

VEGETARIAN DIET – PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT: *Vegetarianism is characterized by a great expansion among consumers as well as food producers and suppliers, which significantly affects supply in the hospitality business. Although vegetarians are perceived as a homogenous group, they are a varied and heterogeneous group, depending on the consumed foodstuffs, which requires hospitality workers to offer a wide variety of meals and combinations of plant origin. This is the reason why this research aims to show attitudes of restaurant management towards vegetarian cuisine and to examine the orientation of restaurants towards vegetarian meals, as well as challenges faced by employees in the hospitality industry. The basic task is to examine and present attitudes of hospitality management towards vegetarian food. The aim of the overall research is to get a better insight into awareness and attitudes of hospitality management towards foods of vegetarian origin, which is reflected in the restaurant offer.*

Keywords: *restaurant business, gastronomy, vegetarianism, food, offer*

INTRODUCTION

Vegetarianism is usually described as a diet characterized by consumption of food of plant origin and avoidance of some or all foodstuffs of animal origin (Perry et al., 2001, p. 406). In the mid-nineteenth century, the term “vegetarianism” was first mentioned, and was used to describe a diet that avoids some or all foods of animal origin. (Petti et al, 2017).

Vegetarianism (lat. *vegetus* – lively, hale, sprightly; lat. *vegetation* – plants, overgrowth) is a diet consisting of foods of plant origin or possibly dairy products and eggs, but with no animal meat (<https://www.seriousseats.com/2007/12/is-cheese-vegetarian.html>). In most cases a vegetarian is usually considered a person who does not consume meat, however, although such a simplistic description may seem appropriate, vegetarianism is a much more complex category to explain. (Nezlek, Forestell, 2019). In the modern world where meat consumption is greater than ever before, vegetarianism seems like deviating from the path. There are numerous benefits from a meat-free diet; however, there are also many nutritional problems that can occur if this diet is not designed carefully. Primarily, vegetarianism can produce many health benefits if practiced properly (Dhammika, 2010).

Vegetarianism is more of a sociocultural than a biological phenomenon. The most common reasons for choosing a vegetarian diet are health, ethical treatment and welfare of animals, care about the environment, taste, religion, philosophy, disgust towards sensory properties of meat (Kim et al., 1999). The consumption of

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food of plant origin is on the increase with vegetarians as well as non-vegetarians, which results in an increase in demand for non-animal food (Lanou, 2007; Greenway, 2010). Nevertheless, this subject is widely discussed, with claims that restaurants do not address this issue very often and use this very important trend inadequately, despite the fact that hospitality, as a very specific industry branch, faces very big competition (Shani, DiPetro, 2007; Perlik, 2010).

It should be borne in mind that vegetarian hospitality is a very challenging task that requires from the hospitality manager a wide range of knowledge about different cooking methods, but also a large selection of non-animal dishes (Licata, 2009).

The subject of this paper is exploring attitudes of hospitality management towards vegetarian food and its presence in restaurant menus. The research also addresses the perception of vegetarian food as a part of hospitality offer which is becoming more and more sought after and the needs of advocates of this diet, as more frequent consumers. The task of the paper is to research attitudes and perceptions of hospitality management towards vegetarian food. The main aim of this research is to obtain data on the attitudes of the participants (restaurant management) towards vegetarian food.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The group of people who call themselves vegetarians turned out to be much more diverse than initially thought. It is believed that vegetarians are more ecologically aware and have a more expressed humanistic perspective on the world compared to non-vegetarians (Jabs et al., 1998; Allen et al., 2000; Lindeman, Sirelius, 2001). The most common way to differentiate among vegetarians is based on foods they include in or omit from their diet, and whose variations are presented in detail in Table 1. Of the other divisions, the most common is the motivation to choose a vegetarian diet that can be from different personal interests, such as: care for health and body weight, personal beliefs related to religion, but also certain ethical and humanitarian beliefs and care for the environment (Jabs et al., 1998; Barr, Chapman, 2002; Shani, DiPietro, 2007, Cvetković et al., 2016).

