

Analysis of the Presence of Traditional Agricultural and Food Industry Products and Regional Dishes in the Choice of Dishes Offered in the Southern Great Plain Touristic Region

*Dénes Sándor*¹

The background of the study is based on previous studies dealing with the areas of Transdanubia and Central Hungary. Those works have proved the hypothesis of author that local ingredients and dishes represent minimum role on menus. The question is how similar or different the choice of menu of Southern Great Plain is from the previously examined areas of Hungary. Additional questions may also arise in terms of the usage of local ingredients available near catering units.

This piece of work has studied several menus of Southern Great Plain, Hungary. The material was collected from different types of restaurants, 'csárda'-s and inns. The methodology was two-tier: data collecting on the one hand, and the detailed examination of differences between the catering units on the other hand: the number of dishes, the right order of dishes, the appearance of local ingredients and dishes, the consideration of seasonality, the usage of different cooking methods and group of dishes.

The study reflects the main problems of countryside restaurants in Hungary. Only a minimum number of dishes could be connected to local dishes out of more thousands. However, there would be a chance to make a comparative analysis between the areas of Transdanubia and Central Hungary.

All in all, dishes are not as precise and perfect as the 'old ones' used to be; that is why it is important for every expert to keep traditions alive in daily routines and by way of strategic means too.

Keywords: Southern Great Plain touristic region, catering, local ingredients, traditions

1. Introduction

The relevance of the topic is given by the global advance in tourism highlighting the choice of dishes offered by catering units. The length of stay for domestic and foreign guests may range from one day to multiple weeks, and consequently the

¹ Dénes Sándor, Principal lecturer, Budapest Business School, Faculty of Commerce, Catering and Tourism (Budapest)

number of occasions they have meals also varies. At the same time, a guest staying one night takes a single hotel service but usually has meals three times. Restaurants, small restaurants (*vendéglő* in Hungarian) and roadside restaurants (*csárda* in Hungarian) should preferably offer *regional dishes* – prepared at least partly from *local raw material* – in their menu.

The analysis of the studied topic is a current issue since, in accordance with a present hypothesis, one of the problems is that procuring raw materials is much easier and cheaper in hypermarkets. This is the reason why catering companies partly do their shopping in these commercial units and do not spend time on finding local products. Another problem is that local producers cannot always guarantee a constant level of quality and quantity of requested products. *Lack of regional dishes appearing in the menu* of catering units poses an additional problem.

Bases of the literature background ‘Appearance of Regional Dishes in the Food Choice of the Southern Transdanubian Touristic Region’ (Sándor D. 2008) and ‘Analysis of Transdanubian Supply of Dishes – local raw materials, dishes’ (Sándor 2009) provide proper ground for the present study focusing on the similar characteristics of the Southern Great Plain Touristic Region. Earlier works covering the Southern Transdanubian region, the entire Transdanubia and the Budapest-Middle-Danube region verified the hypothesis of the Author that *local raw materials* and *regional dishes* play an *insignificant role* in the restaurant menus.

A professional paper featuring an important collection of catering traditions says: ‘With the process of river regulation, draining marshlands and also with the development of agrarian culture, growing, collecting and using certain foods simply ‘went out of fashion’; these plants, however, used to be important raw materials of cooking and eating, including: buckwheat, turnip, millet, mangel, trapa natans, pumpkin seed oil, pickled carrot, spined loach fish, old herbs etc.’ (Szigeti 1999). Additional traditional and regional agricultural and food industry products are presented in the professional study [Farnadi 2002].

Present study tries to give an answer to the question how the choice of dishes in the hot cuisine catering units of Southern Great Plain region differs from that in the previously studied ones. It is also a question whether catering people of the region take advantage of procuring and using locally grown fruits and vegetables. *Hungary has gastronomic traditions* we should take care of by including authentic local foods and dishes of the region in catering units’ menus.

