

RESPONDING TO THE DEMAND FOR TRADITIONAL LITHUANIAN FOOD IN KAUNAS IN THE CONTEXT OF HOSPITALITY SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to reveal the demand for hospitality services for establishments serving traditional Lithuanian food in Kaunas. For this reason, the aim was to examine the application of hospitality service principles in establishments serving traditional Lithuanian food in Kaunas and to evaluate the hospitality services provided in these establishments. To achieve this goal, a qualitative research study was conducted, involving the analysis of scientific literature and comments, as well as two interviews.

Keywords: *hospitality services, Lithuanian traditional dishes.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of hospitality services is shaped by societal changes that affect people's lifestyles. The world does not stand still; technological progress advances constantly, promoting greater mobility across all areas. Never before has a person had such wide opportunities, thanks to which he can become more thoroughly acquainted with various, even the most distant, cultures.

Hospitality management plays an important role in the context of the above-mentioned changes, since a specialist in this field, applying his existing knowledge and drawing on accumulated experience, can thoroughly clarify and adequately respond to guests' needs.

The relevance of the topic lies in the idea that, for a long time, Lithuania was almost unknown to the world, sought to spread the word about itself, and, over the past three decades, has become increasingly open to visitors. This Eastern European country has a glorious history and can boast of having a unique culture characteristic of its land. This includes both intangible heritage and specifically tangible things. Since human senses not only allow them to navigate their environment but also to taste, smell, and appreciate food, and to feel comfort in a cosy environment, this provides much greater satisfaction than simply satisfying the need for food. At the same time, providing hospitality services can not only satisfy guests' food needs but also represent their home country.

People who visit establishments serving Lithuanian food do so for different reasons. Some are motivated by a dish familiar to their palates; they want to relive memories, while those arriving from other countries want to get acquainted with Lithuanian food culture. When delving deeper into alternatives to Lithuanian food offerings, problems emerge. To gain the greatest possible popularity, establishments serving Lithuanian dishes must constantly balance quality and price. Material cultural heritage includes more than one Lithuanian culinary tradition. However, the culture of healthy eating shapes eating habits that are contrary to the national cuisine. Thus, we face a dilemma when Lithuanian traditions are compared with a healthy lifestyle, and then the scales tip against Lithuanian food.

After presenting the principles of hospitality services, the importance of Lithuanian food in a historical context, and an overview of the demand for traditional food, the situation of catering establishments serving Lithuanian traditional dishes in Kaunas was studied in depth. For this purpose, feedback from visitors to establishments

serving traditional food was analysed, two customers were interviewed, and information received through public channels was analysed. These methods were used to assess demand for hospitality services and to identify problematic areas within the business.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Disclosure of hospitality service delivery principles

There are many cultures around the world, each with its own customs. This includes the culture of mutual communication, encompassing relationships with people in one's immediate environment and with those in more distant environments.

The Lithuanian language dictionary, which analyses the meaning of the concept "guest", describes this word as a person who has been invited and has come to entertain or visit someone, with a purpose for that visit; this term also describes a person who is rarely seen, who has arrived and stays for a certain, usually short period of time, who is not one's own, but a stranger [1]. According to this definition, a guest is a person who has temporarily arrived in one environment from another.

The term "hospitality" is derived from the adjective "hospitable". A hospitable person is defined as someone who is positive towards guests and welcomes, receives, and feeds them in a benevolent manner [1]. Thus, hospitality should be understood as the act of properly welcoming a visitor, providing them with services, and responding to their needs.

One element of the hospitality service complex is catering services. Food is one of the basic needs, the satisfaction of which is vital for a person. The satisfaction of a lower level of physiological need is based on the theory that the human body, to maintain its life, must eat [2]. For this reason, catering establishments can play a role in the initial step toward satisfying human needs.

A person who has left his permanent place of residence faces different needs, so the function of hospitality is to receive a guest and meet his needs, providing him with his vital functions, that is, food, rest, support, ensuring his safety, and at the same time providing a feeling of satisfaction with the service received.

To meet the needs of the arriving person, extensive preparatory work is required. In present-day usage, hospitality has acquired a broader meaning and includes more services than just food or accommodation. The ability to anticipate a guest's arrival and prepare to receive them properly is an important part of the entire hospitality service complex.

