or international) are currently implemented in the hotel?                                                                                                             | – HACCP<br>– Halal food certification                                              |
| 4.                         | What additional services or amenities do you believe could contribute to improving the quality of service in the hotel? (Open-ended question)                                              | – Children's playroom and activities for children<br>– Space for a conference hall |
| 5.                         | Do you believe that the current criteria for standards and categorization at the Sarajevo Canton level align with market needs and the growth of tourism?<br>– Yes<br>– No<br>– No opinion | – yes                                                                              |
| 6.                         | How would you rate the competitiveness of hotels in Sarajevo Canton compared to other destinations in the region?<br>– Excellent<br>– Good<br>– Satisfactory<br>– Poor                     | - Excellent – both the hotel and Sarajevo Canton                                   |

|    |                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                           |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7. | Do you have any information on how the categorization of the property was conducted after its construction? | – The property was constructed from the outset to meet the criteria of a 5-star facility, and the categorization was subsequently confirmed by inspection |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Source: Lokvančić, 2025.

After conducting the research and survey in both selected hotels, the respondents who participated in evaluating the level of quality and standards in their hotels generally rated them as good, namely excellent or satisfactory, with no negative feedback regarding the quality of services. The respondents gave the highest rating on the scale (1 to 5), specifically a score of 5, for the accommodation standards in all surveyed hotels.

Regarding hotel, ISO, or international standards, the hotels included in this study apply the HACCP standard. HACCP is a standard implemented in food preparation processes. This system ensures food safety and quality assurance by identifying and controlling potential hazards that could affect food safety. It is important to note that Malak Regency Hotel also holds a Halal food certification, as the entire hotel system is dedicated to the Halal concept.

When it comes to potential suggestions for service improvement, respondents mainly proposed expanding conference space capacity or, in some cases, adding children's facilities and playrooms. All respondents agreed that the criteria for standards and categorization at the Sarajevo Canton level align with market needs and the growth of tourism.

Regarding the final question, respondents rated the hotels as excellent in terms of competitiveness within the Sarajevo Canton market, and as satisfactorily competitive in relation to the broader regional market (Lokvančić, 2025).

Following the conducted research in the hotels and the successful survey, an additional study was carried out involving the analysis of reviews from one of the most popular accommodation booking platforms, Booking.com. The review analysis focused on the hotels selected for this research, examining the most recent guest feedback related to the category "Value for Money."

In this category, guests who have stayed at the respective hotels provide reviews specifically concerning the standards and quality levels of the hotel, as well as whether the hotel meets the standards appropriate for its current 4-star or 5-star rating.

This supplementary research was conducted with the purpose of comparing the perspectives of employees and guests regarding the same hotel, and to determine whether guests rate the hotel at a level consistent with how it is represented by its staff (Lokvančić, 2025).

### **Review Analysis for Courtyard by Marriott Hotel**

1. Everything met the standard
2. Excellent service
3. Good experience in terms of standards
4. High standards of cleanliness
5. High hotel standards in the city
6. Service does not match the category and price
7. Good service standards
8. Price too high for the service
9. Good price for the service
10. Service does not match the quality

Observing the above reviews related to the evaluation of standards and quality levels at Courtyard by Marriott, it can be concluded that guest opinions are divided. However, the majority of reviews were positive, with the hotel rated as meeting its category and being appropriately priced for a 4-star rating. Guests were particularly satisfied with standards related to overall cleanliness and comfort in the hotel.

The most frequent negative feedback concerned breakfast and parking facilities. Guests often complained about insufficient parking spaces or additional parking fees. Regarding breakfast, guests described it as insufficiently varied and noted the high extra charge, which was not mentioned in their reservations.

The overall rating on Booking.com for reviews in the “Value for Money” category is 8.4. It can be said that the hotel meets the criteria and maintains a relatively good level of quality; however, there is room for improvement to not only meet but exceed guest expectations (Lokvančić, 2025).

