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**SPA CUISINE DEVELOPMENT IN THE CASE OF
PÜHAJÄRVE SPA & HOLIDAY RESORT**

Master Thesis

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This Master thesis has been compiled independently. All works by other authors used while compiling the thesis as well as principles and data from literary and other sources have been referred to.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
1. Theoretical approach of healthy food, healthy eating and spa cuisine	7
1.1 The characteristics and importance of healthy food	7
1.2 Spa Cuisine	15
1.3 Sustainability issues	21
1.4 Current trends in gastronomy and their influence on tourism and hospitality...24	
2. The food survey in Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort.....	28
2.1 Brief introduction to the food offered in Estonian spas.....	28
2.2 Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort and the need for the study.....	32
2.3 Data collection and research methods.....	34
2.4 Results of the menu analysis.....	38
2.4.1 Food energy.....	39
2.4.2 Fat.....	41
2.4.3 Proteins.....	41
2.4.4 Carbohydrates.....	42
2.4.5 Salt.....	42
2.4.6 Meats.....	43
2.4.7 Other important features.....	44
2.5 Results of the customer survey.....	48
3. Recommendations for improving the analyzed menu	58
Conclusion.....	65
References.....	68
Appendices.....	74
Appendix 1 Pictures of Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort and buffet menu examples...74	
Appendix 2 The analyzed buffet menu of Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort.....	76
Appendix 3 The example of a menu calculation.....	78
Appendix 4 The questionnaire for the customer survey.....	79
Appendix 5. Results of the interviews with spa chefs (shortened).....	81
Kokkuvõte.....	83

INTRODUCTION

Food is one of the most important things in the world – we all need it to support our body functions. In addition, food always has a cultural and social importance. According to Higman (2012), food is an absolute biological necessity, inclusive in all peoples` lives at all times.

Food is a simple four letter word, but its definition “everything we eat, including fruits, vegetables, grains, meats, dairy as well as beverages, herbs, spices and supplements” fails to convey the complexity of today`s food supply. In generations past, food was grown primarily for sustenance, and people relied on what was fresh and in season locally or from their own farms. Today, food serves a much broader role in culture, ethnicity, socialization, community and health promotion and comes in a wide variety of forms – fresh, frozen, canned, fortified – from locations nearby or around the world (Romano & Palmer, 2011). Thus the question of what to eat and what not to eat becomes important for every single person as well as companies offering food.

It is impossible to search for personal wellness without incorporating a proper diet. Looking at the spa industry, it is obvious that spas – as one the main promoters of healthy lifestyle – are the places where the food offered should be supporting the general concept of a wellness establishment, have qualities that would help customers regain or maintain their health and be as sustainable as possible. The food experience from a spa could be an inspiration to eat healthier in general.

The topic of this master thesis is “Spa cuisine development in the case of Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort “. As the spa cuisine is a rather new idea in all Estonia and the current situation has not in general been studied or mapped from this context, it is necessary to find out, what the current situation looks like, what are the perspectives for future

development and what kind of obstacles and threats may stand in the way when wanting to offer truly high-quality food for customers. Is the Estonian spa cuisine healthy, sustainable, both or neither? How well are the main ideas of international spa cuisine taken into consideration and are the international trends in gastronomy industry followed? What do customers complain about when it comes to food and what are they satisfied with? It is important to find these answers so that the Estonian spa kitchens in general would be able to put themselves on the map better and find ways to improve and develop further. The spa customers nowadays have a high level of knowledge about healthy choices as well as high expectations for the services and products offered in the spas. And food is a crucial part of these services – there are things one can choose to have or not to have, but food is always inevitable. Estonian spa cuisine can definitely be improved, and this thesis focuses on giving recommendations on how it could be done.

In order to get to the conclusions that would make it possible to give recommendations and evaluate the situation, Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort was chosen to be the representative example for this thesis. As Estonian spas are fairly similar regarding their operating schemes, customer groups and also the food offered, the author finds that Pühajärve has the necessary qualities to represent the common characteristics of the Estonian spa market in general.

This work uses a case study approach due to its exploratory nature, Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort being the case studied using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The thesis has the following study objectives:

- To compare the healthiness of an Estonian spa cuisine example to internationally acknowledged spa cuisine standards;
- To explore customers` opinions about the food offered and their perceptions regarding spa cuisine;
- To give recommendations for increasing the healthiness of Estonian spa cuisine in general and especially in Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort.

From these objectives unfolds the main research question – how healthy is the buffet food offered in Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort and how could it be made healthier? Giving an answer to this question is also the main aim of this thesis. As Pühajärve in

this case is a representative example, then the question also stands for other similar businesses.

To answer this question, the author at first reviewed and analyzed literature on the whole concept of healthy food and healthy eating, as well as spa cuisine and sustainability issues connected to food and catering in the hospitality industry. Trends in gastronomy and their relations to tourism and hospitality were another point of interest.

To get some information and evaluation from the wider field of Estonian spa cuisine, the author asked expert evaluations from four spa chefs from well-known Estonian spas.

To find out, how healthy is the food offered at the moment, the nutritional balance for a seven-day standard menu example was calculated and evaluated with the help of the NutriData program – a system created by the National Institute for Health Development in order to make it possible to analyze various menus from the perspective of nutrient ratios and caloricity (National Institution for Health Development, 2010).

The observation method was also used to determinate, how are the customers acting while eating buffet-style meals and to evaluate the appearance of the food as it was served. This is still not considered to be a formal research method, but was used just to support some of the findings provided by the main methods.

In order to explore the current situation from the most important – customer perspective, a survey was conducted in Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort from February to March 2014. The aim was to find out, what the customers like about the food, what they do not like, what would they suggest for improvement, are they aware of the spa cuisine concepts and do they have any special conditions that require extra attention when it comes to food. The survey was conducted in Estonian and Finnish, as they are the main customer groups.

Based on the results of both the menu analysis and the customer survey – especially the negative aspects brought out – the author gives recommendations for changes in the overall catering policy so it would become as healthy, sustainable and balanced as possible. The results are generally useful for all establishments who try to improve in order to offer the best and healthiest choices to their customers.

The paper begins with an introduction that introduces the significance of food, the need for this kind of research, the aims and goal of the research, the tasks set and data and methods used to answer the research question. Introduction is followed by three main chapters: the first of them focuses on the theoretical approach of healthy food, healthy eating and spa cuisine, as well as sustainability issues and current trends in gastronomy. The second main chapter covers the menu analysis and the survey conducted in Pühajärve, including data collection and research methods as well as brief insight to the present situation in Estonian spa catering, based on some background study done by the author as well as previous work from other authors. The third and final chapter summarizes all the findings from previous work and also gives recommendations for future development based on them. Conclusion, references, appendices and a brief summary in Estonian will finish the paper.

1. THEORETICAL APPROACH OF HEALTHY FOOD, HEALTHY EATING AND SPA CUISINE

1.1 The characteristics and importance of healthy food

Since the Second World War, and especially since the 1960s there has been increased interest in nutritional issues and the public`s health in industrialized countries (Coveney, 1999). We are currently witnessing important changes in the feeding patterns of the world population, especially in developing countries. These changes, influenced by a series of factors including food, are leading to higher incidence of overweight, obesity, and non-communicable chronic diseases (Munoz, 2013). The spread of non-communicable diseases (NCD) is considered a global crisis and one of the top problems worldwide (Ares et al, 2013). Food allergies are becoming more and more common in both developed and developing countries and it is estimated, that up to 520 million people in the world have food allergies (TEA Publishing, 2013).

„Eat healthily, live healthily“ is one of the essential requirements for long life. Yet, globalisation and urbanisation have greatly affected one`s eating habits and forced many people to consume fancy and high calorie fast foods (Ashakiran, 2012). This leads to a controversy – in modern society, food and eating are associated with ambivalent feelings: pleasure and enjoyment, but also worry and concern (Kuijter & Boyce, 2014). The same worry and concern is probably what constantly thrives all of us to at least try to look for healthier options when choosing food. Yet, everyday life leaves little room for people to eat healthily. Fast food or precooked meals are easy alternatives to time-consuming cooking, allowing people to have their meal „on the go“. According to Borisov & Laaksonen (2003), when people think about food, they form multi-

dimensional pictures and give various meanings to food. For only a few food means a rational act, satisfying hunger.

Moreover, the desire to eat healthily always competes with the desire to full one`s appetite, so that people must deal with the self-experience conflict between eating healthily and eating freely (Finkelstein & Fishbach, 2010). Therefore the attitude towards healthy food is a bit controversial, and according to Finkelstein & Fishbach (2010), people generally tend to believe that healthy food is less fulfilling than unhealthy alternatives. Usually, healthy food is something people force themselves to eat, it is often not their first choice, probably because there are lots of disbeliefs connected to it. For example, a study among adolescents has shown, that healthy eating is generally viewed as an unnatural, unpleasant short-term activity to avoid the stigma of obesity or to enhance attractiveness (Stevenson et al, 2007) Thus it can be said that increasing the popularity of healthy food would also need educating people, in this case spa guests. According to Ashakiran (2012), awareness of junk food facts is lacking amongst every individual in the community. So it can be said that many people do not know, how to eat healthily, what is junk and what is not. Spas as the places dedicated to holistic wellbeing can make a difference here.

Looking at the bigger picture, everyone agrees that the population`s nutritional health is a fundamental resource for the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of local, national and global communities (Worsley & Lawrence, 2007). Many people associate eating with good health, although definitions for what actually is healthy eating, may vary a lot (Falk et al, 2001). What is good to eat, bad to eat, wrong to eat and impossible to eat, are profoundly cultural questions according to Ashley et al (2004).

The term „healthiness“ when connected to food can refer to various objects ranging from particular food products and nutrients to meals and diets. At its minimum, healthiness of food is a question of food safety (Siipi, 2013). Healthy food is almost always opposed to junk food – an empty calorie food which lacks in micronutrients (vitamins, minerals, amino-acids, fiber), but has high energy (calories). Junk food also contains high levels of refined sugar, white flour, trans fats etc (Ashakiran, 2012).

The notion that individuals should follow a prescriptive diet in order to ensure their wellbeing has ancient roots (Higman, 2012). A good diet is something all people have heard about and probably in some ways try to follow. But what exactly is it? „Healthy“ is not usually defined, but it is implied that it relates in some way to a diet which promotes good health and reduces the risk of chronic disease (Margetts et al, 1997).

Healthy eating means consuming the right quantities of foods from all food groups in order to lead a healthy life. The crucial part of healthy eating is a balanced diet. A balanced diet – or a good diet – therefore means consuming from all the different good groups in the right quantities. They must provide enough energy and vitamins, minerals and other nutrients to prevent deficiencies and support normal metabolism. At the same time, they must not include excessive amounts of these and other factors that might promote development of chronic diseases (Nestle, 2007).

Nutritionists say there are five main food groups - whole grains, fruit and vegetables, protein, dairy, fat and sugar (Nordqvist, 2013). The recommendations for their part in the diet are shown on the famous Healthy Eating Pyramid (the latest version from Harvard School of Public Health along with other suggestions for a healthy lifestyle, such as daily exercise):

Figure 1. The Healthy Eating Pyramid.



Source: Harvard School of Public Health, 2013

A food pyramid is a pictorial representation of a diet that makes recommendations of how much a person should consume from each food group every day. The number of food groups in a diet and the frequency that they are eaten varies between the pyramids. The diets represented in the food pyramids are not intended to help a person lose weight. Instead, they represent proportions of what a healthy adult should eat to stay healthy and maintain a normal weight (Natural Standard Research Collaboration, 2012).

There is remarkable agreement between countries in the dietary guidelines that are put forward to promote a healthy diet (Margetts et al, 1997). Yet, when it comes to food pyramids, it is very important to remember, that most countries have their own – and the suggestions given in them can vary a lot, although the basic idea is the same. This is largely caused by different eating habits and cuisine of different cultures as well as products available (for example, the pyramid in Japan could never be the same as in Estonia). The Harvard School of Public Health pyramid, for example, was created out of concern that the original one was made with too much influence from food industry advocacy organizations. The Asian, Latin American, Mediterranean, and vegetarian pyramids were created by the organization which advocates for consumption of foods based on daily, weekly and monthly eating cycles (Natural Standard Research Collaboration, 2012).

The World Health Organization (2013) gives 5 basic recommendations for both populations and individuals to keep in mind for diet:

- Achieve energy balance and a healthy weight;
- Limit energy intake from total fats and shift fat consumption away from saturated fats to unsaturated fats and towards the elimination of trans-fatty acids;
- Increase consumption of fruits and vegetables, and legumes, whole grains and nuts;
- Limit the intake of free sugars;
- Limit salt (sodium) consumption from all sources and ensure that salt is iodized.

The food pyramid and guidelines in general have received criticism. For example Gustafsson et al (2011) bring out that there is a „disconnect“ between healthy eating guidelines, that assume an „idealised, individualised world“, and actual practices in everyday life. Despite the constantly recurring themes of dietary advice for health promotion – eat more plant foods and less of animal and processed foods – many people feel confused about what they should be eating, mostly because public discussion on nutrition issues tends to focus on single nutrients (Nestle, 2007).

Nevertheless, as exploring the levels of fat, protein and carbohydrates as well as the amount of salt and calorie content of foods is a very important part of this work, it is important to explain the importance of those markers.

Beginning with the energy we get from food, this is what the human body uses for breathing, heart work, maintaining body temperature and every other function necessary for a human being to stay alive. Energy we get from food and drink, obviously, and the most important thing here is the fact, that in order to avoid various health issues, the level of energy consumed should be equal to how much is spent (National Institution for Health Development, 2010). The amount of energy in calories needed by each person daily varies a lot, depending for example on body mass, level of physical work done as well as gender and age.

Fats should account for 30% or less of the calories consumed daily, with saturated fats accounting for no more than 10% of the total fat intake. Fats are a concentrated form of energy which help maintain body temperature, and protect body tissues and organs. Fat also plays an essential role in carrying the four fat-soluble vitamins: A, D, E, and K (NutriStrategy, 2013).

Proteins should account for 10% to 20% of the calories consumed each day. Protein is essential to the structure of red blood cells, for the proper functioning of antibodies resisting infection, for the regulation of enzymes and hormones, for growth, and for the repair of body tissue (NutriStrategy, 2013).

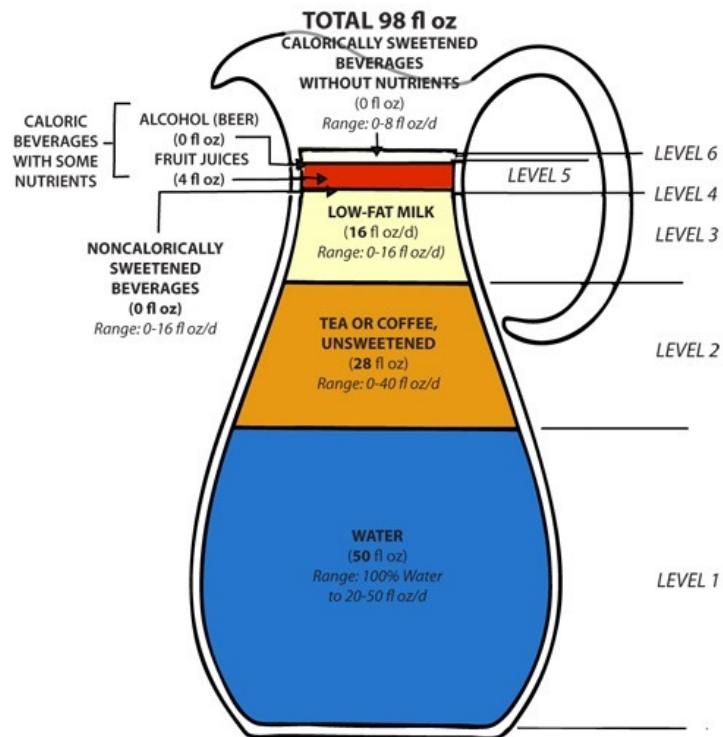
Carbohydrates are a major source of energy and should account for 50% to 60% of calories consumed each day (NutriStrategy, 2013).

Sodium intake is recommended to be less than 3000 milligrams daily. One teaspoon of table salt contains about 2000 milligrams of sodium. The difference between "sodium" and "salt" can be confusing. Sodium is a mineral found in various foods including table salt (sodium chloride). Table salt is 40% sodium (NutriStrategy, 2013).

In addition to nutrients mentioned above, there is a number of vitamins and minerals a daily diet should provide, but as this thesis deals with the very basics of nutrition, they are not under further attention in this work.