The possibility of a wider range or a package with more services allows the recipient of the hospitality service to create a service package that best meets their needs and is more attractive than those offered by other establishments with fewer options. However, an overly wide range of services can significantly increase the price of the basic service, making it unaffordable.

Another problem faced by a company offering many services, or a too wide range of services, is the risk of managing service quality so that it does not suffer from overly fragmented services or a lack of specialists capable of providing them at a high level. Looking at changes in the hospitality services market, several factors can be identified that affect this sector. One change affecting hospitality services is that customers are increasingly uninterested in the basic service package and prefer experiential experiences. Today's guests, with a wide range of options to choose from, have higher expectations than just receiving service; they want service that interests them. They expect to experience satisfaction with the service through a personal, unique experience intended only for them, to feel unique, the only ones, they want their needs

to be looked at individually, with the accumulated experience specially adapted to them. Thus, treating customers as exceptional allows them to feel greater satisfaction with the service and increases its value.

Technological innovations change perceptions of hospitality services and expand the possibilities for their provision. Innovations in the hospitality sector can significantly increase service efficiency, thereby improving the satisfaction of the people served [3]. The ability to adapt to change and absorb technological innovations helps better understand consumer expectations and position oneself more effectively in the hospitality market.

The ability to combine diverse areas, such as tradition, culture, and values, with new technologies, artificial intelligence, and other innovations is particularly relevant for establishments operating in cultural heritage-based hospitality services. This also includes establishments that provide catering services with traditional Lithuanian food.

1.2. The need for traditional food in Kaunas

Each culture has its own traditions. These traditions span a range of areas, including music, clothing, and architecture. Food dishes can thus be considered part of the culture of a particular country or a separate region within it.

Lithuania has long been an agricultural land with four seasons: spring, summer, autumn and winter. It is obvious that Lithuanian cuisine depended on both the region's geographical location, which influenced its flora and fauna, and the time of year when dishes were prepared, according to seasonal rules [4]. Due to the country's agrarian nature and product storage conditions, traditional dishes developed based on the availability of the ingredients needed to prepare them.

The second reason for the establishment of traditional dishes is holiday customs, during which specific dishes were prepared. This can include both family holidays (christenings, weddings) and customary gatherings (harvest, midsummer fest), as well as other religious holidays (Ash Day, Christmas Eve, Easter) [4]. Since the life of a Lithuanian revolved around the cycle of the year and the transformations of nature, it was accompanied by rites of birth, marriage, and death, and the food culture that developed over time refined certain dishes that can be considered traditional Lithuanian. Some dishes were formed not only by seasonality but also by the calendar of religious holidays. Lenten or Advent fasting meals with mushrooms or herring, Shrove Tuesday's pancakes, Christmas Eve cookies with poppy seeds - these are meals that had a specific meaning and their own traditions, which have reached our days.

Lithuanian dishes were formed over a long period of time. Traditions were influenced not only by the listed conditions but also by the customs of neighbouring territories in the immediate vicinity. Recipes can vary, but the main ingredients of any dish are used throughout much of Europe. Borscht (beetroot soup), often with boletus mushrooms, is on the menus of most establishments serving Lithuanian dishes, both because of its name and its earliest mentions. Nevertheless, it cannot be considered an authentic Lithuanian dish. By common agreement, borscht originated in the Eastern Slavic lands; it is distributed from Latvia to Romania. The intensity of flavours, colour, transparency, and the additional products added may vary, but the soup with this name is cooked on a beetroot base [5]. This example shows once again that the concept of Lithuanian dishes cannot be defined with much precision.

The history of Lithuania as a separate state dates back to 1009, when the name Lithuania was first mentioned in Saxon sources [6]. The glorious times of the Grand

Duchy of Lithuania, invasions of other lands, the formation of court customs, and Lithuanian cuisine's friendship with other European kingdoms through marriages brought about certain changes. The personality of Bona Sforza shows that a single, but influential person can bring more than one innovation to an established environment, for example, this queen “discovered” white flour or increased the amount of vegetables [7]. Other historical periods also brought their own changes, forming new food traditions.

