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THE MARKETING VALUE OF SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CASE OF RESTAURANTS

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Summary: In our study, we evaluated sustainability as a marketing tool via the Sustainable Restaurant qualification. When we speak of sustainability, wide arrays of definitions come to mind, usually something like development which does not endanger the process of satisfying the future generations' demands. In our research, we evaluated how sustainability comes up regarding eating habits, which also make a restaurant sustainable. This is an exceptionally important question, because the appearance of the process in eating habits can be one way to measure transition to sustainability. In this research, we wanted to see what prerequisite a restaurant has to adhere to, which makes sustainability become a possibility.

Keywords: sustainability, sustainable restaurant, marketing, low-carbon, sustainable food

1. Introduction

When we began the research, we overviewed the question of sustainability, which has a wide array of sources. In this research, we used various definitions of sustainability, which complement each other, meaning we did not use a set definition. In Ribizsár's (2012) article, the definition of sustainability was researched from various perspectives, which states that in „neo-classical economy (and other fields of science), sustainability has the requirement of various factors in the system for its continued existence and operations". If we view the definition of sustainability as ecological economists see it, „a system can be called sustainable if it reaches, or outgrows its own life expectancy". According to Laki's (2000) definition, „sustainability itself should not be viewed as a static state, since sustaining a state of the system means the preserving of both growth and development capacities." Morelli (2011) defines environmental sustainability as such: The initiatives – by striving for environmental sustainability as a normative objective of their activities – should make a contribution to a situation of "balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to satisfy its needs while neither exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to continue to regenerate the services necessary to meet those needs, nor by our actions diminishing biological diversity.

Járási defines sustainable development in his thesis as follows: „sustainable development is a 'meta-expression', which unifies profit-orientated industrialist, farmers producing for self-use, minimising costs, and social employees striving for equality, nature-loving citizens of western nations worried about environmental hazards, decision-makers wishing for the maximisation of growth, goal-orientated government workers, and – as a natural consequence – vote-counting politicians" (Lele, 1991).

If we evaluate all definitions above, seeing sustainability from both an environmental and economic point, we think that a system can be called sustainable if it is low-carbon, meaning „minimal input of material and energy results in minimal greenhouse gas emission output" (Fogarassy, 2012; Böröcz and Fogarassy, 2011). Szarka et al. (2014) defines the parameter-system of sustainability as such: one of the most important things is the change in marketing,

consumer behaviour, attitude - and value system. This means that there's an important factor of the corporate marketing which we can't ignore: environmental awareness is becoming more mainstream in consumer behaviour. At the same time, additional elements of the marketing environment wield influence on behaviour and habits of corporations and consumers. As for the corporations, they have to abide by laws and regulations, not only because fees and fines affect profit, but also because the impact of green organisations and (tabloid) media became a force which can no longer be ignored. The environment-friendliness of developed western citizens is growing by the minute, but domestic research shows that most Hungarian consumers do not seem environmentally friendly during purchases.
Furthermore with environment –friendly food processing, and food consuming we can fulfil the criteria of the low carbon society (Lukacs et al., 2009). The hypotheses of our research were that interest in sustainable service is growing in restaurants, and these establishments can use the qualification to approach a certain group of consumers, who are sensitive to a culture change in their eating habits towards sustainability.

2. Materials and methods

We did a structured interview with a member of Felelős Gasztrohős (lit.: Heroes of Responsible Dining) for our research, by which we wished to evaluate how the establishment of customers' choice is influenced by the Sustainable Restaurant qualification.
Methodologically, structured interview is the most formal member of the possible variations of interview techniques. In case of these interviews, editing is done to allow re-use of data via repeated use. Structured interviews are used in standard surveying and opinion polls, since information can be quantified, and the answers of various questions compared, and the main topics of market surveys properly covered easily (Lehota, 2001).
We chose this method for our research, because we wanted to get answers to our questions regarding the operation and requirements of a sustainable restaurant chain. We chose the procession of a secondary database as our other method, for which we received data from Felelős Gasztrohős. We decided the evaluation of consumers' and restaurants' ideas on sustainability to be a further research goal, for which this research acts as a basis.

3. Discussion and Results

The qualification of a Sustainable Restaurant, and its system was designed by Felelős Gasztrohős and the Ecological Evolution Foundation. The goal of the initiative is to advertise responsible eating culture in Hungary, and make it more popular. This is done via backing the consumption of local and seasonal foodstuffs, and decreasing the consumption of dishes which have a larger environmental load. To reach these goals, they offer aid to responsible restaurants in making changes to be more environmentally friendly. Among their ethics are environment protection, transparent, responsible and accountable operations, rational use of resources at hand, ethical behaviour, and cooperation with national green organisations and for-profit organisations which don't contradict these ethics. The team of Felelős Gasztrohős understands - due to their experience in recent years - the problems a manager or owner faces, when they decide to „make their shop green". To offer aid, they assembled a guide named „20 steps to sustainable restaurant". But why would an establishment want to receive the Sustainable Restaurant qualification? Because it means approval, they help managers and owners in their venture to protect the environment and „making their shop green". This also means that they can create a marketing which allows them to reach new customers. Restaurants which are eligible, and win the Sustainable Restaurant qualification, are offered the chance to appear at festivals, conferences, and other events, and are featured on Hungarian

and foreign pages and blogs. This helps the restaurant to gain popularity and works as a role model and motivation for future and existing Sustainable Restaurants alike. The colleagues of Felelős Gasztrohős have an ongoing connection to restaurants who were awarded the qualification, by which they offer aid in environmental protection problems, general consultation, and sustainability courses. Joining the network is easy due to the online application, and the members are recommended to events and corporations looking for „green", environmentally friendly locations and catering services. Member restaurants have to pay an evaluation fee, which is different for each - as much as they can handle - and ranges from 5 to 10.000 HUF. Currently, the network has 24 members in Budapest.