2. Goals

The study aims to present the menu supply of the Southern Great Plain Touristic Region in the years 2005-2008 by a field research of a non-representative sample. The main goal is to survey the choice of dishes and then to evaluate the supply of diverse hot cuisine units – restaurants, small restaurants, and roadside restaurants –

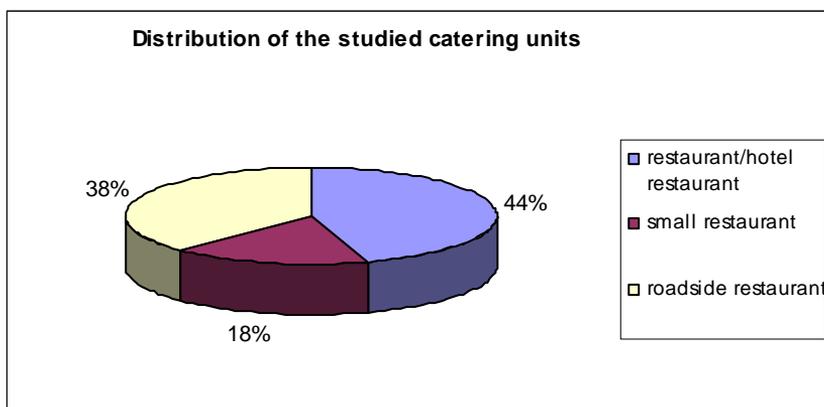
by professional aspects. Accordingly we may have a view of the quantitative and qualitative parameters of the dishes listed on the menus.

Among others, the *analysis covers* the logical dish grouping and listing system, the number of dishes, the diverse use of raw materials and preparation methods, and the supply of *local specialities*, traditional foods, creative menu compilations and explanation of ambiguous denominations used in menus.

3. Research Methods

The *analysis* of the choice of dishes is *based on the menus of 18 restaurants, 7 small restaurants and 15 road restaurants* used in the years 2005-2008. Catering units were randomly selected by a non-representative sample of the Southern Great Plain Touristic Region. Figure 1 shows the distribution of studied catering units.

Figure 1. Distribution of studied catering units



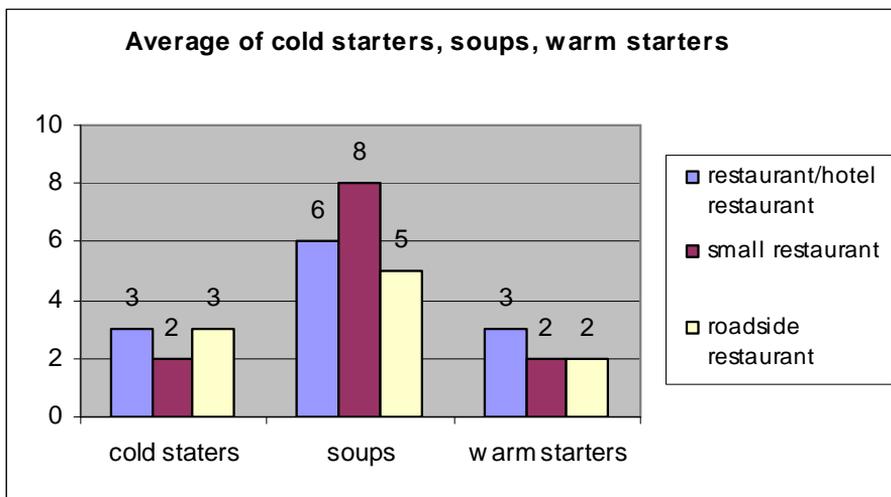
Source: own research

After electronically recording the names and quantity of dishes listed on the menus, meals of certain dish groups were aggregated. Next the average number of meals in each dish group was calculated with handling different types of catering units (restaurants, small restaurants, roadside restaurants) separately. To provide a more efficient visualization, several diagrams are included to present different distributions and average values. Dish groupings and dishes of the menus can be examined by their total and average numbers.

The total figures of soups, cold and hot starters (18 restaurants, 7 small restaurants and 15 roadside restaurants) show that the average number of cold

starters by types of catering units is as follows: 3 in restaurants and roadside restaurants and 2 in small restaurants (see Figure 2). *The average number of soups is 6 in restaurants; 8 in small restaurants; and 5 in roadside restaurants.* The range of soups, i.e. the average number of soups on menus shows that preparing and offering 5-8 different soups might be too much. In case of hot starters, their average number is 3 in restaurants and 2 both in small restaurants and roadside restaurants. The number of cold and hot starters is sufficient in all the three types of studied units; the choice of only 2 different cold and hot starters may be too narrow for small restaurants and roadside restaurants.