When talking about food, it should be remembered, that drinks that accompany the meals are just as important. In addition to the food pyramid, Harvard School of Public Health (2014) has also provided a „drink pyramid“ or a sample beverage plan – a consumption pattern for a person who requires 2200 calories per day, providing 10 percent of calories from beverages:

Figure 2. Sample beverage plan.



Source: Harvard School of Public Health, 2014

As we can see from it, there are many options for what to drink, but water is always the best choice – it does not contain calories and provides everything the body needs to

restore fluids lost through metabolism, breathing, sweating, and the removal of waste. Drinks that are loaded with sugar are the worst choice; they contain a lot of calories and virtually no other nutrients. Consuming high-sugar drinks can lead to weight gain and increased risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and gout. As for coffee and tea, after water, they are the two most commonly consumed beverages on the planet. Drunk plain, they are calorie-free beverages brimming with antioxidants, flavonoids, and other biologically active substances that may be good for health, but the addition of cream, sugar, whipped cream, and flavorings can turn coffee or tea from a healthful beverage into a not-so-healthful one. Milk (and all dairy products) should be limited to a glass or two a day, as they are high in calories, and high levels of consumption may increase the risk of prostate and ovarian cancer. Fruit juice, vegetable juice, sports drinks, vitamin-enhanced waters, and alcoholic beverages have both pluses and minuses. Still, as can be seen, they should not be consumed more than a small glass in a day (Harvard School of Public Health, 2014).

Modern society has no shortage of human nutrition science, nor interventions designed to improve the way we eat. Yet nutrition science, and the models, approaches and interventions derived from this, is apparently delivering diminishing returns in terms of population weight gain, unhealthy eating patterns and the obesity „epidemic“ (Carlisle & Hanlon, 2014).

This „epidemic“ can be directly linked to the food eaten in the West. Cheeseburgers, French fries, super-sized sodas, deep-dish pizza – all these food are connected to the Western, or by another name Meat-Sweet diet, one of characteristics being also portion sizes that could feed two (Sloan & LeGrand, 2009).

The guidelines for healthy eating are quite clear, but still there are many other factors that influence food choices, and it is recognised that knowledge alone is usually insufficient to change dietary habits (Macdiarmid et al, 2013). Food choices and decisions about healthy eating are also competing against a background of food environment full of advertising and marketing of foods which often have different messages and attractions (Brewis & Jack, 2005). It also remains unknown, whether the factors that promote healthy eating are also those that discourage consumption of unhealthy foods, such as fast foods and energy-dense snacks (Williams et al, 2012).

Often the healthiness of food is conceptually connected to its naturalness – the term that refers to a minimal amount or even lack of human influence. This thought has been criticized in academic literature, mainly because of the fact that much of the food the consumers eat today is highly processed and contains additives that – despite being called natural – are actually products of high technology (Siipi, 2013). Therefore the term „natural“ should always be looked at critically, when talking about food.

It is interesting, that nowadays the healthiness of food is mostly connected to restraints and restrictions. It has been suggested that the emphasis should be moved more to a positive and holistic view about how foods affect an individual`s life and his/her wellbeing (Ares et al, 2013). Kuijer & Boyce (2014) also bring out, that in educational messages about dietary recommendations enjoyment of food and eating should receive more attention than it has in the past.

On the basis of current public health practice, it seems the guidelines will remain central to public health knowledge and funding claims but are increasingly disconnected and irrelevant to citizens who inhabit contextualised social worlds (Lindsay, 2010).

Regardless of the definitions and widespread understandings, people`s perceptions about healthy eating can be very variable. The studies have shown for example distorted perception of normal or appropriate portion sizes – large portions are seen as the norm nowadays. Moreover, people often feel the pressure to achieve a „clean plate“, eating everything regardless of any feelings of satiety (Macdiarmid et al, 2013). This pressure is getting stronger as some businesses have started imposing „eat-or-pay“ obligations – in the so-called „all you can eat“ restaurants one has to pay for food left on the plate (Mannering, 2013). Is it sustainable – definitely, especially when according to Mannering (2013), 40% of the food supply chain in the US goes into waste. But healthy – that kind of depends. Still it certainly forces eaters to make more conscious choices and actually think more about eating in general.

It should still be kept in mind, that eating too much should not be seen only as a health problem, but also as an ethical issue, because it wastes limited resources, adds to pollution and increases animal suffering. If one chooses to overeat and develop obesity-related problems, other people will probably have to bear some of the cost – for example through increased taxes needed for health insurance (Singer & Mason, 2006).

There are also multiple barriers to healthy eating, including personal taste and emotions (Stevenson et al, 2007), also cynicism about government health messages and a rejection of healthy food on grounds of poor taste and inability to satisfy (Gough & Conner, 2006), lack of time and willpower as well high price and general reluctance to give up favourite foods (Lappalainen et al, 1997).

It is interesting, that according to Macdiarmid et al (2013), the barriers to adopting a healthy diet tend to focus around cultural and social issues rather than the lack of knowledge or skills. There can also be major differences in healthy eating attitudes of people – what constitutes healthy eating for them and how important that is for an individual (Chang, 2014).

Over the past 60 years Western consumers have become used to cheap food, and if, given the choice, will more likely spend their money on other consumer products rather than more expensive foodstuff (Sloan & LeGrand, 2009). This is probably one of the reasons, why many spas in Estonia do not make a specific effort to offer high quality food in the usual package meals – it would considerably increase the prices of packages and customers are just not willing to pay. Possible explanations would probably not qualify – people like healthy and sustainable food, of course, but they would prefer it for the usual price. Sadly, this is not possible.

As we can see from this literature review, the topic of healthy food and healthy eating is a very complex one, being actually very subjective – although the guidelines and characteristics are the same for everybody.

1.2 Spa Cuisine

From the start of the modern spa in the mid-twentieth century, the spa industry has grown substantially worldwide. Part of that growth involves spas of different types – each with its own business model, including day spas, hotel-based spas, resort spas, and destination spas. Regardless of the type of spa, most operations provide massage and nutrition-related services, with nutrition growing substantially in importance (Tabacchi, 2010). Incorporating cuisine into a spa experience not only benefits the establishment, but also offers a good opportunity to educate customers on a healthy lifestyle and healthy eating – which does not have to be unfulfilling, tasteless or boring. Encouraging

customers to eat better can begin with offering healthy food in the spa. Furthermore, spa hotel guests have expectations of receiving freshly-prepared, healthy, organic foods rather than artificial, pre-prepared foods (Giritlioglu et al, 2014).

To define, what is spa cuisine, it is important to understand first, what is a spa. The number of possible definitions is big, but to bring out some, for example according to Karnik and Borkar (2013), a spa is a centre for treatments and has grown to include relaxation, an opportunity to unwind and get pampered. European spa-goers generally adopt the perception that spa experience is mainly for curative or therapeutic purposes (Mak et al, 2008).

According to Tabacchi (2010), the leading need and interest for visiting spas is to reduce stress and to relax. The second largest purpose is to regain connection between mind, body, and spirit in a place of respite. A common thread among serious spa consumers is the need to escape from hectic family life, business or school demands, and all of the “must dos” of the world.

The International Spa Association defines spas as the places devoted to overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit (International Spa Association, n.d).

Today it is naturally known and understood, that this kind of rejuvenation or renewal, that is related to the definition of spas, can not appear without proper food to support the overall experience. The relationship between food, the body and the soul can also be found in a number of spiritual practices (Coveney, 1999).

According to Lebe (2006), in continental Europe, „wellness tourism“ is used to describe a product based on four main pillars:

- Physical activities – fitness programs as well as indoor and outdoor recreation;
- Vital cuisine – based on supreme foods, quite often gained through biodynamic land cultivation, prepared in a vitamin and mineral friendly way, which also is “*plaisir des yeux*” (pleasure for the eyes) when served to the guests;

- Programs for “pampering” guests, such as several kinds of saunas;
- Leisure – including programs providing “food for the soul“.

From this list it can also be seen how important the role of cuisine is or should be in the context of spa.

According to a study conducted in North America, when asked specifically about food and health, almost 50 percent of spa-goers sought to improve their nutritional health. The same study showed that the core spa user views the spa as offering a full destination-spa experience, promoting fitness of body and mind and excellent local or organic, healthful cuisine (Tabacchi, 2010). There is no reason to believe that spa-goers are different in Europe, looking from that angle.

Nevertheless many spas in Estonia still offer food, that generally can not be considered healthy or sustainable enough. Why this is so, how widespread exactly is the problem and what could be done in order to change or improve it, is one of the biggest questions posed in this thesis. It is obvious that food is a very important factor in the context of service design for any company who somehow wishes to contribute into the wellbeing of their guests. As the service sector is also on the rise nationally – more than 70% of the Estonian GDP comes from the service sector according to Kuosa & Westerlund (2012) – it is understandable, that in the situation of growing competition all companies are forced to improve their services – and food is almost always a very big part of them.

The roots of spa cuisine as we know it nowadays go back a long way. The history of it probably started with the introduction of *nouvelle cuisine* in the 1960s, a style which developed many others – *cuisine fraicheur*, *cuisine minceur*, *cuisine gourmande* and *cuisine moderne*, to name some of the most-well known of them – all of them devoted to promoting healthier and visually appealing eating in one way or the other, as well as finding balance between enjoying food and eating healthy (Taylor & Taylor, 1990). *Until that time people had eaten and drank as they lived in a culinary paradise, where stuffed pigeons flew to their mouths, sausages were hanging from ceilings, butter was spread at least an inch thick and everything was dripping fat...People were trying to overcome the hunger of the Second World War with overeating* (Talvi, 2005).

The general trend of a more healthy and lighter fare on the tables gained new impetus, when Michel Guerard devised the *cuisine minceur*. This mode of gastronomy allowed the guests to eat by the best gastronomic excellence and rules, without making the diner fat, or even allowing them to lose weight. Some examples of the drastic basic laws of this culinary revolution are the banning of some foods and cooking methods, like deep-frying, pastries, potatoes and pastas; no cream, butter or flour to be used at all; no sugar; as little salt as possible; all visible fat removed from the meat and the meat cooked to at most medium only (Bode, 2000).

It is obvious, that all the mentioned trends and movements have influenced spa cuisine a lot, as it has gained many of its characteristics from them, being kind of a successor to all the previous culinary styles. The main difference would probably be the fact, that spa cuisine is not widespread – offered in restaurants everywhere – but sticks to the certain businesses where the basics of it are followed in one way or the other.

In 1983 the term „spa cuisine“ was introduced and coined by Four Seasons Restaurant. In the mid-1980s, as the obesity epidemic rose, even many finer restaurants caught on to Four Seasons' success with spa cuisine. In the 1990s the public went through a restriction-oriented, low-calorie-focused phase and slid into diet mode. Spa guests would seek out weight-loss retreats where their diets were limited, calorie-counting was prevalent and losing pounds was the focus. In the mid-1990s weight-watching changed due to the increasing availability of authentic data; spas began to realize that restricting calories to low levels was actually counterproductive. Now, spas are following the ideas of sustainability, whether it be by growing its own ingredients or focusing its cuisine on organic or local foods. The idea of eating whole, fresh foods has come full circle from centuries past (SpaFinder, n.d). It still has to be said, that food`s sustainability does not automatically mean that it is healthy. Sustainable food can actually be cooked in a way that does not support the general ideas of spa cuisine, it does not have to be good for losing weight or in accordance with respected dietary guidelines.

Nevertheless, spa food or more in common terms „spa cuisine“ is still highly misunderstood. For a long time, it has been bestowed with a reputation of being flavorless, not filling and boring. However, in reality spa cuisine can be really delicious. While the definition of spa cuisine may differ from spa to spa, there are general benefits

one can always count on (Karnik & Borkar, 2013). From this source we come to the first of the problems this master thesis addresses – if in other countries the spa cuisine is misunderstood, then in Estonia the whole meaning and existence of it is not widely acknowledged by consumers. It can even be said, that Estonian spa-goers probably do not think that food is of so much importance when visiting a spa.

According to Karnik and Borkar (2013), the most important characteristics of spa cuisine are the following:

- **Natural ingredients:**

Spa cuisine sticks to using fresh and natural ingredients that are good for an individual and are wholesome in nature.

- **Seasonal appropriate:**

The use of seasonal ingredients avoids much of storage and chemical used in processing and storage systems.

- **Colourful:**

The meals served at a spa are very colourful and inviting as well. The aspect of using colourful vegetables not only ensures that the food is rich in nutritive value but also makes it visually appealing.

- **Well-balanced and nutritious:**

Meals served at spas often concentrate on providing balance and variety in dishes they serve. Spa cuisine is a good blend of macronutrients such as protein, carbohydrates and fats. These recipes also take care of essential nutrients such as vitamins and minerals. Flavour and taste are most important for satiating appetite.

- **Quality ingredients:**

One should be sure that the food is high in quality. It is preferred to keep the cooking to a bare minimum that maintains optimum nutrients retention.

- **Taste and flavour:**

Instead of focusing on large quantities of mediocre tasting food, spa cuisine focuses on satiating ones appetite by delivering appropriately portioned dishes that are high in quality, taste, and flavor. The method of cooking that applies in a

spa menu is mostly steamed, poached, and grilled rather than fried so that more stress is given on low calorie and healthy food.

- **Uniqueness and creativity:**

Very often, spas created recipes that use spices and ingredients that are not traditionally used. Using a single unique ingredient cannot make a special dish. The key for success lies how delicately the ingredients are combined in the right ratio to create flavors that will scintillate the senses and offer a delicious dining experience (Karnik & Borkar, 2013).

Though not mentioned specifically in the characteristics above, the author still believes that the locality of products should also be one of the key factors of spa food. It is considered to be a growing food trend and also helps to improve the sustainability of food.

Planning recipes for a large clientele also requires keeping food allergies, portion size and digestibility in mind. Ingredients to avoid include common food allergy triggers such as nuts which are very acidic, high in fat and hard to digest. Most spas also avoid meats that involve special preparation, such as sushi. Meals should be offered with the appropriate information, such as calories, fat and carbohydrate content, as well as any disclaimers notifying clients of the nutritional content of the recipe (Spa Fresh Magazine, n.d).

As for spa drinks, it is quite obvious, that they should also be able to meet the same requirements as the food – being colourful, made from fresh ingredients ideally, low in calories and rich in vitamins. Nevertheless, water should probably be the basic drink offered in spas, perhaps fused with fruits or vegetables. Still the question with drinks is the fact, that all kinds of drinks are usually offered for sale in spas, just like everywhere else. So the decision here depends largely on the customer.

While many hotels and resorts have long offered both fine food and fine spa, the two were not traditionally paired together as a package. That is changing in a big way, as fine dining and spa-ing are being paired, packaged, marketed, and savored together as never before. Creative culinary-plus-spa experiences have become a massive trend

because they are massively appealing: a logical, sensory, lifestyle combo for both pleasure seekers and true connoisseurs (Karnik & Borkar, 2013).

If wanting to give a precise definition for spa cuisine, basically it would be a light, healthy and beautiful fare. Destination Spa Group (n.d) defines spa cuisine as fresh natural foods low in fat and calories with an emphasis on whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, low-fat dairy products, and the avoidance of added or artificial salts, colors, flavors, or preservatives. Yet, the author believes that the actual essence of food in a spa may be different in different spas – thus everyone defines it for themselves, following the basic characteristics.

The general characteristics of spa cuisine explored in the literature review are the main basis for the evaluation of spa menus.

1.3 Sustainability issues

The movement for sustainable food has its origins in the 1970s as a result of increasing public awareness about environmental issues that impact on the global economy (Sloan & LeGrand, 2009).

One can safely say that in recent years sustainable production and consumption have been a main focus of discussions regarding resource usage at local, national, regional and global level. Food has been one resource which has received much attention due to its fundamental role in maintaining life, but also because of the various inter-relationships with other resources and their impact on human and environmental wellbeing. The idea that one`s dietary choices have an impact not only on personal health and wellbeing, but also on the natural environment and the producers of the food is being emphasised (Piscopo, 2013).

A more sustainable society and food system could ameliorate and possibly remove some of the key drivers of the obesogenic environment. The public health nutrition community should therefore see the sustainability agenda as a potential lever for health improvement (Carlisle & Hanlon, 2014). In order to sustain humankind, it is vital to provide consumers with nutritious, healthy and safe food (European Food SCP Round Table, 2010).

When designing public health nutrition interventions, specialists should consider broadening criteria to include the food consumption process as a whole – growing, purchasing, cooking, and eating – to build on the link between healthier dietary intakes and attitudes toward sustainable food (Clonan & Holdsworth, 2012).