## **Review Analysis for Malak Regency Hotel**

1. Excellent service
2. Well-equipped hotel
3. Excellent service
4. Luxurious standards
5. Excellent service and luxurious hotel
6. Meets 5-star criteria
7. Price too high for the service
8. Hotel does not justify the stars
9. Good quality
10. Hotel justifies the price

Analyzing the reviews from the Booking.com platform for Malak Regency Hotel, it can be concluded that the hotel meets the criteria and maintains a very high level of service and quality. A significantly larger number of reviews come from guests who were highly impressed with the service, especially cleanliness, comfort, and the staff's attitude toward guests. Additionally, guests are very satisfied with the hotel's halal concept, as the majority of guests come from GCC countries. The hotel's location was also highly rated, being in a quiet area close to the airport. The most frequent negative feedback concerned the spa and wellness center, which was considered below the standard expected of a 5-star hotel.

However, the hotel has been undergoing renovations and infrastructure projects targeting this area to improve service quality for its guests. The overall rating on the platform in the "Value for Money" category is 8.1. Although this rating appears somewhat low, the numerous positive reviews speak volumes about the quality of this hotel (Lokvančić, 2025).

## **Review Analysis of Other Selected 4- and 5-Star Hotels**

Since the field research was conducted for only two hotels, an additional analysis was performed on reviews for randomly selected hotels in Sarajevo Canton where no field research took place. The analyzed reviews focus on the category "Value for Money," in which guests who stayed at these hotels leave feedback specifically related to the standards and quality levels of the hotel, as well as whether the hotel meets the criteria for its current 4-star or 5-star rating. This supplementary research was conducted to gain additional perspective on the quality level and guest perception, as well as to identify strengths and weaknesses of hotels not covered by the field research.

The first 4-star hotel analyzed is Hotel President, located in the city center, in close proximity to Bašćaršija. Reviews concerning the quality level and standards at the hotel include:

1. Excellent level of cleanliness and staff attitude towards guests
2. Luxurious hotel
3. Exceptional service
4. Outstanding hotel
5. Poor breakfast
6. Perfect hotel
7. Everything was up to standard
8. Exceptional cleanliness
9. Breakfast not up to the standard of a 4-star hotel
10. Remarkable hotel

Analyzing reviews from Booking.com for Hotel President, it can be concluded that the hotel largely meets standards and maintains a high level of service quality. The vast majority of guest reviews are positive. Guests are particularly satisfied with the exceptional cleanliness of the hotel and the level of service provided by staff, who are described as very kind and accommodating. Additionally, guests highlighted the excellent parking facilities, which include an underground garage. The most frequent negative feedback concerns breakfast, with guests sharing similar opinions. Breakfast was generally described as poor, featuring cold or even spoiled items, as well as a limited selection of products or dishes offered to guests. The overall rating on Booking.com for reviews in the “Value for Money” category is 8.6. In general, the hotel meets criteria and maintains a relatively good level of quality; however, there is always room for improvement to not only meet but exceed guest expectations (Lokvančić, 2025).

The second analyzed 4-star hotel is Hotel Monti Spa & Wellness, located on the Olympic Mountain Igman. The reviews related to the quality level and standards at the hotel are as follows:

1. Exceptional hotel
2. High-quality hotel facilities
3. Excellent room standard
4. Outstanding hotel quality
5. Diverse hotel amenities
6. High level of food quality
7. Professionalism

8. High price for the service quality
9. High-level hotel ambiance and interior design
10. Luxurious hotel

After analyzing reviews from the Booking.com platform, Hotel Monti Spa & Wellness has received significantly more positive reviews than negative ones. Guests were particularly impressed with the hotel's luxury, cleanliness, and overall ambiance. A large number of positive reviews rated the breakfast extremely highly, as well as the overall quality and variety of food served in the hotel's restaurant.

The few negative reviews were primarily related to the spa and wellness department. Some guests complained about the cold temperature of the pool water and frequent malfunctions of certain spa facilities. The overall score on Booking.com in the "Value for Money" category is 8.6. In general, the hotel meets the required standards and maintains a relatively high level of quality. However, there is always room for improvement, even in minor details which, although seemingly insignificant, can leave a strong impression on guests (Lokvančić, 2025).