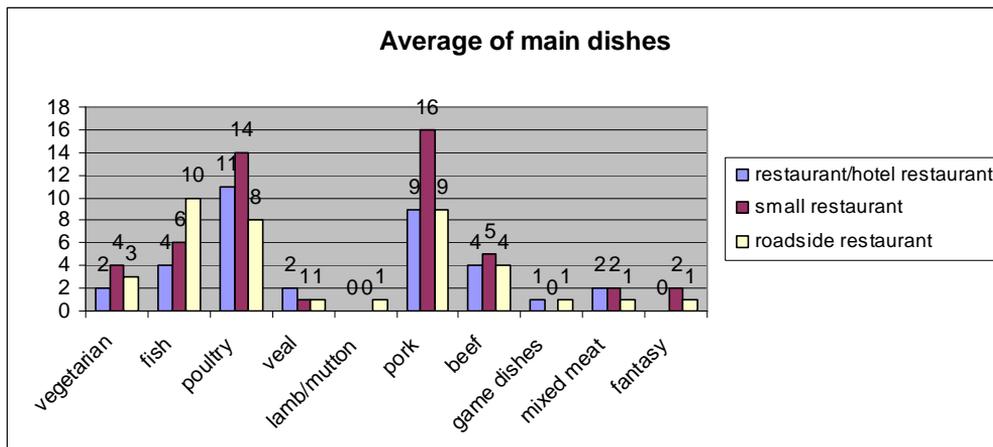
Figure 2. Average number of soups, cold and hot starters in the different hot cuisine units



Source: own research

Figure 3 shows the average number of main courses in restaurants, small restaurants and roadside restaurants in the Southern Great Plain. Accordingly *pork and poultry dishes are the most popular with an average supply of 11 different dishes.* Note that a typical small restaurant enlists 16 different dishes of pork on its menu, while the same figure for restaurants and roadside restaurants is 9. Pork dishes are followed by dishes made of fish, beef, veal and game with an average range of 7, 4, 1, 1 dish, respectively.

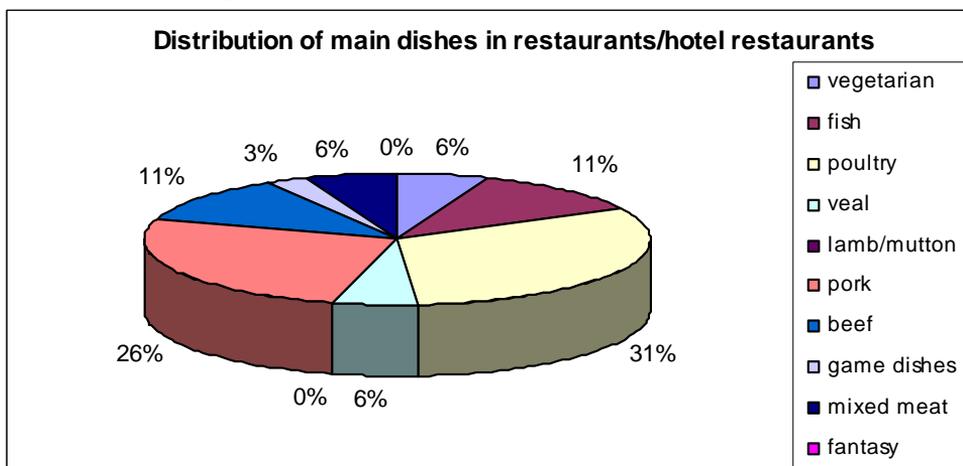
Figure 3. Average number of main dishes in restaurants, small restaurants and roadside restaurants



Source: own research

Figure 4 present the distribution of dishes offered as main courses in restaurants. Dishes prepared of poultry amount to 31%, while fish, pork and beef dishes give altogether 48% of the main courses. Dishes made of the above four types of meat provides accordingly 79% of the total main course supply. These meals are dominated by poultry and only 21% of main courses include vegetarian, veal, lamb/mutton, game dishes etc.