Looking at the spa industry, it is obvious that spas – as one of the main promoters of healthy lifestyle – are the places where the food offered should be supporting the general concept of a wellness establishment, have qualities that would help customers regain or maintain their health and be as sustainable as possible at the same time. When looking at the characteristics of sustainable food, it is obvious that spa cuisine should definitely follow or at least make an effort towards these to meet the objectives of its existence.

All the evidence suggests that sustainable food and beverages are good for the hospitality industry. Educating and retaining customers is the essence of good hospitality management and sustainability can be a unique selling point to make clear the company's commitments (Sloan & LeGrand, 2009).

According to Kirveennummi et al, (2012) some of the main challenges concerning food production and consumption in the future are the following:

- Climate change and environmental decline;
- The growth and ageing of the population;
- The lack of food, energy, clean water and farming land;
- Multiculturalism and transnationalism in a global world;
- Regional inequality and threats of an unequal availability of food;
- Technological innovations in food production and in the development of food substitutes;
- Genetically modified food becoming a part of everyday food consumption;
- Loss of biodiversity.

Following the ideas of sustainable food and sustainable agriculture is one way of keeping those problems from evolving. Sustainability and ecological thinking should become the main drivers in society and people should be educated about the issues

regarding our future, food being a very important part of them. Spas are definitely one place where that could be done, encouraging people to take up healthier and at the same time more sustainable consuming habits in their everyday life.

To give a narrow definition, sustainable diets are diets which have a low impact on the environment, contributing to food and nutritional security as well as to a healthy life for current and future generations. Sustainable diets contribute to the protection and respect for biodiversity and ecosystems, are culturally acceptable, economically fair and accessible, adequate, secure and healthy from a nutritional viewpoint and, at the same time, optimize natural and human resources (Burlingame & Dernini, 2011).

There are various ways how to do this. For example, food production and consumption will cause less pressure on crucial resources (i.e. energy, water and biodiversity), human health and animal welfare, if people in Western countries choose to eat smaller quantities of meat as well as types of meat that are produced in a more responsible way, such as organic or free-range meat (De Boer et al, 2007).

To give a broader definition of sustainable food, there is not one. According to Sloan & LeGrand (2009), sustainable food is a food that is:

- Safe, healthy and nutritious for consumers everywhere and can meet the needs of less well-off people;
- Provides a viable livelihood for farmers, processors and retailers;
- Respects biophysical and environmental limits and also respects the highest standards of animal health and welfare;
- Supports rural economies, in particular, keeping the food miles to a minimum.

Recommendations for hospitality businesses according to the same authors could include the following:

- Reducing consumption of food derived from animals;
- Avoiding fish from unsustainable sources;
- Using local, seasonally available ingredients as a standard;
- Avoiding bottled water;
- Reducing the use of processed food and also packaging;

It may seem easy, but as in every field, here too are several barriers to following these recommendations, for example selection and availability (poorly developed markets), limited knowledge and confusing food labelling (Vittersø et al, 2008). Price is probably also one of the barriers – it is a well-known fact that for example organic food tends to be more expensive. Due to all these matters it is quite understandable, if spas do not use entirely sustainable food, but an effort towards it should still be present.

1.4 Current trends in gastronomy and their influence on tourism and hospitality

Gastronomy is often referred to exclusively as the art of cooking and good eating; however, this is only one part of this discipline. Others have suggested that gastronomy is the study of relationship between culture and food (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). As a subject it emerged during the 16th century out of concern for preserving health by those who enjoyed the richest tables (Taylor & Taylor, 1990).

Gastronomy is a dynamic subject, as menus and menu contents have changed over time and so has the approach to the subject. The changes reflect the times in which we live, encompassing changing dietary attitudes and up-to-date nutritional knowledge, or simply fashion. As an example, no self-respecting restaurant would today present a menu to its guests that did not include at least one dish in each course suitable for a vegetarian (Bode, 2000).

An important factor to be considered is the influence of gastronomy on how tourists experience a destination. All Estonian spas are in need of international tourists as the domestic market is rather small, considering the number of spas in such a small country. The food offered can make a huge difference, according to Kivela and Crofts (2006). They state that consumption of food especially when dining out is a pleasurable sensory experience, hence the pleasure factor or the “feel good” factor as a result of food consumption at a destination is a “pull factor” and a marketing and merchandising tool that must not be underestimated. Gastronomy can add value to the tourist experience and is associated with quality tourism for travelers. Tourist food experiences are often contrasted with „everyday“ or basic eating, there is a search for authenticity and

distinction, so according to OECD (2012), food can create the basis for development of the tourism experiences in a number of ways:

- Linking culture and tourism;
- Developing the meal experience;
- Producing distinctive foods;
- Supporting local culture.

When looking at the annual trends, that influence the gastronomy scene at most at this very moment, the consumer trends are very well expressed by Hudson Riehle, senior vice president of the National Restaurant Association's research and knowledge group in the annual culinary forecast: *"Today's consumers are more interested than ever in what they eat and where their food comes from, and that is reflected in our menu trends research. True trends – as opposed to temporary fads – show the evolution of the wider shifts of our modern society over time, and focus on the provenance of various food and beverage items, unique aspects of how they are prepared and presented, as well as the dietary profiles of those meals"* (National Restaurant Association, 2013).

The top restaurant menus trends for 2014 focus on local sourcing, environmental sustainability and nutrition – children's nutrition in particular. These trends have been gaining momentum for several years, indicating that these wider themes influence the national culinary scene. Chefs recognize that nutrition is a vital component of the foodservice industry, and constantly revise and update recipes to reflect the concerns and desires of a diverse group of consumers who are looking for good food choices to best meet their nutrition and other needs (National Restaurant Association, 2013).

Based on that survey, in which about 1300 chefs participated, the top 10 food trends for 2014 are:

1. Locally sourced meats and seafood
2. Locally grown produce
3. Environmental sustainability
4. Healthful kids' meals
5. Gluten-free cuisine
6. Hyper-local sourcing (e.g. restaurant gardens)

7. Children's nutrition
8. Non-wheat noodles / pasta (e.g. quinoa, rice, buckwheat)
9. Sustainable seafood
10. Farm / estate branded items

(National Restaurant Association, 2013)

HealthNews brings out that spas are going hyper-local, putting unique twists on the “farm-to-table” movement, with farm-to-spa cuisine gaining popularity (HealthNews, 2011).

In general it is stated that no big changes will appear compared to past years, as local products, sustainable agriculture and children`s nutrition are still the most important factors. The customers today are more and more aware of what and how they are eating and where the products come from. It is also interesting, that in the described survey, six out of ten chefs brought out, that they are trying to make their recipes healthier, yet they also noted, that not all dishes could be made healthier – they would lose their original essence then (Ojaveski, 2014).

From these trends the growing importance of sustainability can easily be seen. Spa cuisine and sustainability are inseparably linked together. International Spa Association has set the following guideline to its members regarding sustainability in order to grow this industry toward a deeper connection with the natural laws of nature:

- **Planet**

It is the spa's purpose and responsibility to work with the natural world to promote its healing properties while conducting business in a way that sustains the life of the planet and thus humanity.

- **People**

To serve others, the spa staff members must keep themselves physically, mentally and spiritually healthy by maintaining their overall health and well-being.

- **Prosperity**

Member spa supports sustainability through education on more efficient uses of energy and resources, thus lowering the cost of operations (International Spa Association, n.d).

2. THE FOOD SURVEY IN PÜHAJÄRVE SPA & HOLIDAY RESORT

2.1 Brief introduction to the food offered in Estonian spas

In Estonia you may in several places find therapeutic mud, the healing properties of which were known in folk medicine since ancient times. Spas in the present meaning of the word were established as early as in the 1820-40's. Establishments were especially built or reconstructed for the use of local seawater or mud for the treatment of ailments under the supervision of physicians. Today the main objectives of the spa treatments are to give prophylactic care and spa treatments of the kind, which hinder ailments from becoming chronic, lessening the need of sick care, thereby saving costs, and to restore the working capacity and general capacities of the ailing. In our continually more and more hectic rhythm of life many middle aged and even younger persons suffer from stress. In the course of time the Estonian spas have also partly changed their policy from being purely care centres towards being recreation centres, where the clients in addition to the treatments have the possibility to occupy themselves in various healthy activities, go in for sports or just relax and spend their time comfortably (Estonian Spa Association, n.d).

The Estonian Spa Association currently has 18 members in different parts of Estonia. In addition to them, there are spa hotels that do not belong to the association, as well as numerous day spas and hotels offering some spa services. Estonia has several resort areas – Pärnu, Haapsalu, Kuressaare and Narva-Jõesuu are historically oldest, but spas are also located in Värskä, Kubija, Pühajärve, Toila, Viimsi and of course Tallinn. No other country probably has so many spa hotels per person as does Estonia – according to Visitestonia.com, there are 47 businesses related to the word „spa“ and obviously

further developments are taking place, as new establishments are being built both in Pärnu and Narva-Jõesuu.

The competition is tough – all Estonian spas are practically fighting for the same customers, Estonians and Finns being the biggest customer groups. As the previous theoretical overview has already shown, food has a critical importance for the success of any spa hotel. The study conducted among the head chefs of Estonian spas in 2013 also showed that the rising health awareness of the customers is considered to be an upward trend. That means that spas have to be able to offer clients healthier food choices than they have until now. Also, food is becoming more and more important in the globalizing world, giving an important competitive advantage, that the spas need in a very competitive environment they operate in (Pops, 2013).

The 2014 Trends report by SpaFinder states the movement towards „Healthy Hotels“ as their number one. Part of it predicts the change in the stuffy, eat-too-much restaurants, which are replaced/supplemented by healthy, grab-and-go, in-lobby marketplaces and cafes. The trend toward more nutritious, diet-customized, farm-sourced food and beverage at hotels is heating up. More hotels are making healthy offerings more comprehensive and appealing than just a steel-cut oats option at breakfast, like expansive gluten-free, vegan and vegetarian restaurant menus as well as more „paleo“ options (a whole, unprocessed food diet). The obsession with farm-to-table, slow, real food (which gets hotel guests farmer’s market shopping, gathering in gardens, and cooking) may have already been a 2012 trend, but it’s only grown since then (Ellis, 2014).

Clearly, Estonian spas and the The Health Tourism Cluster have made and are making efforts to offer food that is high in quality and healthy as well, but as most spas have several catering units – buffet side to side with a la carte restaurants, cafes, pubs even – it is also clear, that in that sequence there has to be a low-budget unit, in case of which the options are limited. This is the main point of interest in this work.

To get a better insight on the background, the author asked various questions on the topic from four head chefs working in well-known Estonian spas, that in this case can be used as expert evaluations on the subject (See Appendix 5 for shortened results of

those interviews). Some very interesting points came out from those that can not be left unmentioned. Here is a brief discussion on those.

Spa chefs themselves evaluate the regular spa food in Estonia basically as homely, „the usual food“ and built more on the use of cheaper products than taking the healthiness into account. The principle of local products is hard to follow in case of Estonia, even when by „local“ here the entire country is meant – we just do not have the sufficient amount of local fruits and vegetables.

Price was, is and probably always will be the most important factor when putting menus together; yet, the pursuit to healthiness was also mentioned.

The use of half-fabricated foods, canned products and artificial additives seems to depend entirely on the ideas of chefs – as one chef indicated that approximately 50% of products used for buffet menus are selected mostly on the basis of long preservation time and easy handling, another pointed out that the use of such products is very rare and happens mostly as an emergency. Speed and simplicity of preparation (meaning less workforce needed, as the preparation takes less time) was also brought out as a reason for using them.

What is the meaning of healthy food in chefs` minds? The three points, that dominated the thoughts on this, are well seen in the word cloud below. Seasonal, local and balanced – it seems easy, but definitely is not. Seasonal in the Estonian case would, for a rough example, mean no fresh salads most of the year. Local – is local food Estonian food or food coming from literally local farmers? It can mean both in a country so small as Estonia, but either way, it is difficult, not to say impossible, for big enterprises to go entirely local without an extremely restricted menu in their buffets. It may be possible in *a la carte*, but not where the budget is limited – and it usually is limited in case of food served to the masses. The question of balance is actually the easiest one to solve, requiring only careful planning of the menu. The answers to that question show, that Estonian spa chefs have good knowledge and also a good intention – but the reality might not always come to terms with them. Methods of cooking are considered very important – leaving out all frying and baking, no oil used ideally – but one must

remember, that this is only the way it would be in an ideal world, and this might not be the case in reality.

Figure 3. What is healthy food like according to Estonian spa chefs? (compiled by the author).



Another interesting point was the discussion about the food offered in each enterprise – would the chefs themselves rate their food healthy or not. One chef literally said no – bringing up the strict budget for buffet food as the reason. Another brought up an interesting viewpoint – the food offered can be healthy and varied, but what to do with people eating too much? Should there be a person guiding over portion sizes in a spa (immediately rising costs)? Would losing buffets be a solution? The spa can offer all kinds of options, but it is the customer who has to decide, what kind of portions are reasonable and healthy. Food education in a spa might be one of the ways to tackle this problem, because it all comes down to the choices in a buffet – which can be made only by the customer. And they all not necessarily worry too much about what they eat – and in what amounts.

When it comes to people with food issues, the spas acknowledge their presence – even if there are no special menus, guests can get a suitable food and personal hand-made menus upon request. Marking dishes suitable for people with lactose or gluten intolerance seems to be on a way of becoming a norm rather than an exception. Vegetarian options are generally considered inevitable.

All the chefs stated that the use of as local and as fresh products as possible is very important in case of spas – yet, they brought out many barriers to actually doing this:

- Local farmers are growing only certain kinds of vegetables and are reluctant to try new ones in fear of failure or insufficient demand;
- Insufficient availability in amounts needed;
- High prices;
- Problems with logistics (e.g shipments possible only once in a week).

When asked about knowledge of international trends and taking them into account, all the chefs said that it is interesting and necessary for them to follow up on the trends. One chef brought out the need to know Scandinavian cuisine – because of the customer profile; another thought the idea of local food was the one that should be stressed.

In conclusion, the opinions from the experts proved, that spa cuisine in Estonia is a versatile subject, which is quite difficult to explore in general, as the principles may vary a lot. This thesis therefore continues with a study on a representative example enabling to have a deeper insight.

2.2 Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort and the need for the study

Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort is situated on the shores of Estonia's most beautiful lake, close to the nation's winter capital, Otepää in the southern part of Estonia. The area is one of the most popular holiday destinations in the country, among Estonian and foreign tourists alike. Situated at the heart of the Pühajärve manor estate, the spa resort offers its guests cosy but modern accommodation as well as spa treatments and conference services (Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort, 2014).

The resort provides an extensive selection of health and relaxation procedures to suit everyone's tastes. Its spa centre is made up of two parts: the former rehabilitation centre, which has been transformed into a contemporary health spa; and a wellness spa. The health spa will help guests alleviate the effects of painful joints, chronic illnesses, tight muscles and stress. The wellness centre offers rest and relaxation for the mind and

body with a range of luxurious treatments. Services are also provided by a beauty specialist and hairdresser (Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort, 2014).

The resort's elegant 110-seat restaurant offers diners buffet breakfasts and lunches and dinners as part of its accommodation packages. Its à la carte restaurant is open in the evenings on weekends. In the summer the meals prepared by the chefs can be enjoyed on the restaurant's terrace, which has outstanding views of Lake Pühajärve. The cellar of the old manor house has been converted into a 'barbecue pub' with live music to dance to on weekends. The exclusive glass-walled tower café is the perfect place for couples to enjoy a cup of coffee (Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort, 2014). See illustrative pictures in Appendix 1, pictures 1a-3b.

The roots of an idea to study the catering situation further go back some years. In February 2009 Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort came first in the organic food category of the Green Key awards held among accommodation establishments with the project „Choose organic food – good for the nature, good for You!“. Ecologically pure food is offered by the resort as part of its breakfast buffet and in group menus. The aim of this project was to promote organic food among the employees and customers of Pühajärve and to offer a selection of local ecological products and call target groups to consume in a more sustainable way. More simply said, we wanted, that people could even look and ask for organic products and would know, that Pühajärve offers them. Also we wanted to find our competitive advantage as an ecologically operating spa hotel, that also offers ecological food – which is still not common in any other spa hotel in Estonia.

Five years later, we are still offering the ecological products in our breakfast buffet and group menus, but various factors have made further proceedings very difficult:

- The enormous price differences between regular and ecologically pure products, for which the majority of customers is not willing to pay – to give an example, a certain type of meat can cost 12 EUR per kilogram when it is „regular“ and up to 26,5 EUR per kilogram when ecological;
- The farmers are unable to provide a constant supply of products in quantities needed in such a big establishment;

- Difficulties with storing (have to keep ecological products completely separated from the regular ones).

