

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE TRANSYLVANIAN RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Sustainability is a major concern for a growing number of companies, including high-performing, multinational companies operating in a variety of fields. Transylvania is a historical and cultural region in central Romania and attracts tourists with its spectacular mountain scenery and numerous tourist attractions (such as the famous Bran Castle, home to Count Dracula). The area is also renowned for its traditional and international restaurants, where visitors can enjoy authentic local cuisine. The article aims to identify the sustainability measures applied by restaurants in Transylvania County and the opinion of the employees of these restaurants regarding these measures. In this regard, quantitative marketing research was conducted among employees of restaurants in Transylvania County. The results obtained reveal that most employees have a positive opinion towards the existence of sustainability measures in restaurants and consider their implementation important.

Keywords: sustainability, sustainable development, restaurant industry, Transylvania, employee perception

Clasificare JEL : Q56, L83, M31

1. Introduction and context of the study

The challenges of the contemporary economy are characterized by diversity and depth, transforming business management into an extremely demanding activity from an informational point of view, in which the margins of error are increasingly reduced [1].

In the context of sustainable development, all aspects of socio-economic life are reconfigured so as to eliminate constraints for progress towards a society that recognizes the importance of capitalization not only from an economic point of view, but also in terms of human resources and natural resources [2].

Sustainable business is distinguished by the interpretation of the concept of value. Unlike business, to create value means to obtain profit, in the case of sustainable business, to create value means to obtain profit, to ensure benefits for employees and the community and to protect the environment [3].

Sustainable business is the concept that translates into entrepreneurial terms a basic condition of sustainable development, namely simultaneous progress on an economic, social and ecological level. The integration of sustainability into business at the level of strategic management differentiates a wide variety of options that are grouped by criteria such as correlation with business strategy, the plan in which changes are made, and the stage of integration of sustainability [4, 5].

A systematic review of literature on sustainability in the restaurant industry reveals organizational motivation, waste management, service quality, supply chain, and innovative technology adoption as central themes for sustainable integrated practices in restaurants [6].

Recent research shows that green technologies, such as solar systems and renewable biofuels, represent efficient levers for reducing the carbon footprint of restaurants [7].

Beyond the operational measures, the managers' environmental values and green leadership proved to play a key role in promoting environmental sustainability in restaurants along with the active implication of stakeholders [8].

Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) studies indicate that food procurement represents the main critical point of impact on the environment for restaurants and food services; it offers a methodological base for identifying the priority areas of intervention [9].

The present paper aims to identify the sustainability measures applied by restaurants in Transylvania County and the opinion of the employees of these restaurants regarding these measures. In this regard, a quantitative marketing research was conducted among the employees of restaurants in Transylvania County. The results obtained reveal that the majority of employees have a positive opinion towards the existence of sustainability measures in restaurants and consider their implementation important.

2. Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to identify the sustainability measures applied by restaurants in the Transylvania region (Romania) and what is the opinion of the employees of these restaurants regarding these measures. The proposed approach responds to the current demands of society, which has moved from a sustainable and environmentally friendly development model.

The specific objectives of the research are:

O1. Identifying the main sustainability measures applied in restaurants in Transylvania County;

O2. Identifying the reasons underlying when restaurant owners in Transylvania County decide to adopt or not various sustainability measures;

O3. The intention of restaurant owners in Transylvania County to implement the concept of sustainability in their restaurants.

The investigated population consists of employees in restaurants in the Transylvania region, regardless of gender, income level, or education. The data were collected between March and April 2026. Non-random sampling was used for the research, and the data collection method was an electronic survey, completed by completing an online questionnaire distributed on social networks. The final sample included 320 respondents from 118 restaurants in Transylvania County.

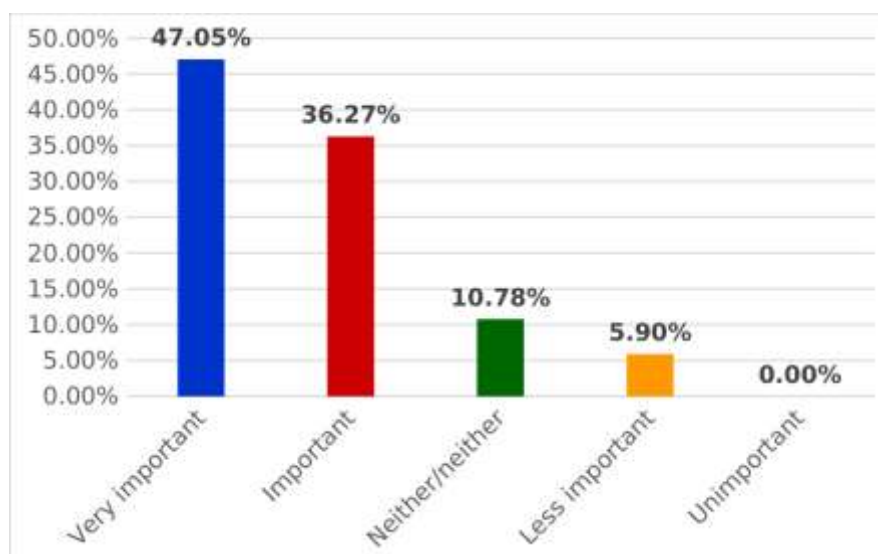
After processing the data, it was found that 52.5% of the participants are female and 47.5% male. The distribution by age group shows that the largest share is held by people aged between 26–35 (42.4%), followed by those in the 45–65 age category (28%).