The dishes of different social classes varied. For example, in medieval times, a lot of meat was served during meals in palaces, and various spices were used in abundance, so the dishes often did not differ much from the food of Western European rulers; later, some dishes were taken over by nobles, then nobles, until they finally reached the townspeople and peasants [8]. However, the preparation of dishes was dominated by products from their own environment, since only some products reached Lithuania due to transportation time and the large quantities required. Alcoholic beverages in the Lithuanian state also had their own history. Soups were replaced by beer, which was so popular in the Middle Ages that it was even recommended for children. Mead was replaced by wine, which reached the Duchy of Lithuania from Western Europe, and the custom of making vodka and drinking it spread among the Slavic peoples [8]. Sweets in Lithuania were made based on honey, and only the rich could afford sugar, which they used to sweeten even wine [8]. Later, when the possibilities of transporting goods improved, and their affordable prices became established, traditions of sweet dishes also developed in Lithuania, which intertwined with the cuisine of ethnic minorities living in Lithuania, such as Jewish-baked, Fried Pastry Strips, Tatar “Hundred Layer Cake”, various other sweet pastries, and, of course, Lithuanian Tree cake. Lithuanians borrowed this pastry from German lands, perfected it, and made it the pride of their land [9].

Potato dishes, now considered Lithuanian national favourites, were not eaten during the Lithuanian state's prosperity for a simple reason – potatoes were “discovered” only in the 17th century, and their spread began in the 19th century [8]. However, the popularity of potato dishes has outstripped that of other Lithuanian dishes. This suggests that extremely exotic local dishes have not become popular due to their cost, the use of endangered animals, and nature protection. In contrast, other dishes have very similar counterparts in many European countries and cannot be considered national dishes.

Lithuanian cuisine is part of regional culinary culture; therefore, the client can be offered a wide range of catering services in the hospitality sector, with a separate dish representing Lithuanian culinary traditions.

2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY OF THE EVALUATION OF HOSPITALITY SERVICES FOR TRADITIONAL LITHUANIAN FOOD IN KAUNAS

The study aimed to highlight the need for traditional food in Kaunas and to evaluate the hospitality services provided by catering establishments offering Lithuanian dishes. To achieve this goal, feedback from visitors to establishments serving traditional food was analysed, two customers were interviewed, and information from public channels was analysed. During the qualitative study, interview and data analysis methods were combined. These methods were used to assess the need for hospitality services and identify problematic areas of this business.

Since the study's methodology is qualitative, it allows for the revelation of the essential points of the phenomenon under study through the experiences, emotions,

values, and attitudes of the participants. This is based on the view that qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, is not focused on the quantitative results of analysing the obtained indicators, but on a deeper understanding of the manifestation of a specific situation, revealed through the experiences of the research participants [10].

A small number of respondents were selected to confirm the positions of service recipients expressed online. The small number of respondents can also be justified by the goals set for qualitative research. After all, the quality of the results is determined not by the number of participants in the research, but by the content of the information they provide and the data saturation indicator. The choice of research methods helps ensure the reliability of the research results, and data analysis provides answers to the questions raised about the phenomenon under study.

3. RESULTS

Among establishments offering Lithuanian dishes, two main directions of Lithuanian food presentation can be distinguished. One group of establishments offering catering services provides a variety of food. However, it has also included dishes attributed to Lithuanian national cuisine on its menu (e.g., capellini, kugelis, borscht with boletus mushrooms, cold borscht), when these dishes are presented in a traditionally established format, or the recipes are diversified with ingredients or spices not characteristic of the particular dish. The purpose and scope of this work defines the separation from the latter establishments offering catering services and does not examine them.

As for the second group, it includes establishments that identify themselves as offering exclusively Lithuanian traditional dishes. This narrows the research field and allows for a deeper dive into the topic.

According to the data provided in the online space, the following establishments focused on Lithuanian dishes currently operate in the catering services sector in Kaunas city [11]:

1. *Bernelių užėiga* in the Old Town, M. Valančiaus g. 9,
2. *Bernelių užėiga Smuklė*, K. Donelaičio g. 11,
3. *Bernelių užėiga* in the Akropolis, Karaliaus Mindaugo pr. 49,
4. *Etno dvaras*, K. Baršausko g. 66A,
5. *Bernelių užėiga* in Šilainiai, Baltų pr. 81.