Because of those obstacles our experience has shown, that ecological products will for at least some time still remain a niche product, even a bit exclusive in nature, which is of course not a bad thing, but does not help Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort to continuously improve the overall food offered to the customers.

As Pühajärve has already set the aim to offer food that is somewhat distinguished from that of competitors, seeking new ways for improvement is only natural. Therefore, the author finds, that improving the food could also go the „spa cuisine“ way, ecological products still being part of it, but not the main focus.

As the buffet lunches and dinners are at the moment the least analysed part of catering in Pühajärve, this research deals mainly with them – as actually these form „the food“ that most customers come into contact with and thus they could be called somewhat the signature of the entire catering policy in Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort. The breakfast is not under too much attention in this study, because first of all, over the years customers have given continuous good feedback about it so the management sees no actual need to seek for improvement there, and secondly, it is very difficult to analyse from the terms of healthy eating, because it would be virtually impossible to define, what exactly will the customers pick from a very large selection of possibilities. One could eat only salad and fish products – or just bacon and eggs, for example. Continuous long-term observation of a target group could be the only possible method here, but as it would be very time-consuming, it was left out this time.

The permission to carry out this case study research was given to the author by the management and catering department of Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort. All ethical standards and principles are entirely followed in this study.

2.3 Data collection and research methods

This thesis is drawn from different perspectives, and due to that is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The author aims at a holistic approach to the subject, meaning to examine as many relevant elements as possible (Morgan, 2014). Due to the nature of the

subject, the qualitative approach still dominates over quantitative. Because of its potential to advance understanding of social and behavioral aspects of food and eating, qualitative research continues to gain importance in the fields of food, nutrition, and health (Bisogni et al, 2012).

The quantitative part of this work focuses on the analysis of the seven-day buffet lunch and dinner menu, conducted with the help of the NutriData program and based on exact recipe calculations *per capita* provided by the head chef of Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort, creating numeric values that can be interpreted accordingly and objectively. The quantitative part focuses on the customers, where the gathered data mainly has to be evaluated subjectively. Ideally, it is expected, that the two approaches would reflect the same findings – in this case, would prove, that the healthiness of food in the company under investigation could be improved.

The primary method for data collection from the customer perspective in this thesis was a self-administered questionnaire (see Appendix 4). This was considered to be best by the author, because the questions needed to be answered subjectively, without any influence from the interviewer – according to De Leeuw et al (2008), the presence of an interviewer can influence answers and cause unwanted effects. It was also necessary that the respondents would answer because they wanted to – not because they were in some way harrassed to do it. Only in that way was it possible to get unbiased answers from people who the subject of food actually touched and they felt they had something to say about it.

The aim of the questionnaire was to find out, what the customers like about the food, what they do not like, what would they suggest for improvement, are they aware of the spa cuisine concepts and do they have any special conditions that require extra attention when it comes to food. The general objective was to find out, what the customers think about the food served to them and what would they change. The questionnaire was tested by a pilot study, which turned out to be successful and depicted some of the results the author hoped to get. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions altogether, 7 of which have open answers – to get the actual opinion of the customer, providing qualitative data – and 5 with a selection of possible answers, providing also quantitative data. A total of 69 respondents took part in the survey. There was an actual number of

78 questionnaires, but some of them were only half filled in, so these were ruled out. Regarding sampling methods, the author used random sampling, meaning that all units in the population have an equal probability or chance of being selected (Jupp, 2006). At the first stage, the random sample consisted of all the customers who stayed at Pühajärve for at least one night in the period from February 10 to April 15th 2014, and at the second stage the sample was narrowed down to customers from the same period who had buffet lunches and / or dinners included in their package. The questionnaires were handed out by hotel administrators on check-in to the relevant customers and asked to return when checking out. A total of 150 questionnaires were handed out, so the response rate was approximately 46%.

The method of naturalistic observation was also used in this thesis, although it is not considered to be a primary or a formal method, but rather was used to support and confirm some of the findings provided by the primary ones. The author observed the behaviour of customers at the buffet table within one week in April 2014, which was necessary in order to come into close contact with the research subject and examine the behaviour of customers when provided with unlimited amount of food. Naturalistic observation seeks to provide authentic, rich descriptions of the behavior of interest as it naturally exists and unfolds in its real context. It takes place in the natural setting for the phenomenon of interest and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate that setting in any way. A major strength of naturalistic observation is that the data collected closely reflects the real, naturally occurring context and the actual actions of the participants in that context (Given, 2008).

This thesis mainly uses the case study approach (Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort in the context of this thesis is the case being studied) due to its exploratory nature, which, according to Yin (1994) allows an in-depth exploration of context needed in this study. It seeks to uncover the various nuances, patterns and latent elements that other research approaches may overlook (Berg, 2004). The case study also allows to use triangulation – the idea, that looking at something from multiple points of view improves accuracy (Neuman, 2006). From that emerges also the possibility to use crystallization – recognizing, that our world is „far more than three sides“. This enables a shift from seeing something as a fixed rigid two-dimensional object towards a concept of the

crystal, which allows for infinite variety of shape, substance, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities and angles of approach (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In nature, this case study can probably be called exploratory, which investigates distinct phenomena characterized by a lack of detailed preliminary research, especially formulated hypotheses that can be tested, and / or by a specific research environment that limits the choice of methodology (Mills et al, 2010).

During the customer study some limitations also occurred. With a bigger number of respondents the results would probably have been even more reliable. Out of 150 distributed questionnaires 81 were not answered at all or not properly answered. Not all customer groups were presented, first of all because some did not have the in-house meals in their packages and secondly, some, who would have had a lot to say about food according to previous experience from the spa hotel`s ongoing customer feedback programme (like the Swedish or German groups) just did not visit at the time when the study was conducted. If there had been more time, the results could have given an insight to the perceptions of all the nationalities and age groups forming the population in Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort. It would have also been interesting to compare the pub and a la carte menu to the buffet, but this would have been too expansive to follow the given requirements. Further studies could pick up from where this one ends and proceed with the same kind of research in other Estonian spas.

The case study approach often raises the critical question about generalization – is one example enough to generalize the results? Yet, providing the kind of generalization applicable to all similar businesses is somewhat the very secondary aim of this work, the main aim still being related to the one particular case under investigation, so it could be said that the results have somewhat intrinsic value.

As far as generalizations are done in the conclusive part of this work, the author assumes because of her own experience, that regarding food, Estonian spa businesses are not remarkably different from each other regarding catering – as the meal-including package prices are generally well comparable, so is probably the budget for buffet food. They all deal with the same problems regarding local and seasonal products and base their menus on typical Estonian cuisine, which tends to be rather high in fat and protein content. This assumption is also largely based on the personal experiences of the author.

Thus the findings of this research are a good general representative of other spa hotels in Estonia – or should at least alarm them, that not everything, that seems healthy, actually is. In spa hotels, the calorie content and nutritive value of the food should be calculated and considered carefully.

2.4 Results of the menu analysis

There are many issues to consider when compiling menus. According to Taylor & Taylor (1990), some of the most important of them in order to find appropriate balance are:

- Colour of foods – without a variety of colours the meal will appear dull and unappetising;
- Cooking processes – must be varied to ensure there are not too many of the similar type (e.g fried, roasted);
- Texture – too many similar textures also makes the foods unappetising;
- Taste – the chef needs to ensure, that one flavour does not predominate at the expense of others;
- Sequence – light, heavy, light;
- Nutritive value – sufficient amounts of essentials;
- Ingredients – repetition of principal ingredients should be avoided, e.g a cauliflower puree soup and cauliflower as a vegetable in the same meal;
- Words – same names should not be constantly repeated on the menu.

In this analysis, the nutritive value of the weekly menu per each day and both meals under investigation was calculated at first with the help of the Nutridata program. The following criteria were taken into account:

- Energy in calories;
- Amount of proteins;
- Amount of fat;
- Amount of carbohydrates;
- Amount of salt;
- Sustainability issues;

- Accordance with the international characteristics of spa cuisine.

As the Nutridata asks for determination of age and gender, the biggest age group staying in Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort was selected to be the example, which is about 30-50 (also the main target group), the average then set to 40 years of age. The gender of the example was selected to be female, because in case of men, the normal amounts are relatively bigger and as the main aim of this work is to determinate the healthiness of the menu, calculations according to female intakes would be closer to the accepted norms and thus easier to compare. It is also common knowledge that females tend to visit spas more than men. The menu was also evaluated from the viewpoint of amount of salt used, the presence of canned products, half-fabricated foods and „comfortability items“ such as sauces and desserts made of powders was another point of interest along with the drinks offered in the buffet.

The tables below show the amounts of certain nutrients and calories daily per calculated meal. The entire analyzed menu can be found from Appendix 2 and an example of a calculation used in Appendix 3. See illustrative pictures of the menu in Appendix 1, pictures 4a-7b.

2.4.1 Food energy

Table 1. Food energy in calories (compiled by the author).

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Lunch	1750	1960	1930	1890	1850	1440	1470
Dinner	1380	2500	1300	1330	1730	1410	1700
Total	3130	4460	3230	3220	3580	2850	3170

The recommended daily calorie intake for women aged 31-60 (normally built, not doing excessive workouts or intense physical work, not pregnant nor breastfeeding) weighing ~60 kg (a common estimate) would be 1866 kcal. The results here indicate, that if the amounts of food calculated per person are actually consumed, the excessive calorie intake is enormous by the end of the day, especially considering that breakfast is not even taken into account here. On doing the calculations, it is assumed, that people will eat approximately 80% or even less (to avoid the lack of food), so of course it can be argued, that people do not actually eat such amounts – but the observations made by the

author suggest otherwise in many cases – when being face to face with a free selection of food, people do overeat, and try everything they possibly can, in some cases even loading up several plates, if one is not enough for all the desired items. It is also a fact stated by the head chef, that it is not rare, that there are not any remarkable leftovers on the buffet table – it is more common, that some items run out despite the excessive calculations, because people eat even more. This is of course always depending on the certain individuals – opposed to the overeaters, there are also those, who eat only the soup. As the purpose here was to evaluate the basis of buffet meals, these factors are not covered, but could give ideas for further studies.

So actually two things can be seen here – first of all, the food can not be called healthy, if the calorie content is so high, and secondly – as the behavioural patterns of customers are probably impossible to change (maybe only with a long-term education on healthy eating), the thing that should change, are the options people can choose from. Studies have shown, that the unhealthy nature of much of the food eaten outside the home has been identified as one of a number of key aspects of our modern day lifestyle that is contributing to rising levels of obesity (Bagwell, 2014). Furthermore, previous studies have shown that first of all, serving sizes are generally much bigger when eating out and secondly, people even tend to ignore the calorie and nutrient contents if they are not very easily visible (Munoz, 2013). According to Pops (2013), for the changes to happen, the caterer itself has to promote healthy food, one can not count on only customers making healthy choices.

One possible approach to consider is related to the sequence of foods in the buffet – according to a study, first foods in the line are the ones that are selected most often (Wansink & Hanks, 2013). Therefore, healthy (or healthier) options should be placed first. The author`s observations also support that theory – when approaching the table, very few people had a careful look at everything that was offered. Mostly, people just take a plate and start loading it in the exact order that the food is placed.

There are also some dangers in placing healthy food side to side with not so healthy - studies have shown that estimations of the calorie content of an unhealthy main meal food tend to be lower when the food is shown alongside a healthy item (e.g fruit or vegetables) than when shown alone. This effect has been called the negative calorie

illusion and has been attributed to averaging the unhealthy (vice) and healthy (virtue) foods leading to increased perceived healthiness and reduced calorie estimates (Forwood et al, 2013).

2.4.2 Fat

Table 2. Amount of fat, grams (compiled by the author).

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Lunch	108	97,5	101	102	90,7	65,1	57,9
Dinner	50,9	136	44,1	30,3	73,8	46,6	63,2
Total	158,9	233,5	145,1	132,3	164,5	111,7	121,1

Suggestions on the daily intake vary from 81 to 85 grams per day in previous studies (Vaask et al, 2006). In this case, even if the meals, taken separately, would be the only ones eaten during the entire day, the suggested amount of fat is in most cases already over the limits. The reason for the fat content in most cases lies in the preparation methods, like deep-frying, but also in the use of heavy meats, cream and butter. Fat, as all the other nutrients, is essential for the human body, but if consumed in excessive amounts, can cause a number of health problems, out of which obesity is certainly the most well-known. In addition, high cholesterol levels caused by trans-fatty acids may end with heart and cardiovascular diseases (Vaask et al, 2006).

2.4.3 Proteins

Table 3. Amount of proteins, grams (compiled by the author).

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Lunch	57,8	90,9	70,1	77,8	82,9	68,8	59,3
Dinner	59,3	91,3	58,8	62,3	46,5	60,3	81,9
Total	117,1	182,2	128,9	140,1	129,4	129,1	141,2

Daily protein consumption should ideally be between 64 and 95 grams per day (depending on many factors, such as age, general health condition and the nature of one`s work) (Vaask et al, 2006). Although the excess in this case is not so dramatic as with fats, the level of proteins is still higher than it should on all days. According to people`s choices, they could be able to consume even more, if a double portion of meat is eaten, for example.

Too much protein in food stresses the liver and kidneys as well as may cause podagra and quicker ageing (National Institution for Health Development, 2010). To correct the protein levels, the amount of meat, eggs, potatoes, rice, dairy products and cereals in the menu should be overlooked and the amount decreased to balance the levels.

2.4.4 Carbohydrates

Table 4. Amount of carbohydrates, grams (compiled by the author).

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Lunch	144	190	196	176	185	155	188
Dinner	183	240	174	210	233	200	214
Total	327	430	370	386	418	355	402

The amount of carbohydrates ideally should be between 329 and 359 grams per day (Vaask et al, 2006). In this case, with a few reservations, the levels are quite satisfying. Still, the excess of carbohydrates can as well be one of the reasons for obesity, and cause dental problems. If the fat and protein levels in the food studied are balanced, it is important to make sure, that the amount of carbohydrates would not be increased further by that.

2.4.5 Salt

Table 5. Amount of salt, grams (compiled by the author).

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Lunch	4,8	7,3	6,8	4	8,1	7,3	8
Dinner	3,8	10	8,1	2,1	4,3	5	6,9
Total	8,6	17,3	14,9	6,1	12,4	12,3	14,9

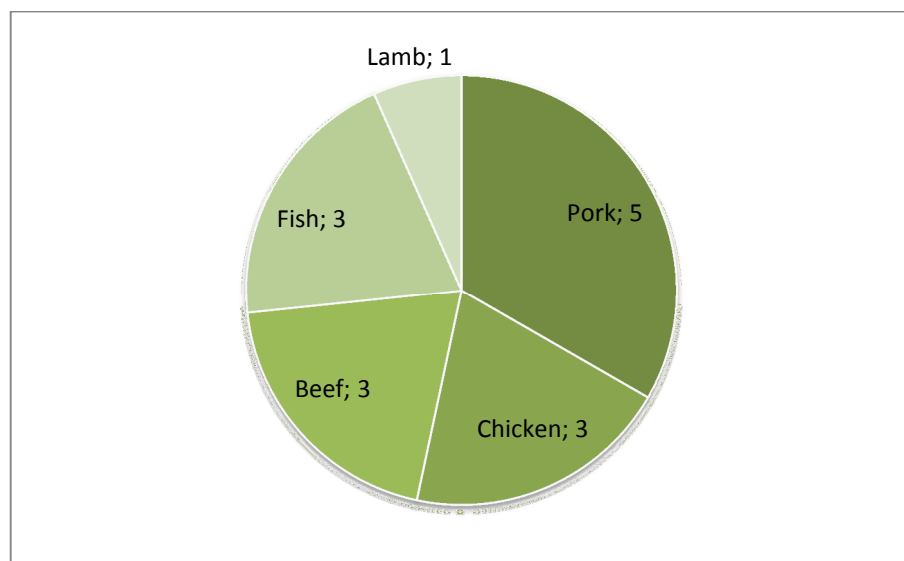
The amount of salt is related to sodium, as it is found mainly in it, and there are very few foods that naturally contain it. The maximum amount of salt per day should be 5 grams for women and up to 6 grams for men (the minimal amount is only 1,5 grams) (Vaask et al, 2006). Clearly, the amount of salt used in this menu is over the limits – which is coherent with the studies which have proved, that Estonians do eat too much salt – the normal amount consumed daily is around 15 grams per adult only from

products, not calculating the salt added while cooking and eating (Vaask et al, 2006). Too much salt may be the reason for high blood pressure, heart diseases, strokes, osteoporosis and swells.