3. Results and discussion

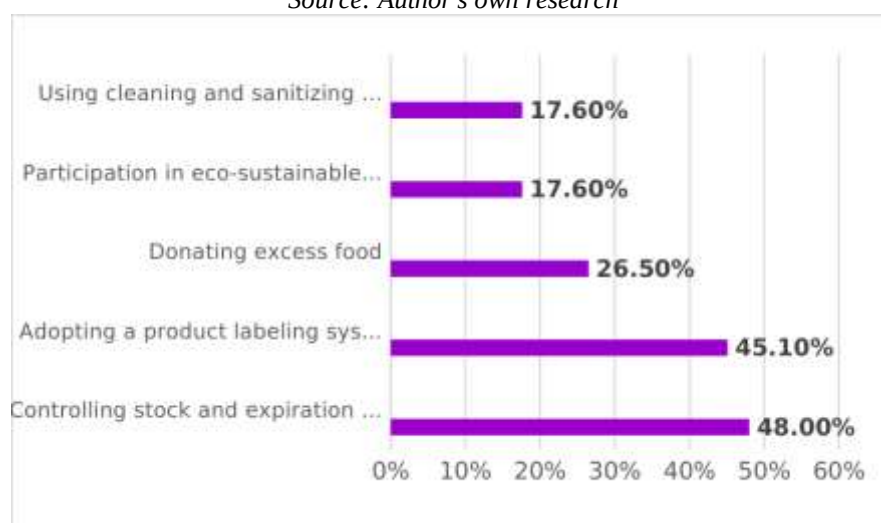
The most relevant research results are presented on the four specific objectives that were taken into account.

O1. Identification of the main sustainability measures applied in restaurants in Transylvania County.

The study showed that the majority of employees (86.4%) confirmed that sustainability measures are practiced in the restaurants where they work. The majority of respondents consider that the application of these measures in the restaurant industry is very important (Figure 1.).

Figure 1. Degree of appreciation of sustainability measures*Source: Author's own research*

The most adopted sustainability measures in restaurants that were identified by the research are: controlling stock and expiration dates of shelf life (48%), adopting a product labeling system to avoid product loss or alteration (45.10%), donating excess food (26.5%), participating in eco-sustainable events (17.6%), using cleaning and sanitizing products without chemical components (17.6%) (Figure 2.).

Figure 2. The most adopted sustainability measures in restaurants in Transylvania*Source: Author's own research*

O2. Identifying the reasons behind when restaurant owners in Transylvania County decide or not to adopt various sustainability measures.

Respondents believe that the main reasons why sustainability measures are not implemented in restaurants are: implementation costs (34.31%) and lack of clear information regarding the implementation and concept of sustainability (27.45%).

On the other hand, subjects believe that the main advantages of adopting sustainability measures are: a better image, increased customer trust in the restaurant, increased sales, and care for the environment and the local community (Figure 3).

These results are aligned with recent research confirming that food waste reduction strategies in independent restaurants depend on economic, organizational, and practical feasibility factors [10].

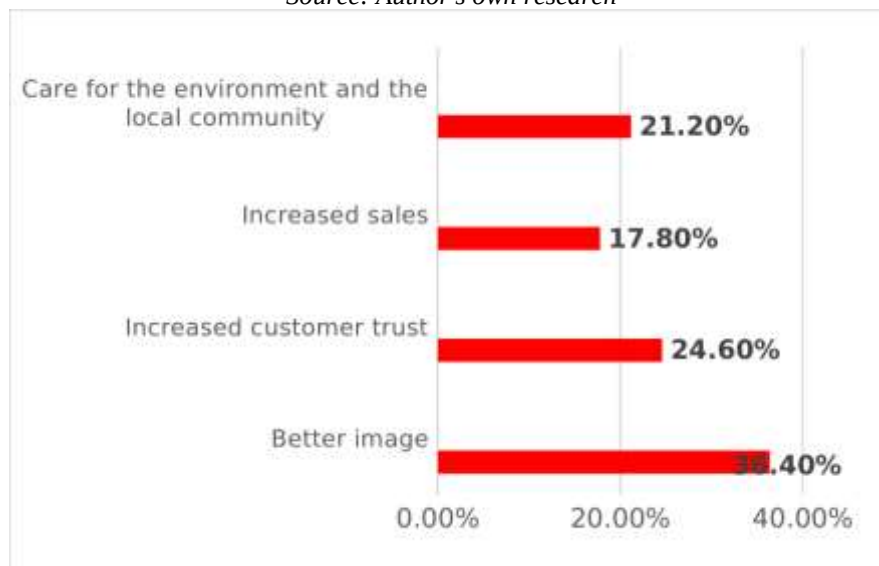
Similar constraints, such as costs, lack of time, insufficient support and a complex food procurement chain, have been reported by small and medium restaurants [11].

