

THE HEALTHY RESTAURANT PRODUCT AS AN ELEMENT OF SPORTS TOURISM

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the growing interest in health-conscious lifestyles has significantly influenced consumer behavior across various industries, including tourism and hospitality (Dimitrova, 2017; 2018; Chipeva, 2019; Polimenov, 2023). Sports tourism, which combines physical activity with travel, has emerged as a popular niche market catering to individuals seeking active and wellness-focused experiences (Dimitrova et al., 2018). Within this context, the concept of the "healthy restaurant product" has gained prominence as a vital element that enhances the overall appeal of sports tourism destinations (Ribov, 2018). The healthy restaurant product encompasses more than just nutritious meals; it reflects a commitment to sustainability, local sourcing, and catering to the dietary preferences of health-conscious travelers (Dimitrova 2019b). By aligning culinary offerings with the principles of balanced nutrition, sports tourism venues can provide athletes, fitness enthusiasts, and wellness seekers with an essential component for optimising physical performance and supporting recovery (Dimitrova 2019a; Tomova et al., 2023). This introduction explores the intersection of gastronomy, wellness, and tourism by highlighting the role of healthy restaurant products in shaping the experiences of sports tourists. It examines how these products contribute to the broader goals of promoting sustainable tourism, fostering healthy eating habits, and meeting the unique needs of travelers engaged in athletic activities (Dimitrova, 2019). Ultimately, the integration of health-focused dining options into sports tourism not only enhances the attractiveness of destinations but also supports the global shift towards a more health-oriented and environmentally conscious travel industry. This study examines the possibilities of the restaurant product to satisfy the gastronomic needs of athletes and tourists with varied and healthy food and drinks during sports tourism. Emphasis is placed on the peculiarities of the restaurant product and its two components - culinary production and catering service. There are trends on the part of quick service

establishments to rework recipes and standards of meals and desserts in order to preserve the taste indicators of the products during mechanical and heat treatment (Dimitrova, 2023). Emphasis is placed on the weight, freshness and form of packaging and arrangement / catering / of culinary products and beverages. Sportsmen and tourists are interested in culinary products and menus that meet a healthy and balanced diet leading to happiness (Dimitrova et al., 2020). Attention has been increased in offering a new quality of the restaurant product, based on diversity, reduced weight and dynamism.

METHODS

In sports tourism, the possibilities of the restaurant product dominate in its two forms - culinary production and catering service. The possibilities of culinary production and its comprehensiveness of processing food products is aimed at the caloric content and the indicators that the food must meet during sports tourism (Ribov, 2017). Gastronomic and ethnic specificities of flavors and heat treatment are also important. These and other features, created as criteria and dressed in rules, make the restaurant product fast and easy for athletes to consume.

The systematized technological features of the restaurant product provide clear guidelines for enhancing its organoleptic and axiological qualities, aiming to better meet the specific needs and preferences of sports tourists. for balanced and healthy food. The food that is offered to athletes and tourists is specific and is made up of culinary production and catering service, the common thing between the two is that they are part of the restaurant product, and the specific thing is that the service is carried out in a certain place and in a certain atmosphere. The specificity of the events implies that part of the culinary production is produced or processed outside the catering facilities. The combination of various factors in the production leads to a final culinary product. Its possibility of different combinations in meeting the food needs of athletes and tourists brings it closer to both the main meals and the supplementary and supporting healthy nutrition and satisfaction (Dimitrova et al., 2021). The diversity of the culinary products produced comes from the specific requirements for caloric and vitamin content as well as from the complex production technological operations and requirements for freshness, aroma, taste qualities and temperature. We can safely say that the restaurant product is elastic, due to the fact that its elements are interchangeable and fully respond to the market and changes in demand. When offering food for athletes, the menu also includes ready-made goods /soft drinks, bakery products, etc./. It is a way of eating that includes eating mostly products with a smaller carbon footprint: fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and unsaturated fats, as well as a moderate to low intake of fish, seafood, meats, potatoes, dairy products, sugar (see fig.1).