After analysing the collected information, it can be stated that the concept of Lithuanian cuisine traditions, as reflected in the menus and interior customisation, is offered by the service providers in the *Bernelių užėiga* and *Etno dvaras* network.

Food is intended to give a person vital energy. Another function of it is to provide satisfaction through the act of eating, as people taste food and experience other positive feelings. For this reason, establishments providing catering services thoroughly evaluate their operations and strive to meet consumer needs as effectively as possible.

To analyse the activities of an establishment providing hospitality services in the field of catering, it is necessary to cover the following areas:

- food quality, portion size and compatibility;
- aesthetic appearance of dishes;
- interior design, interior details and layout, staff clothing, music, etc.;
- location, parking options;
- speed of service provision, flexibility in resolving atypical situations, and feedback;

- qualification of service personnel;
- price ratio compared to the service received;
- availability of additional services (e.g., home-delivered food, education, spaces for children, pet-friendly options, etc.).

When providing hospitality services to establishments that offer food, as well as during each service, the recipient's opinion of the service is very important. For this reason, two people were interviewed who visit various catering establishments in their free time and therefore have an opinion on establishments that serve traditional Lithuanian dishes. The interviewees' names are coded in accordance with the principles of anonymity and confidentiality.

For the first respondent, A15, the *Bernelių užėiga* in Šilainiai left a good impression: *"quite large food portions and I like that, the prices are adequate compared to other cafes, the food quality is high, I really liked the interior, because it reminds me of ancient Lithuanian times, the staff is helpful, understanding the expectations of customers, the music is not overwhelming and harmonizes with the environment"*, *Bernelių užėiga Smuklė*, Donelaičio g. *"very similar experiences as in Šilainiai, but that's how it should be, since it's the same retail chain"*. The second respondent J29 described the *Bernelių užėiga* in Šilainiai in a similar way: *"a beautifully old-fashioned, aesthetically decorated Lithuanian-style space, there is a children's playground, there is a lot of space outside where you can also eat, the food is quite tasty, there is a parking lot, out of all the inns in this chain, I liked it the most, because there is a lot of space and separate rooms"*, the *Bernelių užėiga* in the Old Town had the advantages of being quiet: *"there are several floors, you can choose the desired place, where there are fewer people and you can eat more quietly, in all sections of the chain the food is presented aesthetically, beautifully arranged on plates, not scattered, music may be playing, but it did not disturb or interfere with communication, as in other sections of the inn, they give children something to draw and colour so that they have something to do"*, similar to the *Bernelių užėiga* in the Akropolis Shopping Centre, where *"I liked it because there were not many people during the visit, so you could choose the desired place"*.

The *Bernelių užėiga* network in Kaunas has a long tradition. These catering establishments are frequently visited by both local visitors and guests from abroad. The most frequently expressed positive opinions in their reviews include: appropriate or low prices, good, tasty, balanced food, good, fast service, a cosy environment, an interior adapted to traditional dishes, and servers' national costumes. In addition, visitors to *Smuklė* noted free parking, soft background music, separate seating areas, an extensive illustrated menu, and vegetarian options. Attention was drawn to the possibility of communicating in English; customers mentioned a flexible approach to spice requests. In the Old Town, the main highlights were good service, tasty food, and a cosy atmosphere, as well as the ability to communicate in English and the children's corner. In addition to the already listed advantages of the Akropolis restaurant, due to delicious food, attentive service, cosy atmosphere, affordable prices, large portions, and service time, the menu in English and the variety of offers adapted to different dietary needs were also mentioned. The quiet environment was emphasised, and a separate menu was prepared for children, along with opportunities to draw, colour, and solve crossword puzzles. The Šilainiai restaurant was also named a great place with a great team, offering traditional Lithuanian food, and the following advantages were highlighted: convenient parking, a spacious courtyard, live music on weekends, a children's area, a good price-quality ratio, and dishes reminiscent of

grandmothers' cooking. For each unit, specific dishes and drinks that were liked were excluded.