During the evaluation of the interview and literature, we arrived at the conclusion that the qualification may mean an important marketing opportunity for restaurants. To become a member of the sustainable restaurants, establishments which are devoted to sustainability can apply to the team of Felelős Gasztrohős online, to request the Sustainable Restaurant qualification. To actually get the qualification itself, the restaurant has to clear various criteria, if the requirement system is applicable to them. This wide system of parameters assures the adherence to sustainability. According to our research, the following main criteria are applied to evaluating restaurants:

1. *Supply and acquisition:* One of the most important factors is the minimising of „foodstuff-miles", which means the product should be transported from the producer to the consumers via the shortest route possible. This shows mostly as the preference for local and seasonal foodstuffs, which lessens the ecological footprint of the product. By buying local foodstuffs, we also aid local economy; we can attain trustworthy information about our product, and also avoid the middle of the trade chain. Therefore, for a restaurant to earn the Sustainable Restaurant qualification, they have to shift to buying materials from local sources. The system also covers if the preference of bio-materials is more efficient, since bio-food has less hazardous material in it, meaning it contributes greatly to environmental protection as well.
2. *Waste management:* According to Western-European research, an average restaurant customer generates 0,5 kg of waste (Felelős Gasztrohős, 2015). This amount includes not only the table napkin and leftovers, but various cooking leftovers, like used oil, wrappings, remains of peeling vegetables, and removed parts of meat as well. Managing the waste of restaurants is possible in two ways: selective waste collection, and trying to reduce the amount to begin with. Said reduction is possible for restaurants in various ways, which makes it twice-profitable. On the one hand, because the costs of leftovers not consumed by the customer are spared (remains of peeling, and cut-off parts of meat, etc.), and on the other hand, no additional costs will surface due to destroying said waste. If a restaurant begins a waste reduction programme, effectiveness increases, costs decrease, and making the dishes become more environmentally friendly. Apart from this, the management makes the employees of the restaurant also becomes more environmentally aware and responsible, which may reduce labour fluctuation. Naturally, the most prominent benefit is the satisfaction of customers.
3. *Hygiene:* Hygiene is an extremely important thing to consider for a restaurant. Sadly, the most widespread cleaning solvents in Hungary have chlorine, ammonium and other hazardous materials in them. These, even if they abide by requirements, disregard both the environment and its contamination long-term. Fortunately, there are natural cleaning solvents, which preserve the environment, and also abide by hygiene requirements. However, another thing to consider is that these have a slower effect, and therefore require attention and carefulness when used.
4. *Energy-efficiency:* Creating and storing dishes uses up a lot of energy. According to the research of the Catering Technology Centre, if these systems would be changed to more

energy-efficient ones, up to 80% of the costs could be spared. Restaurants which choose their machinery carefully can cut costs by up to 30% (Felelős Gasztrohős, 2015). The energy requirement of restaurants by square meter can be up to five times as much as other service establishments, like an office, or a trade establishment. During evaluation, they regard investments into renewable energy sources highly, but this is not a requirement due to high initial cost, and long time for returns. They primarily evaluate the steps the restaurant takes to lower energy requirement, as much as they can.

5. *Efficient water usage:* One of the least bountiful resources of the world is freshwater. Currently, we do not feel the effects of this truth on ourselves, but we must not forget that our national water reserves are diminishing each year, apparent in the water yield of rivers. This is why we cannot discard the importance of this resource either (Fogarassy-Neubauer, 2011). We can divide restaurants into three categories by their water usage. The most importance must be put on water used during cooking dishes and cleaning cookware. Though it is dependent on the restaurant's business, we cannot disregard the water spent when they use the facilities. The third is water used for cleaning after business hours. Due to how specific the dishes are, the survey focuses on dishwashing, solutions which reduce water usage at the facilities, and cleaning techniques. If we pay a little attention, we can stop the waste of leaking taps and continuously flushing toilets. These are basic requirements for restaurants which apply, as are taps with either sensors or adjusters.

All in all, our research supported our hypothesis that the number of restaurants which consider both sustainability and profitability to be priorities is on the rise, and that these restaurants contribute to abiding by the criteria of sustainable development via the qualification, which offers them further advantages on the market. The numbers of the network are also on the rise, which shows that consumers have a demand for sustainable restaurants, since if there are more of them, that shows how the market is expanding in that area. We also came to the conclusion that further research is required into the sustainable restaurant network from the consumers' viewpoint as well, to make the evaluation of the sustainable restaurants' parameter system more complex.

4. Conclusions

During our research, we reached the conclusion that the Sustainable Restaurant qualification offers social advantages to restaurants, apart from the apparent economic advantages. The economic and social responsibility of restaurants is an important factor for those who apply for the qualification. Further important things to consider are: do the organisations take the values and interests of the environment and society into consideration, do they take the effects of their operations on business partners, trade partners and employees into considerations, and if they make decisions and take volunteer steps beyond abiding by their legal responsibilities. The responsible operation includes equal treatment, and knowing how they affect individuals and groups who come into contact with the restaurant. When dealing with those who are related to the restaurant, they have to consider not only customers and employees, but business partners and the local neighbourhood as well. Sustainable restaurants and events offer numerous opportunities to cut back on costs, and reaching new customers by becoming more distinct from other restaurants or events. This goal can be reached by handling sustainability as a priority. A further important marketing opportunity is that they take an active role in knowledge distribution. This means that if a restaurant acquires the qualification, they spread and advertise environmentally friendly lifestyle. This also includes taking a social role. All in all, we can say that the Sustainable Restaurant qualification can

contribute to the positive image of a restaurant, which makes sustainability a marketing tool with an actual effect for them.

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