Fig. 1. Diet for Planetary Health (The EAT-Lancet Scientific Committee, published in the authoritative journal Lancet 2024) Source: <https://www.espressonews.bg/> Planetary Health Diet (Fig. content translation):

- **Fruits and Vegetables (500g daily):**
 - Includes various fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **Whole Grains (232g daily):**
 - Examples: wheat, rice, oats.
- **Dairy Products (250g daily):**
 - Examples: milk, yogurt.
- **Plant-Based Proteins (125g daily):**
 - Includes legumes (beans, lentils), nuts, and seeds.
- **Animal-Based Proteins (total 83g daily):**
 - **Meat (14g daily):** Includes red meat (beef, pork, lamb).
 - **Poultry (29g daily):** Includes chicken and other poultry.
 - **Fish (28g daily):** Includes seafood and fish.
 - **Eggs (13g daily):** Equivalent to approximately 1 egg every other day.
- **Vegetable Oils (50g daily):**
 - Includes olive oil, canola oil, and similar plant-based oils.
- **Other (31g daily):**

- Includes small amounts of added sugar and discretionary calories.

Hashtags:

- #EatingWithMeaning

The ratio between the produced culinary products and the finished goods reveals the specificity of the offered restaurant product (Polimenov, 2014). With its flexibility, the restaurant product provides sports tourism not only with supporting meals /primary/ but also main meals /secondary/. B. Axler in his classification considers the restaurant product as primary - food and drinks and as a secondary - product designed to satisfy the requirements of consumers - requirements for comfort, communication, entertainment, novelties and pleasures (Axler, B.N., 1979). In practice and theory, there will increasingly be a tendency to open up the restaurant product to bring it closer to the consumer and, above all, for the culinary product to be processed, produced and packaged in front of the customer's eyes. Through catering and non-traditional attraction forms of service, the aim is to enter sports tourism and sports events to meet the needs of consumers and athletes for food and drinks and achieve high profitability. Paul Dittmer and Gerald Griffin posit a restaurant product structure that approximates the sports tourism restaurant product offering with its three elements:

- food, drinks or a combination of these two components;
- services;
- atmosphere.

The essential thing when offering culinary production outside and in the restaurant is the service. The catering / food / service itself is also part of the non-production sphere. When serving a large flow of tourists and athletes, the standard and quality of service are leading. Service is seen as a variety of activities related to the provision of specific meals and drinks and is tied to marketing. For sports tourism, these are all services offered by the restaurateur to athletes and tourists. Elements of different styles of service technology, service with trays and service carts, preparation and production of culinary products in front of the consumer's eyes are applied to the service. The sporting event itself and its atmosphere contribute significantly to satisfying customer requirements. Restaurant marketing specialists study the offered product and service for the purpose of consumer satisfaction and develop rules for measuring satisfaction, skillfully linking the results to the requirements of the staff so that their behavior is modified and consumer satisfaction is increased (Dimitrova, B., 2019). The atmosphere is related to the sport and its emotional impact is important for the restaurant product and the tourists. Sally Stone associates the atmosphere with a dish that is tasted, but for which there is no recipe. The essential thing about sports tourism is that each sports themed event can be repeated, but it is always different from the previous one. Francisco

Battle classifies the atmosphere in which the restaurant product is offered as modern, avant-garde, "higi - teck" or sports oriented. The brand of the offered restaurant product is part of the atmosphere in sports tourism. The food must be healthy and mobile and meet the specific indicators of tangibility and organoleptic. Catering services must be affordable, comply with hygiene standards and be easy to consume and serve. Good economic results depend on the quality of culinary production and service technology. From the opinions of the different authors, it is clear that the restaurant product can be realized in a different atmosphere. Its complexity, diversity and mobility allow it to be easily used. These and other concepts are the basis of the restaurant business and find application in sports tourism.

RESULTS

The catering product must be present at the place where the sporting event takes place. Such a demand can only be met by large restaurant chains and quick service establishments. Due to the fact that time is scarce and within the event itself, such forms and ways of offering restaurant products, such as pizzas, hamburgers, donuts, etc., are being sought. Certain chains resort to market entry strategies such as:

- o the possibility of changes to the menu with quality products, constant improvement of the quality of service, marketing and technical-technical renewal of the material base.
- o opportunity for new investments and increasing competitive advantage.
- o creating an opportunity based on the hierarchical structure for personnel growth.

In restaurants with a sports theme and games, no matter how much we think that the attention is focused on the atmosphere, practice shows that it is necessary to bet on the culinary production and service technology. The sports theme leads to communication to educate the consumer, but not to changing his taste. It has been proven that standards of service and culinary production are more difficult to maintain than style, decor or organizing a sporting event. On the other hand, when organizing a sports event, the restaurant product must be correctly oriented and positioned. In the market, we encounter different customers who wish to meet their favorite restaurants and assortments that suit their tastes. For example, Dunkin' Donuts aims to satisfy the mass consumer's demand for donuts and coffee. In sports tourism, there are too many customers and they are very scattered, which makes it difficult to offer and serve in the same way. The various quick service companies have bet that their restaurant product is based on the processing of certain products. Thus, they pursue a certain segment (Polimenov, 2019) of the market and seek to improve production and supply. Certain fashions and trends are followed, the interests of tourists are emphasized. Sports clubs open their own establishments, such as the Red Cafe ("Red Cafe")

opened by the team Manchester United. The team club explores the corporate restaurant business and creates more amenities for customers under the motto, "if the fans in the stadiums increase, more football fans will consume their restaurant product provided by the restaurant sector". The restaurant represents the "Thematic Manchester United", it is also a video restaurant with an international menu, where absolutely diverse experiences are offered. In the culinary experience and its peculiarities with the great theming through sports lies the success for sports tourism.