Similar strong points of *Etno dvaras* were also mentioned by customers who wrote online reviews. They mostly mentioned good, tasty food, large portions, a pleasant atmosphere, and fast, polite staff. Other points highlighted were the continuation of cultural - Lithuanian traditions, descriptions of dishes in an easy-to-understand language, the ability to accommodate large groups, a combination of traditional and modern food, food from different regions of Lithuania, a large selection of potato dishes, 3-hour free parking, a children's menu and a high chair, that the restaurant is suitable for vegans, a children's menu, a large selection of dishes, that it is prepared fresh, from non-frozen products, it is possible to leave a tip when paying by bank card, good feature of the stability of the main service team, and evaluation of the pleasing dishes.

Respondent A15 described "Etno dvaras" as follows: "*the food portions are really huge, after eating the first course you do not even want dessert, <...> the prices are not too bad, they are really low, <...> the environment resembles a rustic hut, because it looks interesting and is in keeping with Lithuanian feature, there are all kinds of interesting decorations around, reminiscent of old times, <...> the staff is extremely polite and smart, helping you choose dishes from their wide range.*" The above-mentioned observations of the respondent coincide with the comments submitted by the restaurant's visitors on the Internet.

When assessing guests' opinions of hospitality establishments offering traditional Lithuanian food, it can be stated that traditional food is understood as a value that conveys the nation's culture. As in any similar establishment, the quality of the food, the price level, and the service are important here. An appropriate interior must reinforce the idea of spreading the Lithuanian spirit. Additional value is added by a flexible approach to clients who visit with children, have menu preferences, or arrive by car.

When developing an activity, difficulties inevitably arise; eliminating them improves service quality and makes it more competitive with other service providers. For this reason, it is appropriate to identify problem areas, examine them as fully as possible, and finally eliminate them.

Along with positive feedback, complaints about the quality of hospitality services were also recorded. According to respondent A15, "*there were quite a few people at Etno dvaras, so we had to wait longer than usual for food*". In online comments, customers mostly complained about the service taking too long. A lot of criticism was directed at the service staff - they lacked smiles, were dissatisfied with the service, ignored, arrogant, did not greet, were inhospitable, unfriendly, unpleasant, did not maintain eye contact, did not speak English/Russian, there were too few of them, indifferent, did not pay attention, did not respond to complaints, were rude, did not accept orders based on pictures. There were comments that some complaints were not made for the first time.

There were also complaints about different portion sizes depending on whether customer eat in or take away, reduced portions, lack of vegan dishes, long waits to get the bill, food that was too greasy, too raw or of average/low quality, dishes that were too expensive, reheated food, dry, too hard, overcooked, reheated, rubbery, not fresh, not chewy, cold, undercooked, bitter, not tasty, and inability to provide dishes from the menu because they were out of stock. Capellini are stuffed only with pork; there is no cottage cheese or poultry filling, and Samogitian pancakes are absent as well.

Service users did not like specific dishes due to their taste characteristics - chicken, capellini, Kiev cutlets, beef steak, mushroom soup, ribs, dumpling filling, sauce with crackers and sour cream, no sauce or mouldy salad, sauce for capellini too salty, mashed potatoes diluted, old cooking oil, water-flavoured coffee, kvass old or with a burnt smell, a screw was found in the soup, hair in the dumplings, old lard was used.

Due to the large number of people, the establishment resembled a tourist destination, the music was very bad or too loud, the dishes were presented in a tasteless way, the tables with benches do not have the right distance, it is uncomfortable to sit, there is little decor, the food is brought to people who came together at very different times, after reserving a place for a celebration, people were seated in the busiest place near the kitchen door, misunderstandings regarding seat reservations and the presence of empty tables, showing a lack of communication between the service staff and other employees of the establishment, no warning about the long wait after ordering a dish, it is inconvenient to eat from the pot, priority is given to those who ordered online, not to those who arrived in person, there are not enough portions for those who want to order from the lunch menu of the day. Even when ordering from it, customers have to wait a long time for service. Another drawback is that pets are not allowed.

Despite the abundance of complaints, when examining customer comments, some received an apology from management, an explanation of the situation, a promise to address the expressed shortcomings, and an invitation to contact them again through the specified channels to resolve the issue peacefully.