Table 1. Classification of vegetarians formed on a basis of their dietary habits

Types of vegetarians	Definition
Accidental vegetarians	They mostly eat food of animal origin, but in their diet they consume a larger amount of vegetarian foods and / or accept a vegetarian diet for a certain period of time.
Semi-vegetarians	They do not use red meat (beef and venison) in their diet, while they consume other foods of animal origin.
Pesco vegetarians ('pescetarians')	They consume fish and other foods of animal origin besides meat.
Lacto-Ovo-Vegetarians	They consume honey, eggs and dairy products from foods of animal origin.
Lacto-Vegetarians ('lactarians')	Besides foodstuffs of plant origin, they consume milk and dairy products.
Ovo-Vegetarians ('Egetarians')	Besides foodstuffs of plant origin, they use eggs in their diet.
Vegans	They consume only foods of plant origin.
Raw Vegans	They consume only uncooked and thermally unprocessed foods of plant origin.
Fruitarianism	They only consume fruit, nuts and seeds.

Source: Ginsberg, Ostrowski (2003); Fox, Word (2008); Shani (2010)

The number of vegetarians in the past decade has not fluctuated much. Research has shown that about 3% of adults in the U.S. are lacto-ovo vegetarians. About third or quarter of all vegetarians confirm that they use only plant-based foods in their diet, excluding dairy products, eggs and honey-based products from their diet. It is important to note that females are much more likely to opt for this type of diet compared to males. The same situation is among the younger in relation to the older population (Beardworth, Bryman, 2004; Buzilka, 2009).

It is estimated that there are about 75 million vegetarians in the world, who voluntarily adhere to this diet, and 1.450 million people are vegetarians out of necessity. The number of vegetarians in countries such as India is estimated to be 40%, whereas the data for Europe and America depending on the country range from 1 to 10% (e.g. 9% in Germany, 0.3% in Portugal, 3.2% in the USA) (<http://www.euroveg.eu/lang/en/info/how-many.php>). However, it should be borne in mind that a significant number of vegetarians are not classic vegetarians, but people who increase the intake of foods of plant origin in the desire for a healthier lifestyle. They form a special group called accidental vegetarians (Held, 2003). Meat is a typical male food and many men do not consider a meal without meat a real meal, which can be seen in the smaller share of male vegetarians, and which is why less strict forms of vegetarians prevail such as lacto-ovo or pesco-vegetarians, and there are fewer vegans (about 1% of the total population) (Ruby, Heine, 2011).

Many restaurants still do not have an adequate offer of vegetarian dishes, and the main reason is the perception of vegetarian food as hard, boring and uninspiring, which most chefs shy away from. (Rowe, 2010). This is the reason why restaurants specially recruit cooks for vegetarians because the preparation of high-quality vegetarian meals requires hard work and wide knowledge (Kuhn, 2006).

Nowadays, there is a large selection of nutritious vegetarian products based on plant-based foods. These products, such as various salads, but also classic meat dishes made from various plant substitutes can often be found in the offer of restaurants (Kiernan, 2011). As a result of the previously stated facts, it is important to emphasize that vegetarians are often faced with limitations when it comes to enjoying food outside the home, because of a limited choice of meals (Cobe, 2003; Perllik, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

The research method for this paper was a survey as it is the most adequate choice for obtaining the required information. The survey is conducted anonymously, and the respondents were employees holding managerial positions, without an age limit, and regardless of gender. The survey was structured modeled on the research created by Rivera and Shani (Rivera, Shani, 2013).

The research was conducted in Vojvodina, in cities – tourism centers of Novi Sad and Subotica, and the respondents were managers from fourteen different facilities. The research included managers of food and beverages, head chefs, deputies of head chefs, head waiters, and shift managers. The research was conducted by handing out 115 survey questionnaires, followed by data processing – 90 were processed for the need of the research. All obtained data are statistically processed and tabulated in the paper.

The research consists of two parts, with the first part referring to the obtaining of socio-demographic data on the respondents. The second part consisted of 21 statements on vegetarian diet and participants were asked to express their opinion on a Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). The statements were written based on the model of previous research on vegetarians and vegetarian cuisine in restaurants (Bowen, Morris, 1995; Rozin, 2001; Draper, 2005; Kuhn, 2006; Druce, 2009; Baraban, Durocher, 2010).

THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The Analysis of the Respondents' Profiles (Socio-Demographic Data)

For an easier approach to research, the starting point was the analysis of socio-demographic characteristics, whose data is shown in Table 2. The highest number of respondents belonged to the age group of 21-30 (46.67%), whereas none of the respondents belonged to age groups of ≤ 18 , 51-60, and ≥ 61 . The analysis of the

education level of the respondents, restaurant managers, has shown that the largest number of respondents completed secondary education (86.67%), while there were no respondents with completed primary education or master/magister studies. The largest number of respondents had less than 5 years of work experience in the hospitality sector, as many as 83.33%, whereas there were no respondents with work experience of more than 25 years. The analysis of the structure of the level of management among the respondents showed that most of them are at the lowest, operational level, as many as 82.22%, and the smallest number of respondents were from the top-level – only two respondents, i.e. 2.22%.

Table 2. Socio-demographic data of the respondents (n=90)

		Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents (%)
Age group	≤20	0	0
	21-30	42	46.67
	31-40	38	42.22
	41-50	10	11.11
	51-60	0	0
	≥61	0	0
Education level	Primary	0	0
	Secondary	78	86.67
	College	2	2.22
	University	10	11.11
	Master/Magister	0	0
Work experience in the hospitality sector	≤5 years	75	83.33
	6-15	13	14.44
	16-25	2	2.22
	26-35	0	0
	≥36 years	0	0
Management level	Operational management (shift manager, head waiter, head chef)	74	82.22
	Middle management (head of food and beverages)	14	15.56
	Top management (director and owner)	2	2.22

Source: the Author

The Analysis of the Results of General Attitudes Towards a Vegetarian Diet

In the second part of the research, the respondents were presented with 21 statements regarding vegetarian foods and offers. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. General attitudes toward vegetarian diet (n=90)

STATEMENTS	Disagreement (%)	Agreement (%)	Mean value	SD
Vegetarian food has higher nutritional values.	80	20	2.56	1.29
Adding vegetarian meals in a restaurant offer adds to creativity and reduces complaints of the menu.	30	70	3.83	1.69
Vegetarian food can have high sensory advantages and can attract more guests.	40	60	3.63	1.77

STATEMENTS	Disagreement (%)	Agreement (%)	Mean value	SD
Offering a vegetarian menu means that the restaurant is more competitive.	3.33	96.66	5.01	0.95
Nowadays, many restaurant owners demand that the restaurant menu includes vegetarian meals.	4.44	95.56	4.54	1.07
Including vegetarian meals in a restaurant menu is profitable.	8.88	91.12	4.71	0.99
It is very expensive to provide a high level of quality of vegetarian foodstuffs.	34.44	65.56	3.98	1.50
It is very expensive to maintain a high level of quality of vegetarian meals.	34.44	65.56	3.84	1.61
The availability of vegetarian products for meal preparation is limited to certain periods of the year.	20	80	4.34	1.26
It is difficult to recruit kitchen staff with adequate skills for the preparation of vegetarian food.	41.11	58.89	3.76	1.58
It is difficult to maintain a high level of quality of vegetarian foodstuffs.	47.78	52.22	3.42	1.59
Preparing exclusive vegetarian food requires high costs.	44.44	55.56	3.02	1.65
Vegetarian meals are not equally profitable as other items on the restaurant menu.	64.44	35.56	2.87	1.56
Restaurant workers have a hard time understanding the differences between the types of vegetarians.	67.78	32.22	2.58	1.39
Restaurant workers have a hard time understanding the nutritional needs of vegetarians.	67.78	32.22	2.5	1.37
The storage and preservation of food of plant origin is very complex.	63.33	36.67	2.93	1.53
Vegetarian food is very difficult to prepare to be delicious and exclusive.	65.56	34.44	2.90	1.55
Salesmen and suppliers of vegetarian food are unreliable.	47.78	52.22	3.19	1.41
Preparation of vegetarian food requires engagement of a large number of kitchen staff.	70	30	2.67	1.53
Vegetarian food is boring and uninspiring.	72.22	27.78	2.71	1.43
An offer of vegetarian food can damage the culinary image of a restaurant.	83.70	16.30	2.23	1.30