The first 5-star hotel included in the additional analysis is Apeiro City Avant-garde Hotel, located in the city center, directly across from Hotel Europe. The reviews related to the quality level and standards at the hotel are as follows:

1. Insufficient service quality for a 5-star hotel
2. Exceptional hotel
3. Excellent staff service
4. Outstanding service
5. Friendly staff
6. Beautiful ambiance
7. High level of cleanliness
8. Modern furnishings
9. Professional staff
10. Insufficient quality for the price

After analyzing the reviews for this hotel, it can be concluded that it offers a high level of standards and good quality. Guests are particularly satisfied with the luxurious ambiance and modern interior, which is not surprising considering the hotel is one of the newly built establishments in Sarajevo. Guests also emphasize the extremely high level of professionalism and friendliness of the staff, as well as the quality of food served in the restaurant.

Negative reviews are rare and mostly relate to noise, however, the hotel's central location means that staying near city attractions often comes with a lively and energetic environment.

The overall rating on Booking.com in the "Value for Money" category is 8.8. It is worth noting that although this hotel is rated 5 stars, it does not offer spa and wellness facilities. Nevertheless, this does not negatively affect its overall rating or the guest experience, as many guests left positive reviews and reported a highly satisfying stay (Lokvančić, 2025).

The second 5-star hotel and the final one in this analysis is Hotel Europe, located in the city center near the City Hall and the Old Town. The reviews concerning the hotel's quality level and standards are as follows:

1. Poor cleanliness for a 5-star hotel
2. Spacious rooms
3. Low-quality breakfast
4. Outdated equipment in the hotel
5. Rooms meet the hotel's category
6. Average service
7. Partially outdated interior
8. High price
9. Food below average for the price
10. Excellent hotel facilities

After analyzing the reviews on the platform for Hotel Europe, it becomes evident that the hotel generally does not meet the required standards and lacks a high level of quality. Many negative reviews were left by guests regarding the hotel's cleanliness, which was not up to the level expected of a 5-star property, with some guests noting that rooms were not cleaned daily.

Another major point of criticism was the overall condition of the hotel. Guests mentioned outdated or even dirty furniture and equipment, old gym and spa facilities, and an overall atmosphere that some described as fitting for the 1960s. Breakfast also received significant negative feedback for lacking quality and variety, especially given the hotel's 5-star status.

On the positive side, guests praised the spaciousness of the rooms, which were consistently rated as meeting 5-star expectations. The overall "Value for Money" rating on Booking.com is 7.8, which is the lowest rating in this category among all the hotels analyzed. However, this low score is justified by the large number of

negative reviews. Despite its shortcomings, the hotel has an excellent location and enormous potential to become one of the most modern and luxurious hotels in Sarajevo. Hotel Europe has been a well-known name for many years, but it is now essential to take concrete steps toward renovation and infrastructure upgrades in order to raise its level of quality and meet the expectations of guests who arrive seeking a luxury experience that is currently lacking (Lokvančić, 2025).

## CONCLUSION

From the conducted research, it can be concluded that the surveyed hotels do not sufficiently implement the process of standardization and the introduction of standards from various areas that could improve their service quality. It is important to note that, compared to hotels in the region, the surveyed hotels have not implemented ISO standards related to energy efficiency, environmental protection, occupational health and safety, or information security management. However, despite these shortcomings, the respondents expressed satisfaction with the current levels of quality in the hotels and reported positive outcomes.

The survey method was successfully and efficiently carried out among respondents in hotels categorized as 4-star and 5-star. Challenges and limitations were encountered when attempting to communicate with representatives of 3-star hotels, as none of the representatives agreed to participate in the research or provide any feedback.

Regarding future research, a deeper analysis of specific standards influencing guest satisfaction in hotels is recommended. At the same time, a comparison with best practices in hotel standardization within the region is necessary. Additionally, it would be beneficial to investigate the impact of emerging tourism trends on hotel service standards.

The results of this research may be useful to all parties interested in tourism and hospitality topics, including hoteliers and managers seeking better insights into the state of the hotel sector in Sarajevo Canton, hotel representatives aiming to improve services and adapt to market demands, tourism organizations focused on development and promotion, as well as employees in various institutions who wish to be informed about the status of the hospitality sector and its potential improvements.

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