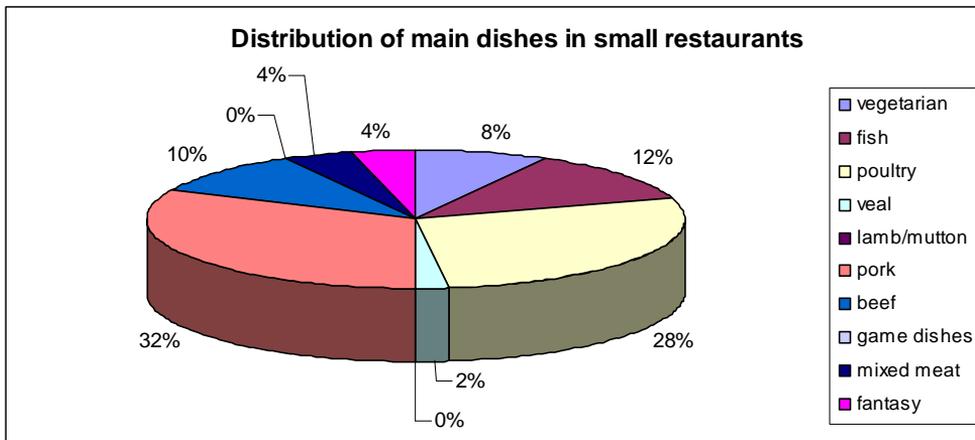
Figure 4. Distribution of main dishes in restaurants



Source: own research

Figure 5 shows the distribution of main dishes in small restaurants. Pork dishes give 32% of the total range, poultry dishes amount to 28%, dishes made of fish contribute with 12% to total main dishes, beef dishes are responsible for 10%, while vegetarian dishes account for 8% of total supply which latter can be deemed a relatively high share. However, only 10% of space remains for other categories of main courses, which allows for a quite limited range of other meals.

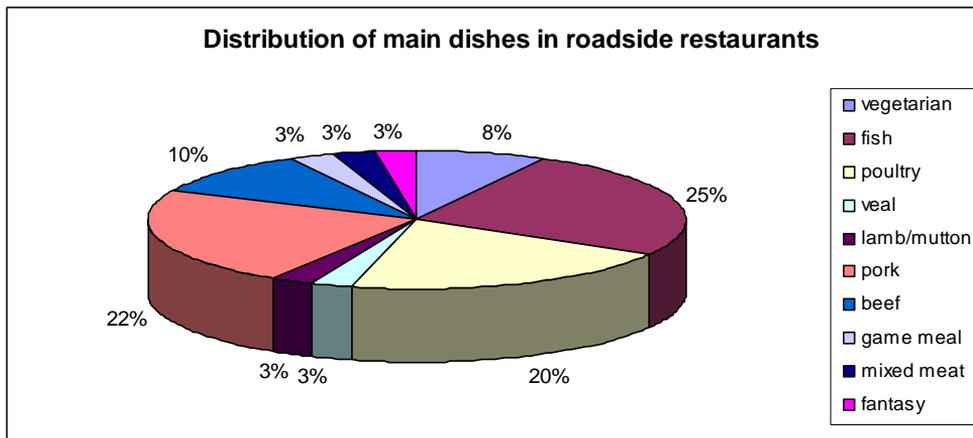
Figure 5. Distribution of main dishes in small restaurants



Source: own research

Figure 6 shows the distribution of main course meals in roadside restaurants. Fish, pork and poultry dishes amount to two thirds of total main course supply. The high number of fish dishes, amounting to a quarter of all main courses, comes from roadside fish restaurants. The high number of pork and poultry dishes appropriately reflects the balance of demand and supply. However, only a narrow choice remains for other dish categories.