One of the reasons for high salt levels in the menu is the salt added into the boiling water of potatoes, spaghetti etc, but this does not affect the excess – even when „the boiling salt“ is not taken into account, there still is too much of it. It also must be kept in mind, that the salt amount above is the actually added salt – the one that hides in some half-fabricated products, canned foods and sauce and broth powders adds up to the number.

2.4.6 Meats

Figure 4. Meats used in main dishes (times in total of 14 meals) (compiled by the author).



The diagram above depicts the times of certain types of meat used in the menu. Pork, as could be expected in Estonia, is the most common meat used, while beef, chicken and fish equally share the rest of the meals. Lamb is represented in one meal (minced meat made of lamb to be exact). It can be said, that red meat certainly dominates in this menu, and the case with fish is that in one case it is breaded and cooked in the fritter, which destroys all the good qualities that it might have and in another, used in fish lasagna, which is extremely calorific. Chicken, if used skin-on, automatically means a

lot more calories and fat. The use of half-fabricated products is also largely connected to meat –breaded fish, ham and cheese pockets all come in a „ready-to-use“ state. In the case of beef, in one case it is actually beef liver. Ideally, lighter options such as chicken fillet, steamed white fish, turkey, even rabbit, as it is becoming more and more common in Estonia, could replace the half-fabricated „meats“ and heavy red meat options.

2.4.7 Other important features

Another interesting factor that came out from the menu analysis is the fact, that there is not a single day, when potatoes do not accompany the dishes or are in them in some way. Potato is known as „the second bread“ in Estonia, so it is probably no wonder, but it still should be kept in mind, that it is rather calorific for a vegetable and if accompanied by heavy sauces and red meat or being oven-baked for example, is not easy to digest nor healthy. In some days, potatoes could be changed to something new and interesting, such as quinoa, or just steamed vegetables or woks, if the main protein is heavy in nature. It is also unnecessary to have several side dishes just because one of them needs to be the potato – one would be enough if considering the perspective of healthiness.

The analysis revealed, that the use of canned products and various products (broth, desserts, sauces) made from powder is a norm rather than an exception. Out of 14 calculations analyzed, canned products were present in 11 cases and different powders also in 11 meals. It should certainly be decreased, better still, if lost entirely. It is understandable, that baking a cake out of powder requires less worktime and workforce and is cheaper, but considering the essence that spa food should have, this should not be an option. Canned products are probably not so bad in some cases, marinated cucumbers for example, which are used as salad and loved by the clientele, but instead of canned exotic fruits using fresh would be better. If this is not possible because of the price, they should not be used at all. Also, in Estonian climate the use of canned items in wintertime is somewhat understandable, especially when there would be a possibility to use home-made preserves and pickled products, but in spring, summer and autumn there certainly should be fresh alternatives.

Vegetarian options are offered as part of the selection only at dinner. The reason is, that lunch already has a soup selection, and therefore the budget does not allow to add a vegetarian option. Still, the author believes, that vegetarians are a group left largely unattended – especially considering that it is a growing trend.

Frozen products were used in 10 cases out of 14. Vegetables to be cooked are also frozen in almost all of the cases when they are used (except for the ones in fresh salads). According to Bode (2000), all frozen foods lose by the process. Defrosting bleeds all the foods, particularly fish and meats, leaving behind a distinctive texture, through which most of us are able to recognize, whether the product used was fresh or frozen. The reason lies in the fact, that the Estonian climate does not actually allow to use seasonal vegetables more than about three months a year – there are some, like carrots and beets, that can be preserved over the winter, but their flavour and looks is often poor. So freezing vegetables is acceptable, but the meat used should then be fresh to avoid eating entirely from the deep-freezer.

When it comes to drinks offered, water is freely available at all lunches and dinners, which is very good, also it is important, that it is not bottled water, the use of which would be unsustainable. In addition, juice drinks made from syrups are offered, some of which also have the same Estonian eco-sign as the previously mentioned ecological products in the breakfast:

Figure 5. The Estonian eco-sign (used in breakfast and for juice drinks in lunches and dinners).



It is good, that some of the juices are ecological, but still, as one of the producers, Taarapõllu Farm, states in its webpage, for making 1 litre of syrup 700 grams of sugar is used, so they can be called heavily sweetened (Taarapõllu talu, 2014). Tea is also

offered with dinners, which can be considered healthy, when no sweeteners are added – this again is still up to guests themselves.

As for the question of sustainability, Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort has made great efforts on this with the organic food project in many catering units – organic products in the breakfast selection, group menus and some items in the pub and a la carte menu – but it must be said, that buffet lunches and dinners have not actually been touched from this context, if we look at the characteristics of sustainable food from the theoretical part of this work, which were:

- Reducing consumption of food derived from animals;
- Avoiding fish from unsustainable sources;
- Using local, seasonally available ingredients as a standard;
- Avoiding bottled water;
- Reducing the use of processed food and also packaging.

Several issues that came out from the menu analysis actually relate to the sustainability issues, like the overusing of meat and lack of local and seasonal products at times as well as the use of processed foods, which should be reduced. Bottled water is not offered as part of the menus, it is only for sale. The most important factor to be considered here is probably the fact, that buffet-style meals can not actually be considered very sustainable at all, as the food wastage and overeating (meaning wasting resources) are common in the case of buffet.

Finally, when looking at the international characteristics of spa cuisine described in the theoretical part of this work, the author made the following observations in addition to facts that came out from the menu analysis:

- **Natural ingredients**

Not present entirely. Up to some extent (e.g fresh vegetables for salads), but definitely not in a way they could be called a standard.

- **Seasonal appropriate**

Probably present in the summer and autumn, but not in the spring. The difficulties related to this have been discussed previously.

- **Colourful**

The observation showed, that though the salads may add some colour to the table, generally it is rather dull and plain when it comes to colours. See exemplary pictures in Appendix 2.

- **Well-balanced and nutritious**

The answer to that can be found by the results of the menu analysis.

- **Quality ingredients**

Spa cuisine favours keeping cooking to a bare minimum and using ingredients very high in quality, which, according to the menu analysis, it not the case with the investigated meals.

- **Taste and flavour**

Instead of focusing on large quantities of mediocre tasting food, spa cuisine focuses on satiating ones appetite by delivering appropriately portioned dishes that are high in quality, taste, and flavor. According to this study, the mentioned qualities are not present.

- **Uniqueness and creativity**

Although this is largely a subjective question, it seems that in this case we are looking at quite the usual Estonian home food, rather than something unique and creative.

In conclusion, the findings revealed that the menu:

- Contains too much fat;
- Contains too much proteins;
- Is too calorific to be called healthy;
- Uses too much red meats;
- Contains too much salt;
- Uses too many canned products and comfortability items such as various artificial powders and half-fabricates;
- The menu can not be called sustainable;
- The menu has little qualities that a spa cuisine example should have.

The possible solutions to these issues are discussed furthermore in chapter 3. Yet, it must be said, that the findings are actually not surprising – it is also a widespread issue in the nutrition of Estonian population, that their fat and protein levels are too high, carbohydrates too low, and the daily amount of salt three times higher than it should be (Vaask et al, 2006). The basic nutrients in food are also not properly balanced, which is exactly the case with the analyzed menu. Therefore, a lot of changes need to be made in order to be able to call the offered food „spa cuisine“. The recommendations are discussed in chapter 3.

The analysis done on the menu was based entirely on numeric values and dry numbers. But if the question is in something so essential, emotional and subjective as food, no study can be complete without asking the ones who actually eat the food – the customers. So this work continues with the customer survey among people who actually ate the menu analyzed above.

2.5 Results of the customer survey

In this part of the work, the data collected from the questionnaires is discussed. The results cover the age and gender of the respondents and their experience with visiting spas. Regarding food, the following issues were a point of interest:

- Meals included in the package;
- Knowledge about the term „spa cuisine“ – do they know anything or not;
- Special conditions regarding food and any problems that may have occurred with them while staying in Pühajärve;
- Thoughts and feelings about the healthiness of the offered food;
- Thoughts and feelings about the visual side of the food offered;
- What disappointed and / or positively surprised them regarding food;
- Perceptions about the food offered in spas;
- Ideas on how to improve the catering in Pühajärve;
- The importance of nutrition to them in general – do they consider healthy eating as a norm or not.

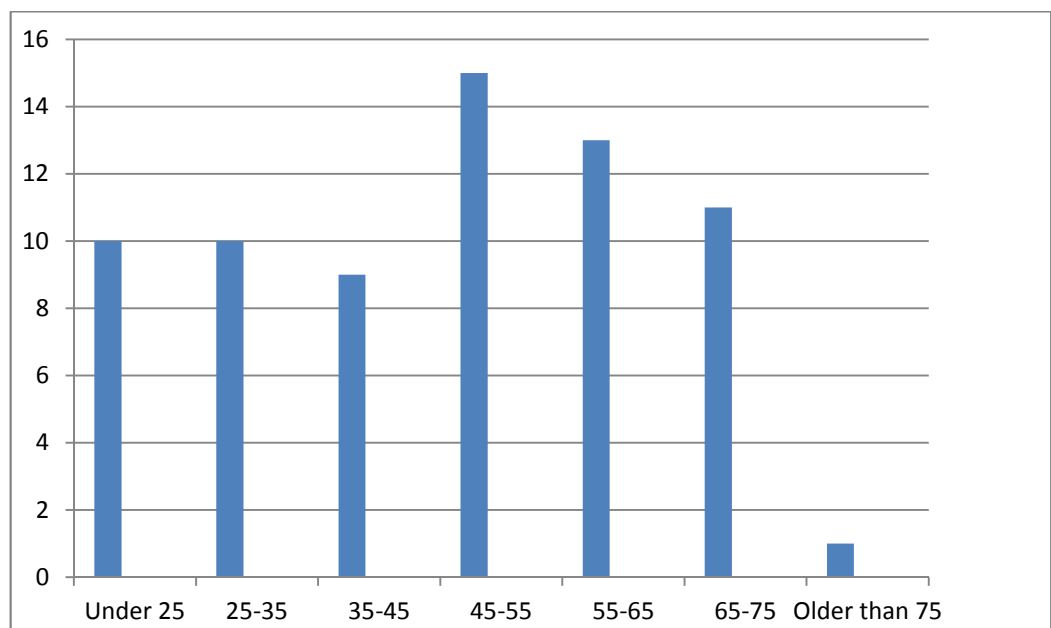
Direct quotations from customers are written in *Italic* in the following work.

As for the nationality of the respondents, they were Estonians and Finns, 36 out of 69 being Estonian and 33 Finns. As expected, most of the respondents were women – 52 against 17 men. There were no remarkable differences found in the answers given by Estonian or Finnish customers or men and women separately.

Regarding experience with spa visits, 24 said they visited spas at least 2 times a year and 16 at least once a year. 9 respondents said they visited 3-4 or even more times in a year (even up to once a month). 16 other respondents said they visit rarely and 4 questionnaires were not applicable for this question, because they only mentioned the reason for visiting – the reason in all cases, where it was brought out, was relaxation and holidays, a few also mentioned seminars and conferences held in spas. Based on this question we can assume, that the respondents have had previous experience with spa food and are therefore competent to evaluate it.

The age profiles of the respondents are shown on the following diagram:

Figure 6. The age profile of the respondents (compiled by the author).

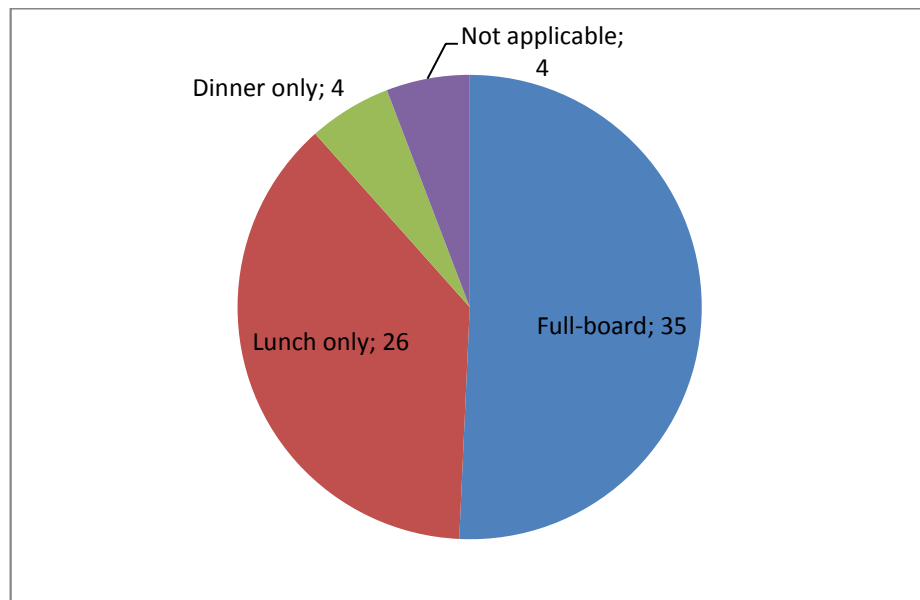


As can be seen, the respondents from all age groups were represented quite equally, except for people older than 75 – this group got only one answer. This is good, because people from different age groups may have very different perceptions about food.

As for those perceptions, quite as expected, the majority of the participants – 47 claimed that food in their minds is an important part of essential wellbeing and they try to consider it every day. The rest of the respondents, 22 answered that food is partially important for the overall wellbeing. None of the respondents thought that food was not important at all.

Now, when getting to the most important part of the survey – the buffet food in the spa – it was first necessary to find out, how many people ate only for lunch or dinner and how many ate the full-board – the results were as seen on the following diagram:

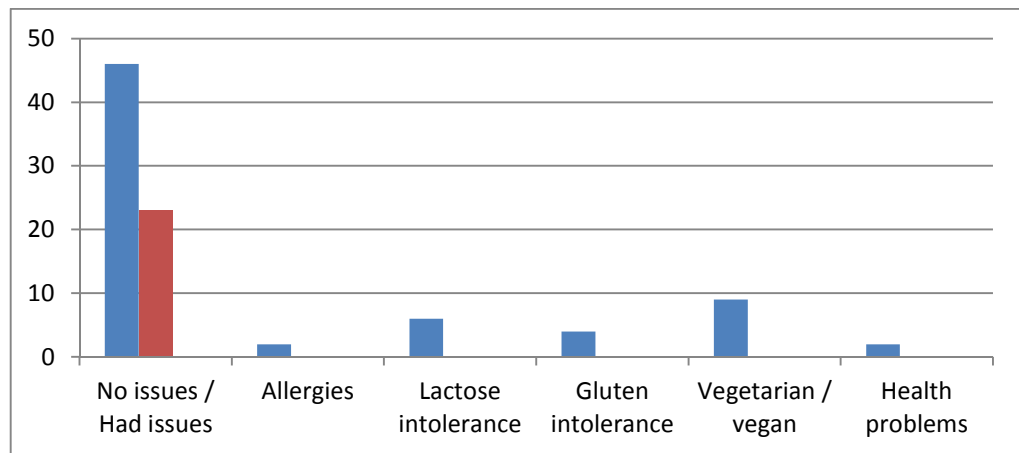
Figure 7. Full- and half-board customers (compiled by the author).



Here we can see that the majority of customers ate both lunch and dinner during their stay, which makes them excellent for evaluating the menu. Nevertheless, half-board customers are just as important for getting the general impression they have about the food. Not applicable here refers to guests who did not mention, which they ate, but as the questionnaires were given only to the people whose packages included lunch and / or dinner, they are still considered a viable sample.

As for the health problems and allergies related to food, the results are somewhat surprising. The pilot study showed that more than half of the respondents had some kind of issues related to nutrition, but this trend does not show in the final results:

Figure 8. Health problems related to food (compiled by the author).