Respondents, speaking about the Šilainiai restaurant of the *Bernelių užėiga*, singled out several points that bothered them. In the opinion of respondent A15, *“In Šilainiai, food is prepared for a very long time, there could be more parking spaces, the parking lot would be expanded”*, *“Parking spaces in Bernelių užėiga on Donelaičio Street are very limited”*. Respondent J29, when asked to name the shortcomings of individual branches of *Bernelių užėiga*, shared that *“The price in Šilainiai is high, there are often a lot of people, so it takes a long time to prepare food, often something from the menu is not available, and you cannot prepare the desired dish, the same is true in Akropolis. In addition, in the Akropolis, although parking is convenient because it is next to a shopping centre with many parking spots, the parking areas are not very large. In the Old Town, parking is more difficult to enter, and in addition, the Old Town is paid, and at the time I was there, there were a lot of people, and it took a long time to prepare food”*.

There are fewer negative reviews from service recipients about the *Bernelių užėiga* network on the internet.

In the restaurant "Smuklė", dissatisfaction was expressed with the service (unfriendly, even terrible, few smiles, indifferent, showing no initiative for feedback, discriminating, interrupting the conversation, slow to the point that some customers even left without receiving their dishes), high prices, tasteless food (clients did not like the stew, dry food, raw steak, undercooked potatoes, too salty, too fatty, overcooked, crumbling capellini, too much oil in the sauce, cold baked bread, soup without sour cream), the environment (stuffy inside), there were no more capellini, misunderstandings about free and reserved tables, closing well before the official opening hours were announced. 12 glass shards were found in the rabbit stew, but the dish had to be paid for. Complaints were also submitted that the respondents had food poisoning, vomiting and diarrhoea from the meal. It was mentioned that similar complaints from the same individuals are made after repeated visits to this establishment.

Similar problems were raised in the Old Town restaurant – food was served at different times to individuals in the same group, staff who were uncomfortable, dissatisfied with the service in English, unhurried, unfriendly, unadvisable, sullen, impolite, rude, inflexible, uncommunicative, irritated, inattentive, only responding to raised voices, long-lasting service, having to search the menu yourself, small selection of vegetarian dishes, small portions, too expensive, even if tap water cost 3 euros, dirty tables, inappropriately selected music, dishes were cold, overcooked, too greasy, sticky, green, and had been in the freezer for a long time.

Some customers have had negative experiences at this restaurant for a long time, so they no longer plan to return. There was a proposal to change the national costumes to other, more comfortable attire, to buy hearing aids for the service staff, and to organise training on compliance with service standards, but some were even fired altogether. When asked for a phone charger, he said no without even asking for the model or explaining his answer.

Personal requests that can be easily fulfilled and would provide the guest with greater satisfaction are not addressed.

At the Akropolis restaurant, the quality of hospitality service for customers was reduced by the staff - slow, strange, not maintaining eye contact, not responding to comments, unprofessional, unfriendly, evasive, rude, disrespectful, inattentive, mocking customers among themselves, not accepting complaints, the personnel manager - rude, humiliating customers, not setting an example for those providing hospitality services, service - prolonged both in terms of bringing food and preparing the bill, low culture, unpleasant, dishes - tasteless, very greasy, overcooked, half-raw, dried out, hard, cold, unchewable, too little seasoning, meat with a pasty texture, cocktail with a watery taste, portions too small, finished by the end of the work day. According to customers, in critical situations, they were called liars, forced to pay for poor-quality, unprepared food, and, when the restaurant closed too early, the food was delivered in takeout packaging.

A customer complained of food poisoning after ordering and receiving food from a courier service. Private individuals complained that they could not eat their food at the available tables and left without receiving the ordered dish. Dishes are brought to visitors who arrived at very different times. After a long wait, one person is served, and another who arrived together and ordered the same dish is informed that the second portion is no longer available. When asked not to add some condiments to the main dish due to allergies, there is no response. The actual working hours do not correspond to the officially stated hours; the establishment closes without warning. The need for a vegetarian menu was expressed. The tables are untidy, and a hair was found in the bun. The customer recommended paying attention to communication culture and service ethics.