Figure 6. Distribution of main dishes in roadside restaurants

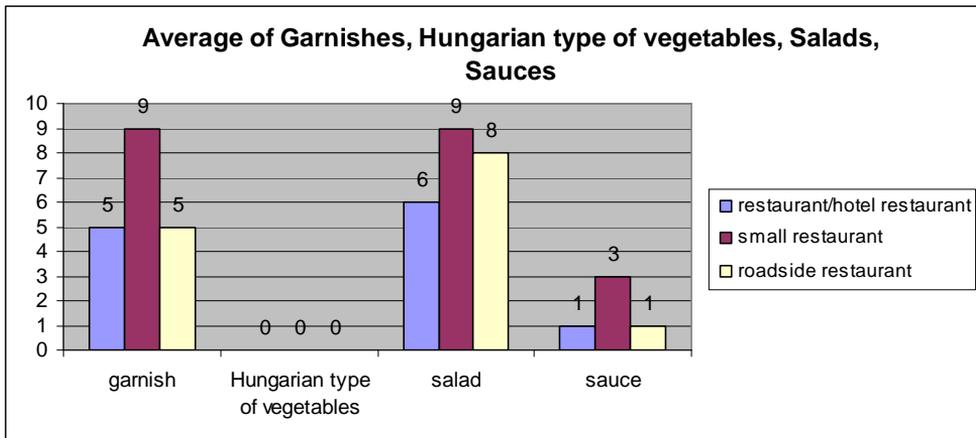


Source: own research

The total amounts of garnishes, Hungarian type of vegetables, salads and sauces (18 restaurants, 7 small restaurants and 15 roadside restaurants) indicate that the average number of different garnishes is 5 both in restaurants and roadside restaurants and 9 in small restaurants (see Figure 7). *The average range of garnish is 7*, which can be deemed quite wide, but garnish offered as a separate group of meals often poses problems. Of course it is possible to include the choice of garnish in the menu, but when offering a complete dish creation as meat-garnish-sauce, a separate category for garnish makes no sense. The average number of Hungarian type of vegetables is 0 in restaurants, small restaurants and roadside restaurants. The choice of this type of dishes is extremely poor. The lack of demand might also affect the scarcity of supply. At the same time, it would be vital the selection to include Hungarian type of vegetables prepared of high quality seasonal raw materials in a modern preparation way.

Average numbers in case of salads: 6 in restaurants, 9 in small restaurants, and 8 in roadside restaurants. In accordance with *Hungarian traditions*, offering 6-9 different salads, which includes also pickles, is typical. In this case, pickles (including pickled cucumber, pickled paprika, etc.) can be listed in one group; still the selection might be unique. Should this be the case, of course these pickles must be offered at the same price. By the similar principle, salads (tomato, cucumber etc.) could be listed in a different line. Average number of sauces is 1 in case of both restaurants and roadside restaurants, while 3 in small restaurants. Here comes the question: why it is necessary to include a separate group of dishes of sauces.

Figure 7. Average number of garnish, Hungarian type of vegetables, salads and sauces in different hot cuisine catering units

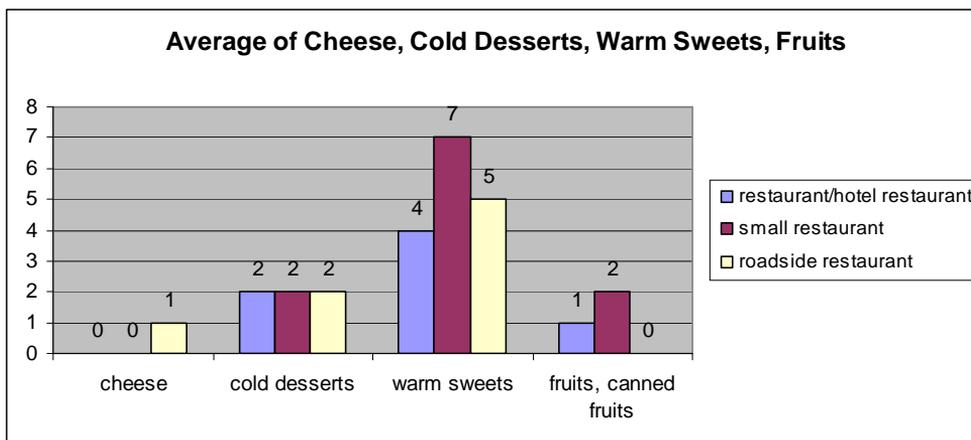


Source: own research

The total values of cheese, cold desserts, warm sweets and fruits (based on the data of 18 restaurants, 7 small restaurants and 15 roadside restaurants) indicate that the average number of cheeses is 0 both in restaurants and small restaurants and 1 in roadside restaurants (see figure 8). The number of cheeses appearing in menus is quite low, but catering units occasionally offer a selection of cheeses including more types of cheese. *The average number of cold desserts is 2 in all the three types of catering facilities. This figure is rather low. The average number of warm sweets is 4 in restaurants, 7 in small restaurants and 5 in roadside restaurants. The width of range of warm sweets is 7 in restaurants, a rather high figure.*