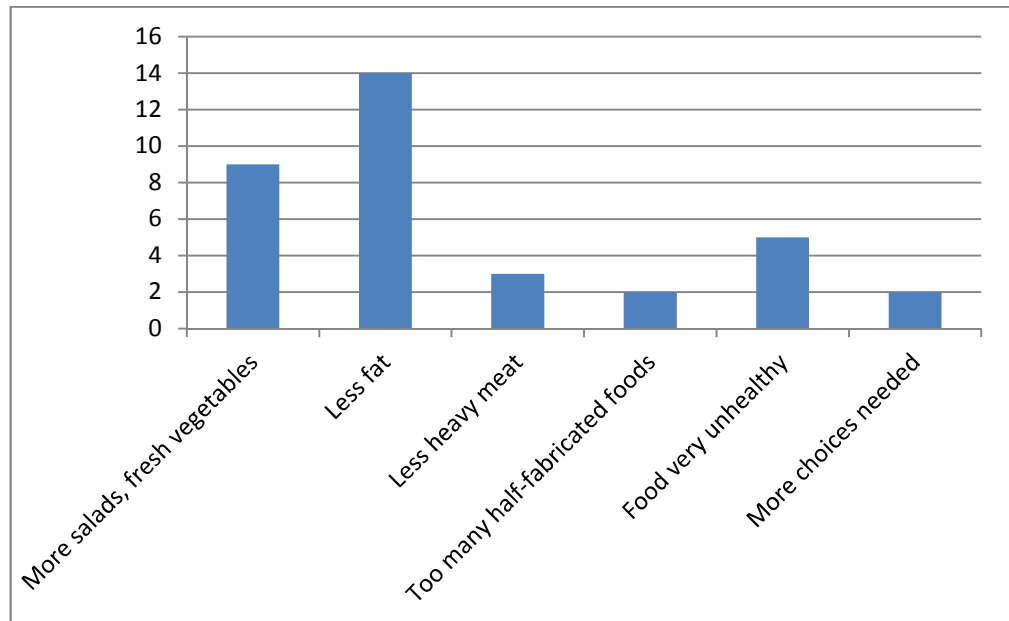


Only 23 out of 69 respondents had a need for a special approach regarding food and out of them, 9 were vegetarians or vegans (one did eat fish). Allergies were present in only two of the cases, whereas lactose and gluten intolerance was a problem for 6 and 4 respondents accordingly. Two customers had special guidelines for eating due to health problems (e.g recovery from surgery). The other part of the question focused on whether their problems actually became „a problem“, or did they find it easy to eat as they needed. Some issues were raised here:

- Not enough options for vegans;
- Poor options for vegetarians – at some lunches, they felt they should eat salads only. It was pointed out that vegetarian food should not consist of vegetables only, but also needs some protein, like pasta, for example;
- Lactose-free milk had to be asked for especially during lunch and dinner;
- There were no clear markings for lactose and gluten free food – this mistake had already been corrected by April 2014.

When the healthiness of the offered food was asked about, the opinions were almost equally divided in two – 34 respondents rated the food healthy or rather healthy, and 35 found that there were issues that needed correcting. The generalization of their suggestions can be divided as follows:

Figure 9. Issues connected to healthiness of the food (compiled by the author).



The dominating comment here is about the fattiness of the food – those comments centered around the fact, that there was lots of visible oil underneath the meat, sauces were too heavy and fatty and there were no possibilities to eat lighter options as even the soups sometimes had visible fat on top of them. People also brought out the presence of heavy meats too often as well as the need to add more fresh salads. It was also brought out that some of the dishes were too salty. 5 respondents rated the food quite or very unhealthy. The presence of half-fabricated foods was noticed by two respondents. Surprisingly, another two respondents felt that there was not enough options to choose from. Those findings show that the excessive fat in food is actually noticed by the customers and they would long for something lighter.

Another interesting point emerges from the explanations of those who thought the healthiness of the food was all right – people seem to be unable to rate the food correctly from the perspective of healthiness. Some of the most colourful comments were the following:

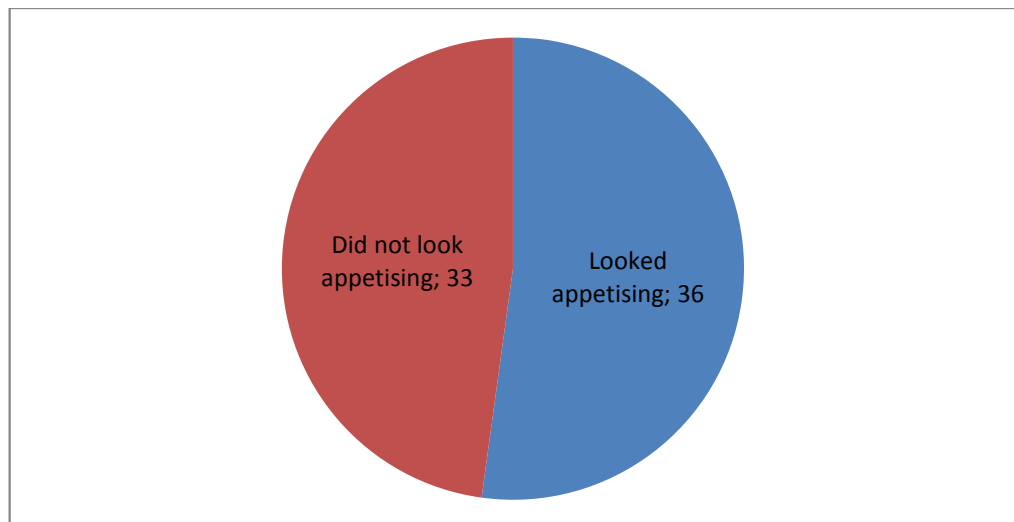
- *The food is healthy. Everything is there, the meat and salad and the potatoes are boiled.*
- *I think it was healthy. There was fruit cocktail with the dessert (from the can, of course).*

- *There was lots of food, so it was healthy, I think.*

These comments along with many similar show, that people are not actually able to separate what is healthy and what is not. Many probably think the role model of food from their childhood table is the norm or automatically presume, that if there is something that resembles a fruit or vegetable, then everything is fine. For those, if the food offered is not from MacDonaldis or a hot dog from a gas station, they seem to consider it healthy enough – probably because it looks and is homely – and we all have a perception, that homely food is the best – although, in most cases, it might not be so. Lack of knowledge hereby might be one of the problems the spa in a longer perspective could deal with. Maybe the actual showcasing of the energy and fat content (in comparison with the amount it originally should be) of the food eaten could be a start that might discourage some people from overeating.

The feelings about the appearance of the offered food (whether it looked appetising or not) also got two groups of different opinions:

Figure 10. The appearance of the offered food (compiled by the author).



Surprisingly, the two groups are almost equal. The reasons for this may be in the fact, that some people do not pay much attention to food – if it does not look and taste literally hideously, they do not find that there is anything to complain about. The same trend as in the previous questions seems to be present here – some people like to see

food that is familiar and homely. Yet, the other group brought out several issues regarding the appearance of the food:

- More fresh and colourful products to brighten up the looks;
- More garnish – the food is just placed in the hot trays and nothing has been done to make it look beautiful;
- Disorganized, messy after a bunch of eaters;
- The food is dried and lost its looks after having been laid out for a while; it was also said to have affected taste;
- The food looked simply bad, was stated by two respondents; they also said they did not eat much of anything, because everything was so greasy;
- *The food actually tastes better than it looks. The looks of the food did not say „eat me“.*
- Buffet was not considered to be the best option to make dishes look appetising, which is right, of course – the tray starts to look messy on the same second the first person digs in;
- *Visible oil layer underneath the meat was visually very repulsive;*
- One respondent mentioned, that the looks of the food was fine, but the strong smell of fish was simply disgusting;
- Three respondents said they would have expected something interesting, not the „usual everyday food“;

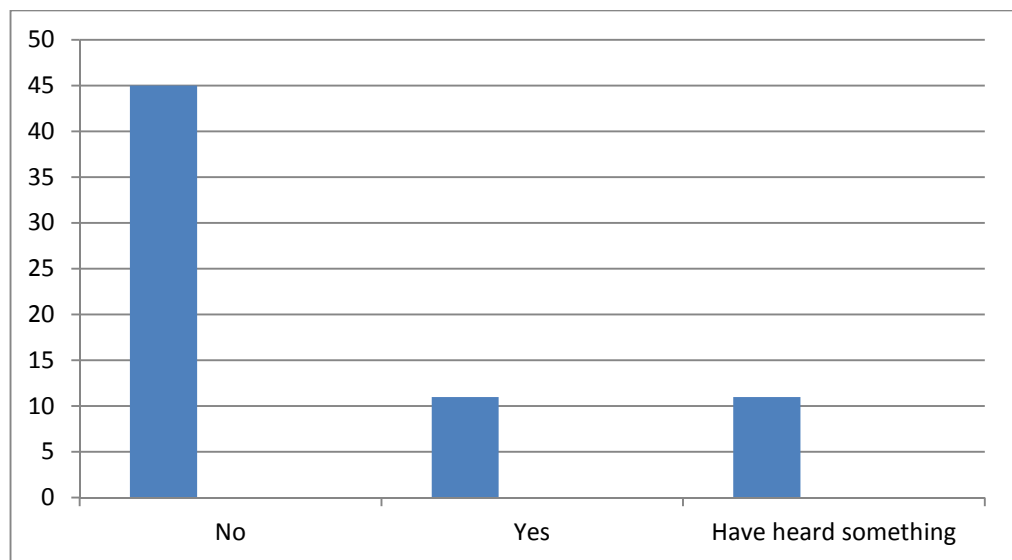
These comments leave no doubt, that there is room for improvement. The suggestions for that are discussed in chapter 3.

In the question about the most satisfying and biggest disappointment regarding meals, 30 respondents said they can not bring out anything specific and / or the overall impressions are given in the answers to other questions. From the comments of those 39 who had something to say, the biggest disappointment was the fattiness of food – 15 respondents mentioned this. Another issue was the lack of fresh fish and poultry (meaning too much red meat). There were also problems with the service – it was brought out, that it was rushing and impatient towards customers and thus affected the

entire experience. The biggest satisfaction levels regarded breakfast, which is not under investigation here, but raised an interesting issue – in 8 cases it was said that breakfast really created great expectations, and the lunch and dinner that followed were then seriously disappointing and the levels incomparable. The saltiness of food was mentioned in 5 cases – it was suggested, that people can add their own salt and there is no need to make the food so salty in the beginning – which is coherent with the findings from the menu analysis. The food was dull and too similar every day, nothing surprising, according to 7 respondents. Although coffee can be bought from the restaurant, 5 respondents thought it would be normal to have coffee included in the lunch and dinner. It was also mentioned that the dishes were not warm enough.

When it comes to the knowledge of customers regarding spa cuisine, clearly the majority do not know anything – here are the answers to the question „Have you heard about the concept of spa cuisine?“:

Figure 11. The customers` knowledge about spa cuisine as a concept (compiled by the author).



In this case the results depict a need to educate guests on spa cuisine as a concept, so they would understand, that the food offered in spas can and should be of a lighter kind.

When asked about what comes to their minds first when thinking about the food offered in spas, can be seen on a word cloud below:

Figure 12. Word cloud depicting the first thoughts of customers on the topic of spa cuisine (compiled by the author).



As can be seen, the first that comes to their mind, is healthiness – so it is important, that the food in a spa would actually be healthy – otherwise we are risking to deceive the customers` expectations. Diversity, lightness, freshness and low calorie content were also among the most popular first ideas. Surprisingly, not many mentioned diet – in some other countries, according to the theoretical part of this work, diet food is the first thing related to spa cuisine. Vegetables were considered an important item, as well as buffet-style food – this is probably because all Estonian spas serve buffet in some way and people are used to it. Local products were also related to spa food, whereas balanced and seasonal, opposed to the thoughts of the spa chefs, were mentioned less.

As for improvement suggestions, 28 could not give any, but 41 customers gave the following comments (generalized, if one answer was present several times, it is counted as one):

- *Raise the price – I would be willing to pay more for true quality product;*
- *Why not buy meat and vegetables from local farmers and mention it on the menu?*
- More fresh products, make more of the food from scratch;
- More options for people with lactose intolerance;
- More fish and chicken dishes;

- *Ask more for the opinion of customers, day to day and dish to dish;*
- Give more options to choose from;
- More local products, clearer markings on where the food comes from (is it Estonian or not);
- *More salads – interesting salads, not just grated carrots;*
- *Fish could be one option on every meal;*
- *I would like to see the calorie content of the dishes;*
- Less fat and oil to be used while cooking;
- *More vegetarian options – everyone can eat them, but vegetarians can not eat meat!;*
- Less pork, more beef;
- More vegetables;

From these answers can be seen, that actually the thoughts of customers are rather similar to the ones of the author after analysing the menu. This proves, that though not all, at least half of the population probably understands the issues the buffet food has at the moment and is able to give reasonable suggestions without even having seen the calculations or knowing the nutritive or calorific values of the dishes.

Based on both the menu analysis and the customer survey, the following chapter focuses on putting together a clear set of recommendations for Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort to improve the buffet menu so, that it would become an example of spa cuisine rather than a regular example of Estonian home food.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE ANALYZED MENU

Based on the menu analysis as well as opinions and suggestions given by the customers, the author hereby includes a set of recommendations on improving the menu so that it finally could be called a representative example of spa cuisine as it is known internationally.

The work revealed several problematic issues, the most important ones being the following:

- In general, the knowledge and willingness to follow the principles of spa cuisine is present among Estonian spa chefs, but the real world often limits the possibilities – price, availability, strict budget, climate;
- The food offered is too high in calories;
- The food offered is too high in fat and protein content;
- Too much salt is used in preparing food;
- Too much red meat is used in the dishes;
- Too many canned products and artificial sauce and dessert powders as well as broth cubes are used;
- Too little attention is paid to vegetarians and vegans;
- The customers` knowledge about healthy food is somewhat poor;
- The customers tend to overeat;
- Some of the offered drinks are made using very large amounts of sugar;
- The menu is not sustainable;
- The menu does not have the qualities of spa cuisine as they are internationally known.

First of all, as this study has proven, customers are lacking knowledge on how to eat healthily and they do not know much about spa cuisine as a concept – which was also one of the assumptions made by the author beforehand. This is coherent with the findings in theoretical part, stating that many individuals are lacking knowledge on junk food facts and often tend to view healthier food choices as something unnatural and unpleasant (Ashakiran, 2012; Stevenson et al, 2007). Educating them as well as employees on the topic could in the long term create a competitive advantage. Healthy eating principles could be introduced in booklets or in the information sets in the hotel rooms. If the standards of spa cuisine are achieved, the information on this could be found from the buffet restaurant. It is important for the customers to understand, that spa food does not – or at least should not – mean the usual home food. However, the criteria consumers use to make their consumption choices, as well as the value consumers award to different qualities of the food are based, amongst others, on personal preferences, experiences and goals; perceived or actual needs and resources available to meet these needs; as well as a suite of social, cultural and policy-related factors (Piscopo, 2013). So this topic in case of spas could give ideas for further studies.

The overeating of customers is another problem – both from the viewpoints of sustainability as well as healthiness – hard to deal with while offering buffet meals and proves the theory by Sloan & LeGrand (2009), stating that a normal part of the Western diet are the portion sizes that could feed two. This seems to be a certain kind of epidemic in our society on its own and could also be linked to the theory about the need of people to achieve „a clean plate“, eating everything regardless of any feelings of satiety (Macdiarmid et al, 2013). This might also come from the childhood for many people – probably every one of us has been said to finish all the food on the plate while being a child. This could contribute to sustainability by lowering food wastage, but can not be considered a healthy approach. The customer education is the key in this case as well. The possibility mentioned before about the sequence of foods – beginning the buffet line with the healthier ones – is still a viable option. A friendly reminder to take only as much food as one needs and actually can finish could also be considered. Yet, it must be kept in mind, that knowledge alone probably will not change dietary habits, but the choices and decisions made about healthy eating are also competing against the food environment, which often has different messages and attractions (Macdiarmid et al,

2013; Brewis & Jack, 2005). According to that theory, it would be important to ensure the healthy food environment as well as educate eaters on what they should or should not eat. An entirely restrictive approach probably would not seem very friendly or inviting to the customers, who might feel, that they have been put to a diet without wanting it. The number of respondents in this study who felt that the offered food was healthy enough, are a proof for that. The author thus believes, that the ideas by Ares et al (2013), stating first and foremost moving the emphasis on the positive and holistic view on the links between eating and wellbeing, should also be the preferred path for spa hotels.

Little can probably be done with the issues regarding budget, that creates barriers to using local and fresh products at all times – raising the price would probably be the only option here. As this was also one of the suggestions given by some of the customers, maybe it is worth considering – surely it would open up several possibilities for offering products higher in quality and therefore enhance the customer satisfaction. This is somewhat controversial to the theory, in which it was learned, that people have become used to cheap food, and would rather spend on something else than foodstuff (Sloan & LeGrand, 2009). This maybe is the case with home food, but the results of this study show, that there is at least a certain group of customers, who do not mind paying for a quality product while on vacation. This segment could also be responsive to food-related marketing in the future.