In the Šilainiai department, customers complained about similar issues that caused a feeling of dissatisfaction with the hospitality service provided: the closing time of the establishment did not correspond to the officially stated one, and customers were asked outside regardless, pressuring them to finish eating the ordered food as quickly as possible, high prices and small portions, the taste and quality of the dishes were often unsatisfactory, including vegetarian food, there were obvious discrepancies between the food brought and the ingredients of the dish presented on the menu, and the menu did not change. The speed of service often caused great dissatisfaction, it even seemed that they forgot to serve, the knowledge of the service staff about the dish was insufficient, they made mistakes when fulfilling the order and calculated the price accordingly without giving any discounts, they were impolite, rude,

unprofessional, unhelpful and inflexible to atypical but fulfilled customer requests, they were tired, did not have knowledge of English, did not bring an ashtray even after asking four times, even though it was not peak season and there were not many people, it was felt that customers were ruining the life of the service staff just by visiting this restaurant, sometimes the service did not resemble service in the true sense of the word, one particular waitress even seemed to hate her job, the people in charge of the service staff were also impolite, not responding to the complaints expressed.

Dissatisfaction stemmed from a situation in which customers were not informed that they could not bring their own cake, so they left and chose another catering establishment that accepted it. Another unpleasant situation involved an accident at a children's playground: a child was not offered ice or other assistance after being injured on metal steps, even as preparations were made to go to the emergency room for examination. The security guard's behaviour, which woke a four-year-old child who had fallen asleep on a bench, was unpleasant because it violated the institution's internal rules.

The poorly designed parking lot was not satisfactory. Many customers disliked the music, which was either too loud or too low; they wanted a quieter background. Lithuanian folk music would have suited the environment. According to customers, the interior has not been renovated for decades, the place is neglected, the toilet tiles are slippery, and the toilets themselves do not meet hygiene requirements. Payment for events is made only in cash, which the customer found to be tax fraud.

There were suggestions to improve the card reader to allow tips to be left for the waiter. For a variety of vegetarian dishes, potato pancakes can be fried in vegetable oil instead of animal fat. The managers were asked to make greater efforts to work with the staff and to set higher expectations for customer service.

Complaints expressed by customers receiving hospitality services in catering establishments most often concern the service itself, including its duration, as well as the staff's negative qualities and the quality of the food, both in specific cases and in general. Attention was also drawn to the discrepancy between the price and quantity ratios; specific situations are discussed, while topics related to the environment, interior, and infrastructure are discussed significantly less.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Meeting a traveller's needs includes supporting his vital functions and aligns with the satisfaction he derives from the service provided. The phenomenon of hospitality as part of culture is based on receiving a guest by feeding him and providing him with rest and security. In the modern world, the traditional principles of hospitality established over many years must be combined with new technologies. Openness to innovative solutions does not depend on whether the hospitality service is focused on traditional food provision. Even though this service seems inflexible in the face of environmental changes, the search for harmony between the modern world and heritage is an inevitable direction for improving the quality of hospitality services.

When assessing the need for traditional food in Kaunas, it is necessary to consider Lithuanian culinary traditions and the region's variety of dishes. Having examined the city of Kaunas' food culture in its historical context, it is possible to identify a set of dishes that vary with the seasons, holidays, and historical events. The developed national food culture allows us to convey traditions that encompass not only food but also other aspects of hospitality-related customer service. The ability to offer a service through exclusivity and originality sets this establishment apart from other catering

establishments and meets the needs of both local customers and guests arriving from abroad.

In Kaunas, two groups of service providers offer exclusively traditional Lithuanian food – *Bernelių užėiga* and *Etno dvaras*. By offering traditional food, the hospitality service also conveys the nation's culture to the client; therefore, it is very important to emphasise the service's strengths and minimise its negative aspects. The cultivation of Lithuanian traditions is reflected in food culture, the environment, and broader symbolism. Still, it is also closely related to hospitality, which reveals the host's attitude towards the guest. For this reason, it is not enough to focus solely on food quality or pricing policy, or to try to meet individual customer needs; it is necessary to pay special attention to the selection, training, and motivation of service personnel.

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