The average range of fruits and canned fruits is 1 in restaurants, 2 in small restaurants and 0 in roadside restaurants. These figures are quite meaningful. Concerning the already studied regions, offering 2 kinds of fruits in a restaurant has represented the widest choice so far. At least 1 kind of fruit should be offered in roadside restaurants as well.

Figure 8. Average number of cheese, cold desserts, warm sweets, fruits and canned fruits in the different hot cuisine units



Source: own research

4. Results

After processing the data from 40 menus, the primary goal of surveying the choice of dishes in the region can be summarized as follows: the quality of menus in terms of their content reflects a quite diverse picture. *There are restaurants where quests are awaited with nearly 300 different dishes.* In-depth analyses suggest that producing such a wide range of meals at a consistently high level is a great challenge for any kind of hot cuisine unit regardless of venue and time.

Among the studied units, however, Kisködmön Restaurant in Gyula is one of those operating with the highest quality offering altogether 20 dishes excluding desserts, but its menu is a unique, professional curiosity. The supply includes historical dishes and preparation methods involving high quality raw material. According to the findings of the six studied regions, the smallest number of dishes is offered in the Restaurant of Szeged Novotel Tisza. However, the 15 dishes included in their menu can provide a suitable selection for almost all different guest demands including also vegetarians. The choice of dishes could have been expanded with one or two more hot starters and some warm sweets. Managing raw materials is simpler this way and this makes consistently preparing dishes of high quality easier.

In some cases, dish groups are listed in menus in an order fashionable some decades ago. As a consequence of this, guests may encounter desserts earlier than main courses or salads.

It is also rather old fashioned to use the categories of readymade dishes and freshly made dishes. Foreign speaking guest may think in this case that the translated denomination of readymade dishes might refer to “meals not cooked at that time”. At the same time, several hot cuisine units apply logical listing order of the meals – based on the timeline of consuming.

Fortunately, nearly a hundred dishes prepared of Hungarian raw materials including goose liver, goose cracklings, ewe cheese, ewe curd, salami, sausage, bacon etc. can be found. Regional dishes appear on the menus only at an insignificant frequency. Out of the 3000 dishes surveyed only 40 dishes can be somehow connected to a given region. Often only the denomination of the dish refers to its regional character e.g.: kecskeméti kakas rétes-béles, Bean Soup Szénás Style, Betyár Soup of Gyula, Hungarian Great Plain Soup with Dumplings, variations of chicken breast: Szatymaz Style, Maros Style, Félegyháza Style, Great Plain Style, Balástya Style etc.

In accordance with Hungarian traditions, dishes starting the meal (cold/warm starters and soups) are dominated first of all by Soups. With regards to main courses in restaurants, the number of poultry dishes is the highest, while in small restaurants and roadside restaurants the same stands true for pork dishes. Basic supply of vegetarian dish is still one-sided and quite limited (including only breaded cheese and mushroom).

The range of garnish covers 7 different types on the average, however, the question may arise why catering units don't offer directed main course-garnish pairs? As of international practise, main course is a complete dish including meat (or without meat), garnish and sauce. Fortunately, some of the surveyed menus included no separate garnish category. Strange and surprising, the number of Hungarian type of vegetables is less than minimal, that is zero in all the three types of units (restaurants, small restaurants, roadside restaurants). On the other hand, the average number of salads offered to main courses is 6 in restaurants, 9 in small restaurants and 8 in roadside restaurants. The range of sauces is not too extensive as well, with an average of 2: 1 in restaurants; 3 in small restaurants and 1 in roadside restaurants. In addition, as it has already been mentioned in the analysis of the South Transdanubian Region, the composition of the most often appearing Tartare sauce is not exactly identical with the sauce offered in international cuisines.