It is important, that the customers would be able to see the ingredients used as well as energy and nutrients content in every single dish served – in many cases these probably could be the factor to limit overeating as well. The knowledge of food composition is important because of its repercussion on the nutritional status and thus health (Munoz, 2013). It is good, that lactose and gluten free foods are marked already, so this would be a logical addition.

Regarding the high fat level that the menu contains, several suggestions can be given:

- To overlook the preparation process and eliminate methods that make food unnecessarily calorific (e.g deep-frying the frozen breaded fish – it could be changed to a steamed fillet). Steaming, boiling or grilling are

the most preferred preparation methods. The use of fritter should be stopped and the products, that need fritting to look good, substituted with healthier alternatives.

- To carefully analyse the fat content in the products and to use meat that has no visible fat (e.g pork fillet instead of neck chops, removing chicken skin before preparation);
- To lose heavy desserts, like creams and cakes made of dessert powders (those require a lot of added oil for making); instead, spa desserts should and could be of a lighter kind – sorbets, fruits, berries, jellys, yogurts to name some;
- Fish and chicken (or other poultry) should dominate over red meats such as pork, beef and lamb;
- If a red meat is served, it should not be accompanied by cheese, cream sauce or other side dishes high in fat content.

Another option, that could be at least partially considered, is following some of the suggestions of a Nordic diet, which is mainly based on traditional Nordic foods, such as fish, low-fat dairy products, whole grain cereals, mushrooms, berries, rapeseed oil and low-fat wild meat (Adamsson et al, 2012).

In order to decrease the huge amount of salt in the menu, first of all the use of half-fabricated foods and canned products should be decreased. Broths could be made from scratch instead of using cubes (one of those contains 1 gram of salt per 2 grams of product!). The overall amounts added in the cooking process should also be decreased, as every person has the possibility to add salt, if he or she wishes to do so. The foods then would not be as salty to begin with. Instead seasoning the dishes with herbs and natural spices could be considered as a healthier alternative, that could also create some unique and creative dishes.

The lack of vegetarian / vegan options in the menu especially at lunch is another point that needs correction. The solution here could be in the soup offered at lunch – it could be suitable for vegetarians as well, e.g containing no meat. This would also help with

the excessive fat and protein levels in the menu, because vegetarian soups are generally lighter and non-vegetarians actually do not have issues eating food that does not contain meat. Therefore, even considering replacing some of the meat options with vegetarian ones could be a possibility – it is not necessary to eat meat several times daily. Decreasing the amount of meat could also create a link with a theory by De Boer et al (2007), who claimed, that smaller quantities of meat can contribute to sustainability.

As for the meats used, lighter options such as chicken fillet, turkey, rabbit, fresh white fish (not breaded) could replace at least one third of the red meats used at the moment.

The side dishes should be lighter in nature – instead of potatoes and spaghetti, interesting new possibilities like quinoa could be tried, or just vegetable woks, for example, especially when the main protein is heavy in nature. When pasta or rice is involved, whole grain varieties should be used.

The use of canned products in some cases is probably inevitable, but unnecessary items such as canned exotic fruits that are also very high in sugar content and due to that, calories as well, should be ruled out from the menu. The alternative in winter could be frozen local berries, for example. In case of Estonia during wintertime the use of canned products is understandable, so here more attention could be paid to using home-made conserved items (cucumbers, pumpkins, jams etc). One possibility is to actually make them on the spot – which probably would be very exclusive in the case of a relatively big hotel. The other option is to turn to local farmers and try to use as much of their products as possible, also giving proper references about their origin. During spring, summer and autumn as much fresh products as possible should be used instead of canned ones.

From here we also come to the painful subject of local and seasonal products in the case of Estonia. The best suggestion here is probably to use them as much as possible when possible, and follow the belief, that even frozen local is still better than something brought in from Spain, for example. The use of local and / or farm products could also be marked, as well as the origins for all the rest of the food. Locality of food is becoming a factor more and more discussed, as reflected also in the Food Trends for 2014 (National Restaurant Association, 2013). The findings of this study have also

proved the importance of it, so seeking the possibilities to use local products should be continuous.

The use of dessert and sauce powders should be stopped. These are products that can hardly be called food at all and often require lots of oil for making. In a spa, it is not even necessary to ensure the presence of heavy sauces, creams and cakes, which usually are the outcome from those powders. As mentioned before, desserts should and could be of a lighter kind.

The same point of zero tolerance goes for the half-fabricated products, such as breaded frozen fish or ready-to-go meat products. They are unnecessarily salty and high in fat, not to mention the content of additives. Even a cheaper kind of fresh product is healthier in nature.

If these suggestions are followed, it should as a side effect make the food automatically more sustainable as well, regarding the use of processed foods and local products. Widening the use of organic products to lunches and dinners could still be considered as an option, although it brings us back to the price factor.

Regarding the drinks offered, the situation is actually good, regarding the fact that no „artificial“ drinks are offered. Some suggestions can still be given. Water could be fused with various fruits, berries and vegetables (cucumber) or with mint to add both flavours and colour. In the case of juice drinks, it is good, that some of them are ecological, but as they still contain a huge amount of sugar, the use of them could be considered. In this case, the customers could also see the amount of sugar in their drink so they would be able to make more conscious choices.

Mostly from the customer survey emerged the suggestion to use more fresh products and interesting salads. Here, one of the options could be an opportunity to mix the salads according to everyone`s own wishes, giving a certain selection of ingredients to choose from – this approach can already be seen a lot in buffet restaurants in Estonia. This could also deprive some of the customers from eating too many unhealthy options.

Regarding variety, uniqueness and creativity, one of the possibilities for improvement could be changing the menu every week according to what is fresh, seasonal and available at the moment instead of keeping the same menu for a year.

It is understandable, that it is very difficult to put all those recommendations to practice at once, but introducing them would definitely result in what was looked for in this work – a menu, that can be called a spa cuisine example, instead of being an example of usual home food, which the researched one basically is at the moment.

CONCLUSION

The topic of food, nutrition and healthy eating as well as spa cuisine in the context of Estonia is proven to be a complex and diverse issue. The spas because of their deeper meaning related to healing, renewal, rejuvenation, are the places where the healthy eating environment should be ensured. To be able to offer a holistic healthy food experience, it is important, that all the food in a spa, not only a la carte or breakfast selection, would be equally high in quality and prepared with care and consideration of widely accepted standards described in the theoretical part of this work and set historically.

The main research question and the aim of this work was to determine, how healthy is the buffet food offered in Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort and how could it be made healthier. The term “healthy” in this work was defined by the the literature review, meaning basically consuming all the different groups of nutrients in the right quantities (Nestle, 2007). In order to answer the research question, the author analyzed both the exact ingredients used in the menu from the viewpoint of basic nutrients as well as the opinions of customers who actually ate the food offered. To understand the big picture, the author also asked expert evaluations on the subject of spa cuisine from four spa chefs of well-known Estonian spas.

From this research it became clear, that there are various issues in the case of Estonian spa cuisine that need improving and could be improved. The author of this work thereby offered a set of recommendations on how it could be done and thus hopes to encourage all spa businesses to have a careful look on all the aspects of food offered in their businesses. Studies have shown that spa hotel guests do expect freshly-prepared and healthy foods and the importance of nutrition is growing (Girtlioglu et al, 2014;

Tabacchi, 2010). So making an effort towards improvement should be considered a priority for all spa businesses.

It is important, that the menu analysis and the feedback from customers largely depicted the same findings – the question in this case study was looked at from two different angles and the two methodologies finally came to the same answer. This opens up an interesting opportunity for a spa business to actually go for improvement and maybe try new approaches – it is true, that not all customers nor employees may not yet be ready for it, but otherwise, it is probably hard to develop at all. As the management of Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort has expressed their interest and willingness to work on the topic, the results of this work are believed to be very useful for further development. The author has been asked to present the results and recommendations of this study to the catering department of Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort, which hopefully concludes in at least some of the given recommendations put into practice over time.

It can be said that based on the findings from a representative example, the spa cuisine in Estonia is something a whole lot different from international standards. It is existing as the food offered in the spas, of course, but cannot be called a concept easy to define – which it may have seemed to be according to the theoretical background of this work. The reasons do not lay in the lack of knowledge or willingness of the spas, but rather in the factors that are very difficult to change, such as budget for buffet food or even the preferences of customers. But as the buffet is still the best example of an entire catering policy in a spa, it should not be left unattended next to the a la carte options, for example.

The study has shown, that many people long for a different food experience from a spa – and are often disappointed not to get it. The willingness of some customers to pay more for high quality food is also an encouraging sign. It is possible, that introducing all the changes at once may somewhat be scary to the customers, especially those who tend to visit several times a year, but making changes and introducing new approaches step by step should still conclude in the desired outcome in the long term.

As described in the theoretical part of this work, the world is currently going through a change in the feeding patterns, which may lead to a higher incidence of overweight,

obesity, and non-communicable chronic diseases (Munoz, 2013). The discoveries made by this thesis prove, that the eating habits of people as well as the food offered to them in many ways contribute to that trend. This work also agrees with the point made by Gustafsson et al (2011), that there is a disconnect between the well-known guidelines for healthy eating and the real world, as the two in the context of this study do not fit together very well. Obviously, everyone – both the caterers and customers – know, what is right and what is not, but there are many barriers to achieving the ideal that need continuous work. Balance could be the keyword in this case, just as it is in the case of spa cuisine – according to Taylor & Taylor (1990), balance between enjoying food and eating healthy.

As the literature review has clearly shown, the links between healthy eating and the pursuit to holistic wellness are inseparable from each other. Thus they should also be an inseparable part of a spa experience. Ensuring this is a challenge without a doubt, but if accepted, can definitely result in long-term advantages for a spa enterprise. Hopefully this work has provided enough inspiration to pay more attention to the topics related to food and eating in the context of wellness.

The author is confident that the research question posed in this thesis was answered and the research task – to give recommendations for improvement – fulfilled. Yet, as food and nutrition are very diverse topics, especially in the context of spa industry, this thesis hopefully can also give ideas for further studies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Pictures of Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort and the buffet menu examples.



Pictures 1a & 1b. Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort.



Pictures 2a & 2b. Standard room and the buffet table.



Pictures 3a & 3b. The view from the swimming pool and the tower cafe.



Pictures 4a & 4b. Buffet menu examples.



Pictures 5a & 5b. Buffet menu examples.



Pictures 6a & 6b. Buffet menu examples.



Pictures 7a & 7b. Buffet menu examples.

Appendix 2. The analyzed buffet menu of Pühajärve Spa & Holiday Resort

MONDAY

Lunch

Fish soup with fennel and tomatoes
Meatloaf with sundried tomatoes, mustard sauce
Mashed potatoes, spaghetti, selection of fresh salads
Sourcream-halvah cream with lingonberry jam

Dinner

Beef casserole, selection of fresh salads
Couscous with vegetables
Selection of fruits

TUESDAY

Lunch

Turkey soup with lentils
Pork in blackberry marinade, broth sauce, oven-baked potatoes, buckwheat
Selection of fresh salads
Milk custard with jam

Dinner

Breaded fish fillet, tar-tar sauce, potato gratin
Tagliatelle with beef tongue
Selection of fruits, crumble cake with apples

WEDNESDAY

Lunch

Borscht
Chicken schnitzel, smoked bellpepper sauce
Mashed potatoes, rice, selection of fresh salads
Divinity cream with milk

Dinner

Lamb kebab, onion sauce
Oven-baked potatoes, buckwheat, selection of fresh salads
Spaghetti with vegetables
Cake

THURSDAY

Lunch

Minced meat soup with potatoes and bacon
Pork fillet with cheese and onions, broth sauce
Boiled potatoes, spaghetti, selection of fresh salads
Cottage cheese dessert

Dinner

Fish lasagna
Selection of fresh salads
Spicy vegetable casserole with salad cheese
Spongecake with dried fruits

FRIDAY**Lunch**

Cheese soup with ham, onions and croutons
Chicken casserole
Mashed potatoes, rice, selection of fresh salads
Berry soup with cottage cheese

Dinner

Beef liver stroganoff , oven-baked potatoes
Rice-vegetable wok with spinach
Selection of fresh salads
Crumble cake with cherries

SATURDAY**Lunch**

Pork soup with pasta and parmesan
Fish steak, lemon-butter sauce
Boiled potatoes, rice, selection of fresh salads
Strawberry cream with cookie crush

Dinner

Pork tenderloin in cream sauce
Herb-roasted potatoes, steamed vegetables
Bread pudding with raspberries and caramel

SUNDAY**Lunch**

Vegetable puree soup
Ham and cheese pocket with cream sauce
Buckwheat, spaghetti, selection of fresh salads
Yoghurt jelly with honey apples

Dinner

Cabbage-chicken stew
Boiled potatoes, rice, selection of fresh salads
Potato cutlet with mushroom filling
Ice-cream with sauce

All meals offer ice water and juice drinks (sea-buckthorn and wildberry). Dinner also offers tea.

Appendix 3. An example of a recipe calculation used for the menu analysis.

23.04.2014 15:09:01

1

Retsepti printimine

Toote nimi

TK = 1,000 TK

Kogus

1

Retsept	Toode	Neto
	Rõngu siirupid	2,000
	Leib näki	3,000
	Võideks / või	5,000
	Kurk	40,000
	Mugulsibul punane, valge	20,000
	Veiniädikas/ balsamiko	0,100
	Oliivõli	2,000
	Salati köögiviljad	50,000
	Külmutatud köögiviljad	50,000
	Itaalia kaste	0,400
	Kalasupp fenkoli ja tomatiga	1,000
	Pikkpoiss päiksekuivatatud tomatitega	1,000
	Hapukoore halvaakreem pohlamoosiga	1,000

Retsept	Toode	Neto
	Sai	20,000
	Kartul must	277,440
	Hakkliha	180,000
	Heigifilee külmutatud	50,000
	Hapukoor	145,000
	Vispi köögikreem&vahukoor	1,260
	Margarin	6,000
	Piim	44,500
	Võideks / või	13,900
	Küüslauk	6,690
	Kurk	40,000
	Külmutatud köögiviljad	50,000
	Porru	33,950
	Mugulsibul punane, valge	53,250
	Küpsised/ Halvaa	20,000
	Spagetid	38,000
	Suhkur	10,000
	Tärklis (kartuli)	2,700
	Keedis,pannkoogi, vaarika, maa	35,000
	Veiniädikas/ balsamiko	0,100
	Fondid, puljongipulbrid	0,610
	Itaalia kaste	0,400
	Maitseainete segu	4,180
	Sinep	5,000

Nimi _____

Allkiri _____

Appendix 4. Questionnaire for the customer survey.

Dear Spa customer,

The following questionnaire was created by a masters student of the University of Tartu Pärnu College with the aim to support Estonian spa hotels in offering quality spa cuisine and learn about customer`s thoughts and perceptions on this topic. I kindly ask you to answer those questions and am very grateful for your attention and help!

1. What is your gender?
 - Female
 - Male
2. Which age group do you belong to?
 - ...-25
 - 25-35
 - 35-45
 - 45-55
 - 55-65
 - 65-75
 - 75 and older
3. What kind of meals were included in your package during your stay?
 - Breakfast
 - Lunch
 - Dinner
4. Do you have any special conditions regarding food (like allergies, intolerance of some products etc)? Please name them and if you have any, please specify, were they taken into consideration during your stay.
5. Would you rate the food offered in your package healthy? Please explain, why or why not.
6. Was the offered food well-presented and looked nice and appetising? If not, then what did you not like?
7. What were you most satisfied about when considering food and what disappointed you the most?
8. Are you familiar with the concept of spa cuisine?
 - Yes
 - No
 - I have heard something

9. What comes to your mind first when you think about spa cuisine?
10. How do you think the food could be improved in this spa hotel?
11. Do you believe that food is an essential part of personal wellbeing?
 - Very important – I think about it every day
 - Not so important, I do not think about food too much
 - Not important – I do not think about food at all
12. How often do you go to spas and what is usually the main reason for visiting?

Thank You!

Please leave the filled questionnaire in the hotel reception on departure.

Appendix 5. Results of the interviews with spa chefs (shortened).