The features of the restaurant product in sports tourism are related to:

- the requested food and beverages meet the wishes of the consumers and certain foods and beverages are for a certain group of consumers.
- relying on the attractiveness of the offered restaurant product based on a study of the potential of the clientele.
- increasingly sustainable positioning of the restaurant product on the market and offering a competitive advantage.

The competitiveness of the sports restaurant product depends on the combination of culinary production and drinks, which organoleptically complement each other. Adherence to technology in culinary processing meets the desire to consume, which is enhanced by a correctly selected drink. A quality restaurant product produced and offered at a low price creates an opportunity for higher competitiveness. The competitiveness of the sports restaurant product is a set of thematic organoleptic culinary production and drinks with organoleptic indicators fully corresponding to the olfactory and gustatory reception of the consumer, of flavors that are essential and original for the respective restaurant product.

As M. Ribov points out, in the economic sense, the concept of "competition" has three interpretations - behavioral, structural and functional. The behavioral interpretation considers competition as "honest competition between sellers and buyers to achieve the most favorable conditions for the sale of goods". The structural interpretation is associated with distinguishing the four main types of markets – perfect competition, monopolistic competition, oligopoly and monopoly. The functional interpretation is aimed at determining the role that competition plays in the economy.

The label of the product contains a scale with five colors from green A to red E, which shows which of the processed foods to consume and which less often. How is the scale interpreted? According to the Nutri-Score calculation system, a product with a green rating of A is more likely to contribute to a healthy diet than a product with a red rating of E from the same product group. The Nutri-Score system assigns 1 to 10 points for ingredients to limit (ie calories, saturated fat, sugars, salt) and 0 to 5 for beneficial ingredients (protein, fiber, fruits and vegetables, nuts). (see fig.2).



Fig. 2. The Nutri-Score system is designed for labeling products. Source: Photo: eutoday.net
Examples of Nutri-Score labeling

Business entities compete on the basis of theoretical knowledge and practical skills with each other, where each one of them strives to achieve "its goals independently of the others." The competitive struggle between restaurateurs is regarding the assortments, their quality, organoleptic indicators of the culinary production, price and conditions of realization in sports tourism. This struggle is an external expression of a contradiction between use value and product value, a struggle and contradiction between abstract and concrete labor in the labor process.

DISCUSSION

Competition resolves the stated contradictions "in the interest of those restaurateurs who offer a higher quality culinary product, with better organoleptic indicators, for the production of which minimal costs have been incurred." In the restaurant industry, the economic competitive advantage is in relation to the cost price of the restaurant product, and the axiological is a comparison according to the organoleptic culinary indicators of the product and their ability to satisfy certain thematic needs, tastes, interests and aspirations of the client. The skillful combination of drinks with culinary products helps to improve the quality of the offered restaurant service and increase its competitiveness. Therefore, quality management in the production process and supply is a function of the skills of all specialists. Culinary products and drinks meeting certain organoleptic criteria and their skillful combination should satisfy the taste and state of mind, the temperament of athletes and tourists. The quality of the drink and the ability to satisfy, to complement the ensemble of flavors and through the bouquet it creates during the meal to easily transform the food into a feeling of satisfaction (Polimenov, 2019). The difficulty for restaurant business in sports tourism is that if a chain of establishments offers the same product and the consumer's desire cannot be satisfied,

then he looks for another product. With catering service, customers cannot be served with the same efficiency to all those who wish, due to the fact that the service is outsourced to the sports grounds.

CONCLUSION

Restaurateurs must take into account the changes in the consumer's requirements, observe his behavior and strive to satisfy the differences. To gain an advantage, the restaurant must focus on more than two subsets of sports tourism customers and strive for performance. An important condition for success is to distinguish dissatisfied customers from satisfied ones, and the prospects are for the development of regional culinary products and the creation of the "Wellness Bulgaria" brand, "Wellness-BG" has a future.

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