Note: Likert scale with six points is used: (1 – I completely disagree, 2 – I mostly disagree, 3 – I partly disagree, 4 – I partly agree, 5 – I mostly agree, 6 – I completely agree); 'agreement' – partly, mostly or completely, 'disagreement' – partly, mostly, completely)

The statements with which respondents agree are mostly related to the benefits of adding vegetarian dishes in restaurant offers, as well as profitability and attraction of more guests. As many as 96.66% of the respondents think that adding vegetarian dishes to the restaurant offer automatically means that the restaurant is more competitive in the market, which is true in every aspect and most of the surveyed managers can see that the trend of vegetarianism affects the awareness of consumers regarding the choice of a restaurant they are to visit. At the same time, this statement has the highest mean value of all statements – 5.01 (SD=0.95).

Other statements the respondents mostly agree with include those related to an increase of profitability by introducing vegetarian dishes, and significant requests of owners to introduce vegetarian dishes with 91.12, and 95.56% of agreement. These statements are also generally true and the obtained data indicate that the management sees profitable advantages of introducing vegetarian dishes because these dishes mostly cost less to prepare and preserve compared to dishes made of meat, therefore it is not surprising that these statements had very high mean values of 4.71 and 4.54 (SD=0.99; SD=1.07).

However, the attitudes of respondents show that they are not too eager to introduce vegetarian food in their restaurant offer, and the data show that more than a half of the respondents agree that there are certain problems when it comes to preparing this kind of food. The most common problems are related to the price

of vegetarian foods and their seasonal character. The fact that is not encouraging is that as many as 65.56% of respondents think that providing high quality and attractive vegetarian meals requires high costs, while more than half of respondents think that the preparation of exclusive vegetarian food is complex and difficult.

Statements with which respondents disagree are related to a reduced possibility for preparation of vegetarian food, and for training employees to prepare food adequately. Most respondents (67.78%) disagree with the statement that it is difficult for staff to learn to prepare vegetarian food, or that it is hard for restaurant staff to understand different types of vegetarians (67.78%). Also, most of them think that it is not difficult to provide adequate conditions for storing foodstuffs for the preparation of vegetarian dishes (63.33%). A large number of respondents disagree with the statement that preparing vegetarian food requires an engagement of a large number of employees (70%), as well as with the statement that vegetarian food is boring and uninspiring (72.22%). The lowest mean value is of a statement that vegetarian food can hurt a restaurant's reputation 2.23 (SD=1.30). These data are encouraging because the respondents, the management, sees that the preparation of vegetarian dishes is not more complicated and complex than the preparation of non-vegetarian dishes. Vegetarian foodstuffs demand less attention when storing and processing than non-vegetarian foodstuffs such as meat, eggs, and milk.

CONCLUSION

Based on the conducted research, we can conclude that hospitality management, driven by young people who follow the latest world trends, slowly introduces more and more vegetarian dishes in restaurant offers. The management can see the advantages of offering vegetarian dishes which can attract new guests and increase competitiveness. The data which positively speak about attitudes of hospitality management towards vegetarian food are related to their opinion on the profitability of dishes and all advantages provided by such dishes. However, due to the seasonality of food and the unreliability of consumers, most respondents believe that it is not easy to prepare vegetarian food of appropriate quality. Assistance with understanding the preparation of vegetarian dishes, as well as storing the necessary foodstuffs for such dishes would be of great help.

Generally observed, hospitality management has positive attitudes towards vegetarian food, whether we talk about vegetarian dishes and benefits they provide or the needs of such guests. Regarding the negative side, we can point out an opinion of the respondents concerning the complexity of preparing vegetarian meals and not having adequate staff. Additional investment in the education of managers and chefs proportionately to the increase of advocated of this type of diet will lead to an increased awareness of the vegetarian diet as an important part of a future offer.

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