The average choice of cheese is 0 in restaurants and small restaurants, and 1 type of cheese is usually offered in roadside restaurants. The standard favourite of cold desserts are ice cream cups, sponge cake Somlo style and chestnut puree. Warm sweets are dominated by pancakes (60%) largely contributing to the base of this category. In roadside restaurants, cottage cheese pasta appears in the menu as the most frequent pasta. The choice of fruits, including also canned fruits, is rather narrow, the average figure being 1 in restaurants, 2 in small restaurants and 0 in roadside restaurants. Why are tasty Hungarian fruits missing from the menu?

An improvement can be detected in the fact that more hundreds of different dish versions are offered in restaurants, small restaurants and roadside restaurants. There are some places where interesting fantasy names are given to these dishes, e.g.: Favourite of Rózsa Sándor, Favourite of the Roadside Restaurant's Host, Jackals' Favourite.

In many cases there are formal mistakes in the menus, e.g.: the name of the place, the manager name or the name of the chef are missing, the word classification is used instead of categorization which was the terminology on force in the surveyed period, etc. Also spelling mistakes and misuse of terminology often appear in the menus, e.g.: "baconszalonna", caviar, tuna fish, Gordon blue, beafsteak, etc. The proper use of these terms is as follows: bacon (or "húsos szalonna"). Caviar is the roe of a certain species of fish, namely sturgeon; otherwise it should be named salted roe or salmon caviar in case of salmon. Frozen fillet of sea fish is often referred to as tuna fish but these are generally hake fillets. The proper name of the dish is Cordon Bleu, while it should be spelt as beefsteak in Hungarian menus.

5. Conclusion, Suggestions

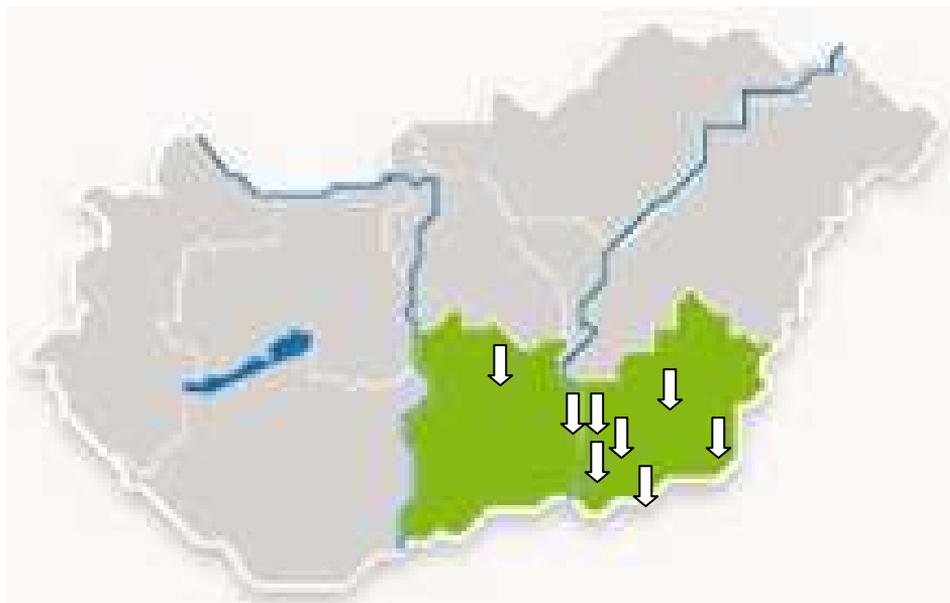
The following conclusions may be made from the analysis of choice of dishes offered in the menus of 18 restaurants, 7 small restaurants and 15 roadside restaurants in the years 2005-2008:

- A too extensive range of dishes listed in the menu may have an adverse effect on preparing dishes in consistently high quality
- It would be practical *to keep selection within reasonable limits at the same time providing outstanding quality dishes* for the guests
- Applying international menu formatting experience would be useful
- The terms "Readymade dishes" and "Freshly made dishes" should not be used any more, instead dishes should be included among main courses based on their main raw material
- Range of vegetarian dishes should be extended and made more diverse, and tasty vegetables dishes should be prepared with less or no 'roux' (thickening agent of flour and oil)
- The category of garnishes and sauces is not necessary when garnish and sauce are added to all main courses
- *Selection of cheese and fruits should be reasonably widened*
- Range of cold desserts should be made more flexible, there should be other desserts in addition to the magic trio of ice cream cup, chestnut puree and sponge cake Somlo Style

- Pancake dominance of restaurant warm sweets should also be weakened by expanding the choice of this category
- Fantasy dishes cause no problem when an explanation of the dish is added
- *Range of regional dishes should be widened*, since domestic and foreign tourists are mostly interested in local foods, accordingly it is a shame that out of 3000 dishes only 40 can be attached to the region in any way
- Adding the name of a geographic location to that of the dish does not make the food an authentic local speciality in itself
- It is recommended to include traditional foods in the menus by applying professional literature and the related knowledge of local people
- Using local traditional and regional raw materials is an outstanding possibility for expanding the range of regional dishes. Some of the local traditional and regional raw materials can be seen in Figure 9.

Traditional and regional raw materials, products of the South Great Plain Region: goose liver of Orosháza, sausage of Csaba, sausage of Gyula, grey catfish of River Tisza, apricot of Kecskemét, peach of Szatymaz, garlic and onion of Makó, tomato sweet pepper of Szentes

Figure 9. Traditional and regional raw materials and products in the Southern Great Plain Region



Source: own creation based on <http://www.nvteredmeny.hu/del-alfoldi-regio/index.html> and Farnadi 2002

- A further possibility is to use local wines when preparing the dishes, however, it is not enough to indicate only 'wine' in the menu, it should be detailed e.g.: Venison Stew with paprika flavoured with 2007 Cabernet Franc Barrique of Birkás Cellar
- Areas to improve the most include the usage of an extremely limited range of raw materials and preparation methods, menu compositions often lacking creativity
- Therefore it would be practical to dismiss the most regular choice of dishes available in almost each and every restaurant and offer regional dishes prepared of local raw materials in the menus
- More attention should be paid to meeting the formal and spelling requirements of the menus

6. Summary

All in all, current choice of dishes should be updated and a wider range of regional dishes should be offered; the above goals require the cooperation of all professionals in their everyday practise to observe our traditions in the future as well.

References

- Alsósoproni, N. F.-né 1926: *Dunántúli szakácskönyv*. Pannónia Sajtóvállalat részvénytársaság, Szombathely, 313. p.
- Farnadi, É. 2002: (felelős szerk.) Cserhalmi, ZS. – Csoma, ZS. – Némethyné, U. H. – Sipos, B. – Szabó, E. (szerk.) *Hagyományok – Ízek – Régiók program II*. FVM AMC Kht. Budapest. 365 p.
- Sándor, D. 2002: *Ételismeret*. BGF. KVIFK., Budapest, 323. p.
- Sándor, D. 2008: *Tájjellegű ételek megjelenésének elemzése a dél-dunántúli turisztikai régió ételválasztékában*. Tudományos évkönyv BGF., Budapest, 194-208. p.
- Sándor, D. 2009: Dunántúli ételkínálat – helyi alapanyagok, ételek – elemzése. *Economica*, Tudományos közlemények, Szolnok, 50-57. p.
- Sándor, D. 2009: *Tájjellegű ételek megjelenésének elemzése a dél-dunántúli turisztikai régió ételválasztékában*. Turizmus Bulletin, 14-18. p.
- Sándor, D. 2009: Helyi alapanyagok és tájjellegű ételek (2), A közép-dunántúli turisztikai régió ételválasztékának elemzése. *Kulinárium Gasztronómiai és Szállodai Szaklap*, 28-29. p.

Szigeti, A. 2003: *Népi konyha Dunántúli tájak ételei*. Mezőgazda Kiadó, Budapest, 384 p.43/1998. (VI. 24.) IKIM rendelet a vendéglátó üzletek kategóriába sorolásáról, valamint ártájékoztatásáról
<http://www.nvteredmeny.hu/del-alfoldi-regio/index.html>date of access: October 30th, 2009.