However, alternative research shows that sustainability implementation can consolidate companies' performance through a competitiveness-mediated effect [12].

From the client perspective, knowledge of restaurants' sustainability practices and environmental concern increases consumers' intention to visit green restaurants [13].

Fig. 3 The main advantages of adopting sustainability measures

Source: Author's own research

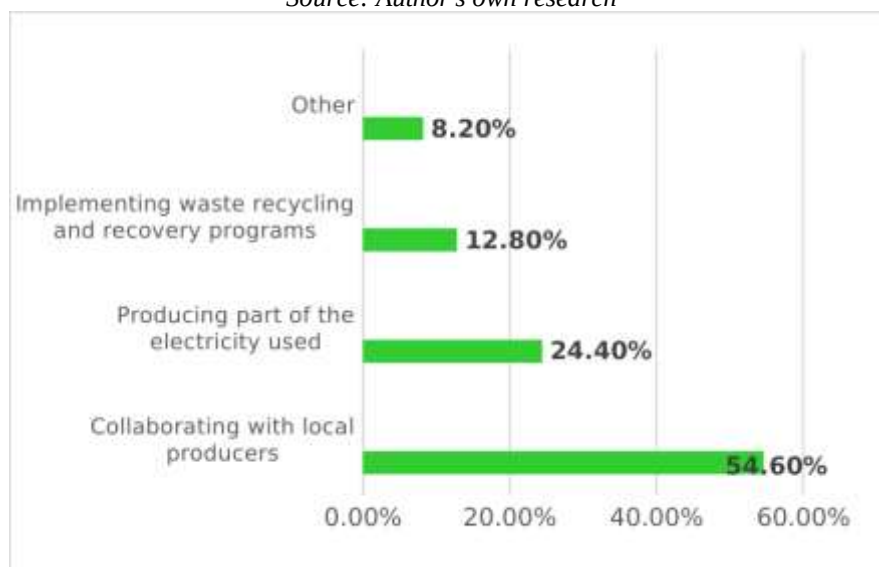


O3. Intention of restaurant owners in Transylvania County to implement the concept of sustainability in their restaurants.

The research aimed to identify what other sustainability measures managers intend to implement in their restaurants in the future. Thus, it emerged that they want to adopt the following sustainable measures in the near future: collaborating with local producers and using local raw materials, producing part of the electricity used with photovoltaic panels, and implementing recycling and waste recovery programs (Figure 4).

Fig. 4 The main sustainability measures that are intended to be implemented in the future

Source: Author's own research



Results underline a noticeable discrepancy between attitude and action: although 86,4% of employees consider sustainability measures important or very important, the major identified obstacles (implementation costs 34,31% and the lack of clear information 27,45%) indicate that expressed commitment does not automatically translate into implementation. This gap between intention and action is in line with the presented tension in the literature of the positive sustainability perception in relation to the real resource constraints that small and medium restaurants are dealing with, especially the reliance on owned capital and limited access to financial support and specialized consultancy.

4. Conclusions

Sustainability is generally defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [14].

The concept of sustainable development has proven to be a visionary development paradigm, enjoying interest from both academia and practitioners [15, 16, 17].

We are increasingly seeing examples of restaurants adopting environmentally and socially sustainable actions and increasingly using sustainable, fresh food from local suppliers, adopting a marketing strategy to attract customers and adopt a positive image of the restaurant. The most used sustainability practices (by restaurants worldwide) are: purchasing local food and products, using energy- and water-efficient devices and equipment, reducing food waste, implementing recycling programs, and organizing support programs for local communities [18].

Green practices of restaurants are associated with a more powerful capitalization of the brand, positively influencing the consumers' behavioral attitudes and intentions [19].

At a company level, green strategies are becoming a real competitive advantage, improving consumer satisfaction and employee motivation, particularly for small and medium hospitality facilities [20].

For a touristic region, such as Transylvania, that attracts based on natural and cultural heritage, sustainability is not just an ethical choice; it is a decision about fundamental economic resources conservation. In other words, the investment in sustainable activities stands more for protecting the regional touristic assets than for an operational cost.

Din perspectivă managerială, rezultatele sugerează că simpla conștientizare a beneficiilor sustenabilității nu este suficientă — sunt necesare programe de sprijin, financiar sau informațional, din partea

Looking from a managerial perspective, results show that the simple consciousness of sustainability benefits is not enough. Programs of financial support are needed from local authorities and HoReCa associations.

The research presents certain limits that need to be mentioned: the use of non-probability sampling and the exclusive online distribution of the questionnaire may have introduced a selection bias toward younger and more digitally engaged employees. Second, the findings reflect employees' perceptions rather than objectively verified practices observed on-site. Finally, the geographical scope, limited to Brașov County, restricts the generalizability of the findings to the broader Transylvanian region.

Future research could expand the sample to the national level, compare employees' perceptions with those of restaurant owners and managers, or adopt a longitudinal research design to examine whether the declared intentions to implement sustainable practices (Figure 4) are effectively translated into concrete actions over time.

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