Question	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4
Are you familiar with the term „spa cuisine“?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
What do you think are the most common characteristics of Estonian Spa Cuisine these days?	Locality. Considering customers` wishes.	Everyday, homely food. Attention to price rather than healthiness.	Natural flavours, quality products, balanced nutritive value.	Cheap home food. Does not take healthiness into account.
What is the most important factor to consider for you when putting together spa menus for customers?	Diversity. Fish, vegetables every day.	Easy preparation, good price. Healthiness.	Availability of products, quality for good price.	Flavour profiles of guests, food trends.
Can the customers see the caloricity and nutrient ratio of foods and the origin of products used for cooking in your spa?	No. Only Estonian products are marked at breakfast.	No.	No.	No.
Do you often use canned foods, dessert and sauce powders, prefabricated foods? If yes, what is the main reason?	Rarely. Only some fish products.	Some we use (canned products, half-fabricated products).	Yes, about 50% of products can be considered something of a kind. Long presevation time, easy and quick to handle.	Very rarely.
What is the meaning of healthy food in your opinion?	Balanced, rich in fibres.	Temperant eating, tasty, seasonal, balanced.	No oil, natural, seasonal, local. Balanced menus. Boiling, stewing, steaming rather than frying.	Local, seasonal, healthy methods for cooking
Would you rate the food offered in your company healthy?	Yes.	Yes – but it is often the people who just eat too much.	Not really, not the buffet, because of the strict budget.	Rather yes.
Do you have special menus for people with various issues connected to food (allergies, gluten or lactose intolerance, vegetarians)?	Yes – allergies, gluten and lactose intolerance, diabetics, vegetarians. Foods are marked accordingly.	Yes.	No, but we will make special food when required beforehand. Vegetarians options are present, suitable foods for people with lactose/gluten intolerance are marked.	No – but if needed, we will prepare the food according to the guest`s needs.
Should the food offered in spas be made firsthand from local and fresh products or do you consider this not so important?	Yes, it is important.	Yes, it could be.	Yes.	Yes.
What in your opinion is the biggest obstacle in using local, fresh and natural ingredients?	Availability. Price.	Availability and amounts – not possible to order as much as needed	Only certain kinds of vegetables available. Bureaucracy. Price.	Price. Availability and logistics as well.

<p>Are you familiar with current trends in international gastronomy and take them into account in your everyday work? If yes, please specify.</p>	<p>Yes, mainly we try to introduce the local food culture and use local products.</p>	<p>Yes.</p>	<p>Yes. Scandinavian trends, because of the clientele.</p>	<p>Yes, I constantly try to follow the international trends.</p>
<p>Have you worked in any other spa hotels or just one?</p>	<p>Only one.</p>	<p>Yes, I have worked in another spa – no major differences.</p>	<p>Only one.</p>	<p>Only one spa, but I have visited almost all of them – differences are related to type – medical/wellness and sometimes there are even cultural differences regarding food in different geographic locations in Estonia.</p>

KOKKUVÕTE

SPAATOITLUSTUSE (SPA CUISINE) ARENDAMINE PÜHAJÄRVE SPA & PUHKEKESKUSE NÄITEL

Toitu võib vaadata kui üht olulisimat asja kogu maailmas – me kõik vajame seda tahtest sõltumatult. Isikliku heaolu suunas ei ole võimalik püüelda ilma tervislikku toitumist kaasamata. On mõistetav, et spaad kui kohad, mille põhikontseptsiooniks on tervisliku elustiili ideede kandmine, peaksid pakkuma toitu, mis toetab neid ideid ning on oma olemuselt tervislik ja jätkusuutlik. Spaast saadud toidukogemus võiks olla inspiratsiooniks üldiste toitumisharjumuste muutmisel.

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärgiks oli välja selgitada, kui tervislik on Pühajärve Spa & Puhkekeskuses pakutav lõuna- ja õhtusöökide buffeemenüü ning kuidas oleks võimalik muuta seda tervislikumaks. Buffeemenüü on valitud just seetõttu, et üldiselt on see madalama eelarvega segment, mille koostisele ning arendamisele pööratakse palju vähem tähelepanu, kui näiteks *a la carte* menüüle ja selle toorainetele. Pühajärve on siinkohal valitud Eesti spaaturgu üldiselt esindavaks näiteks.

Spa cuisine kui terviklik kontseptsioon ei ole Eestis veel väga tuntud ega levinud. Seetõttu oli vajalik uurida, milline on hetkeolukord, kuidas oleks võimalik seda parendada, millised on perspektiivid edasiseks arenguks ning millised on peamised takistused. Selleks seadis töö autor järgmised eesmärgid:

- Võrrelda Eesti spaatoitlustuse näidet rahvusvaheliste *spa cuisine* standarditega;
- Uurida klientide arvamusi pakutava toidu kohta ning nende teadlikkust spaatoitlustuse kui nähtuse suhtes;
- Anda soovitusi uuritud menüünäidiste tervislikumaks muutmiseks.

Nende eesmärkide saavutamiseks antakse töö esimeses osas teoreetiline ülevaade tervislikust toidust ja toitumisest, sellega seotud probleemidest, spaatoitlustusest kui nähtusest ning selle arengust, jätkusuutlikkusega seotud küsimustest ning ka hetketrendidest gastronoomias ning nende mõjust turismile ning majutusteenust pakkuvatele ettevõtetele.

Et saada parem ülevaade uuritava teema laiematest tagamaadest, küsitles autor eksperthinnangute saamiseks ka nelja tuntud Eesti spaa peakokkasid.

Uuritava menüünäite tervislikkuse hindamiseks analüüsis autor kalkulatsioonide alusel seitsme päeva lõuna- ja õhtusööke NutriData programmi abiga. Tähtsamateks hindamiskriteeriumiteks olid toidu kaloraaž, valkude, rasvade ja süsivesikute sisaldus, soolasisaldus ning lisaks poolfabrikaatide, konservide ning kastme- ja magustoidupulbrite kasutamise sagedus.

Et hinnata olukorda ehk kõige tähtsamast – kliendi seisukohast, viidi uuritavast ettevõttes läbi kliendiuuring, mille eesmärgiks oli välja selgitada, mida kliendid toidu puhul hindavad, mis on valmistanud neile pettumuse, millised oleksid nende soovitud olukorra parandamiseks, kas nad on kursis spaatoitlustuse kui eraldiseisva nähtusega ning kuivõrd esineb neil toiduga seotud eriseisundeid (nt allergiad).

Töös, mis oma olemuselt on juhtumianalüüs (*case study*), on kasutatud nii kvalitatiivseid kui kvantitatiivseid uurimismeetodeid, et saada võimalikult mitmekülgne ja laiapõhjaline ülevaade.

Menüüanalüüsi ning kliendiuuringu tulemuste põhjal esitas töö autor soovitud uuritava menüü parendamiseks, et muuta see tervislikumaks ning ühtlasi vastava(ma)ks rahvusvahelistele *spa cuisine* standarditele.

Peamised probleemid, mille esinemine leidis uuringu käigus kinnitust, on järgnevad:

- Eesti spaakokkadel on olemas nii tahe kui ka teadmised tervisliku toidu serveerimiseks, kuid tegelik olukord seab piirangud – hind, saadavus, ranged eelarved, kliima;
- Pakutava toidu kaloraaž on soovituslikust kõrgem;
- Pakutava toidu rasva- ja valgusisaldus on soovituslikust kõrgem;
- Pakutava toidu soolasisaldus on liialt kõrge; samuti mõnede jookide suhkrusisaldus;
- Toitudes kasutatakse sageli liiga suurtes kogustes punast liha;
- Toitudes kasutatakse liiga palju konserve ja kastme-, magustoidu- ning puljongipulbreid;

- Vähe tähelepanu pööratakse taimetoitlastele, kelle hulk elanikkonnas on järjest kasvamas;
- Klientide teadlikkus tervislikust toitumisest jätab sageli soovida;
- Klientidel on buffeelaudades kombeks süüa tervislikkuse seisukohast liiga palju;
- Menüü ei ole planeeritud jätkusuutlikult;
- Menüü ei ole hetkel vastav spaatoitlustuse rahvusvahelistele standarditele.

Oluline on märkida, et nii menüüanalüüs kui ka kliendiuuring jõudsid suures osas samade tulemusteni, mis oli loodetud eesmärgiks ka erinevate uurimismeetodite valikul.

Olulisemad menüü ning üldise olukorra parendamiseks antud soovitused olid järgnevad:

- Kliente ning ka ettevõtte töötajaid tuleks harida, et paraneks teadlikkus tervisliku toitumise põhialustest ning spaatoitlustuse olemusest. Kliendid peaksid mõistma, et spaatoit ja tavatoit ei ole – või ei peaks olema – üks ja seesama. Nõuandeid toitumise parandamiseks võiks jagada vastavatel infolehtedel ja/või hotelli toamappides. Sealjuures peaks n.ö keelava ja välistava lähenemise asemel rõhutama enam just positiivset ja holistilist lähenemist toitumisele ja selle seostele üldise heaoluga.
- Klientide liigsöömise tendentsi poolt tingitud ohtude vähendamiseks võiks kaaluda toitude paigutusjärjekorra ümberkorraldamist selliselt, et tervislikud valikud oleksid esimesed, kuna eelnevad uuringud on näidanud, et järjekorras esimesi toite tarbitakse tavaliselt kõige enam. Seda toetavad ka autori poolt tehtud vaatlused.
- Piirangutega, mida seab paikapandud eelarve, on üldiselt raske midagi ette võtta. Lihtsaim lahendus oleks ilmselt tõsta hinda – kuna ka mõned kliendid seda soovitasid, ei tasuks seda võimalust välistada. Siiski on varasemates uuringutes väidetud, et inimesed on viimastel aastakümnetel üldiselt harjunud odava toiduga ning kulutavad raha pigem millelegi muule.
- Toidu kaloraaž ning toitaineline koostis peaks olema klientidele nähtaval iga roa puhul – lisaks informatiivsele väärtusele võib see välistada ka ülesöömise.
- Toidu valmistusmeetodid peaksid olema sellised, mis ei lisa asjatult kaloreid – vältima peaks nt friteerimist ja õlis praadimist. Eelistatud valmistusviisid on

keetmine, aurutamine ja küpsetamine *sous vide* või omas mahlas, samuti grillimine.

- Kasutataval lihal ei tohiks olla nähtavat rasva, kanal tuleks eemaldada nahk.
- Olemuselt rasked ja rasvarikkad magustoidud (koogid, keeksid, kreemid jm) võiks asendada kergematega, nagu näiteks sorbeed, tarretised, puuviljad.
- Kala ja kana (või muu linnuliha) peaks nädala lõikes domineerima punase liha üle. Kui pearoaks on punane liha, näiteks siga või veis, ei peaks lisandid olema rasked (nt koorekastmed, kartulid, juust). Kartuli kasutamine igal toidukorral ei ole ilmtingimata vajalik – kaaluda võiks ka põnevamaid lisandeid nagu näiteks kinoa, samuti lihtsalt aedviljad või wokid – eriti kui liha on olemuselt raske. Pasta- ja riisitoodete puhul võiks eelistada täisteravariante.
- Osaliselt võiks kaaluda ka nn Põhjamaade dieedi (*Nordic diet*) põhimõtete järgimist – peamiseks kasutatavateks tooraineteks on selle puhul traditsioonilised Põhjamaade saadused, näiteks kala, marjad, seemed, erinevad täisteratooted, rapsiõli ja madala rasvasisaldusega piimatooted.
- Menüü soolasisalduse vähendamiseks võiks piirata konservide ja poolfabrikaatide kasutamist miinimumini. Puljongid võiks valmistada ise vastavate kuubikute kasutamise asemel (puljongikuubik sisaldab 2 grammi toote kohta 1 grammi soola). Lisatavaid soolakoguseid võiks vähendada vähemalt kolmandiku võrra, kuna soovijatel on alati võimalik soola ise juurde lisada. Rohkem võiks kasutada erinevaid ürte ja vürtse toidu maitsestamiseks.
- Taimetoitlastele parema valiku pakkumiseks võiks kaaluda lõunasöögil pakutavate suppide lihavabaks muutmist. Tavatoitujatele ei valmista taimetoidu söömine probleeme, samuti on taimetoit enamasti koostiselt lahjem, mis aitaks kaasa ka üldise rasva- ja valgusisalduse vähendamisele terves menüüs.
- Konservide kasutamine on mõningatel juhtudel kindlasti vältimatu (nt marineeritud kurgid), kuid kasutama ei peaks näiteks konserveeritud eksootilisi puuvilju – nende suhkru- ja seega ka kalorisaldus on väga kõrge. Külmutatud marjad on kindlasti paremaks alternatiiviks. Eesti kliimas võib mõista konservide kasutamist talvel, kuid kevadel, suvel ja sügisel tuleks kindlasti otsida värsked alternatiive.

- Kuigi kohaliku ja hooajalise tooraine kasutamine on Eesti kliimas raske, peaks seda siiski tegema nii palju kui võimalik – siis, kui võimalik. Ka külmutatud kohalik tooraine on parem, kui näiteks Hispaaniast pärinev juurvili, seda nii lisaainete sisalduse kui jätkusuutlikkuse seisukohast.
- Kastme- ja magustoidupulbrite kasutamine tuleks lõpetada.
- Jookide osas võiks kaaluda veele erinevate marjade, puu- ja köögiviljade lisamist, et anda maitset ja värvi. Suure suhkrusisaldusega siirupite kasutamist võiks kaaluda, sest hoolimata sellest, et tegemist on osaliselt mahetoodetega, ei saa neid nimetada tervislikeks.
- Et suurendada värskete ja huvitavate salatite valikut, võiks mõelda ka võimalusele lasta klientidel endil koostada salateid neile sobivatest komponentidest, mis lisab menüüle ka teatava mängulise ja loomingulise nüansi.
- Et menüü oleks unikaalsem ja loomingulisem, võiks kaaluda selle muutmist igal nädalal või siis igal kuul, et muuta hooajalise ja kohaliku tooraine kasutamine lihtsamaks.

Eeltoodud soovitude järgimine panustaks palju ka menüü jätkusuutlikumaks muutmisse (eeltöödeldud tooted ja kohalik tooraine). Siinkohal võiks pikemas perspektiivis kaaluda ka mõningate olemasolevate mahetoodete lisamist lõuna- ja õhtusöökide menüüsse, kas või hooajaliselt.

Kokkuvõtteks võib öelda, et Eesti spaatoitlustus on mitmetahuline teema, mida ei ole lihtne üheselt defineerida. Põhjused ei ole siinkohal mitte spaade ega ka spaade kokkade suutmatuses, huvituses või tahtmatuses, vaid pigem faktorites, mida on väga raske mõjutada – olulisimad neist on näiteks buffeetoidu madal eelarve ning ka klientide endi eelistused ja soovid, mis päriselus sageli ideaalidega põrkuvad. Kuid kuna tavapärase buffeetoit on autori arvates siiski ettevõtte toitlustuspõhimõtete parimaks näiteks, ei tohiks selle arendamist unarusse jätta.

Käesolev uurimus on näidanud, et paljud kliendid ootavad spaast saadavalt toidukogemuselt midagi tavapärasest eristuvat ning on pettunud seda mitte leides. Kindlasti võib kõigi soovitatud muudatuste järsk rakendamine kliente ehmatada ning tekitada vastakaid reaktsioone eriti laia kliendiprofiili puhul, mis ka Pühajärve Spa & Puhkekeskust iseloomustab, kuid järkjärguline arendustöö peaks pikas perspektiivis

kindlasti viima soovitud positiivsete tulemusteni ning looma konkurentsieeliseid, samuti uusi turundusargumente.

Globaalsel tasandil on toimumas muutused inimeste söömiskäitumises, mis on viinud üha suureneva ülekaalulisusepideemia ning rasvumise, samuti mitmesuguste krooniliste haiguste ning allergiate esinemissageduseni. Selle töö tulemused tõestavad, et nii inimeste endi söömisharjumused kui sageli ka pakutava toidu olemus aitavad sellele veelgi kaasa. Siinkohal tulekski otsida tasakaalu – mitte ainult menüüdes ja numbrites, vaid ka emotsionaalsel tasandil – tervisliku toitumise ning toidu nautimise vahel.

Seosed tervisliku toitumise ja personaalse heaolu vahel on ilmselged. Sestap peaks tervislik ja holistiline olema ka igal spaakülastusel saadav toidukogemus, kuna just spaad on kohad, mille tegutsemise sügavamaks eesmärgiks on aidata igal inimesel head tervist saavutada või säilitada. Juurdunud toitlustamispõhimõtete radikaalne muutmine on kahtlemata väljakutse, kuid viib kindlasti positiivsete tulemusteni.

Loodetavasti annab käesolev töö teemaga seotud võtmeisikutele piisavalt inspiratsiooni seniste toidu ning toitumisega seotud seisukohtade muutmiseks. Autor tänab kõiki, kes on käesoleva uurimuse valmimisel abiks olnud.

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