



ULST Timisoara
**Multidisciplinary Conference on
Sustainable Development**
21-22 May 2026



SUSTAINABLE MENUS IN FOOD SERVICE – CONCEPTS AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTIONS

IULIANA IOANA MERCE¹, IOANA ANDA MILIN^{1*}, TIBERIU IANCU¹, IOAN BRAD¹, MARIUS
IONUT GORDAN¹, DRAGOȘ CIPRIAN CHENDE¹, REMUS GHERMAN¹

¹University of Life Science “King Michael I” Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural
Tourism, Department of Management and Rural Development

Abstract: *In recent decades, public food services have undergone major transformations, driven not only by changing consumer tastes but also by the emergence of global issues such as climate change, depletion of natural resources, and increasing food waste. In this context, the concept of a sustainable menu has become increasingly important, being considered a viable solution for balancing the population's dietary needs with environmental protection. A sustainable menu is not limited to the selection of healthy dishes; it involves a complex approach that includes the sourcing of raw materials, their processing, distribution, and final consumption. Essentially, it refers to a responsible food system that aims to reduce negative environmental impact without compromising the quality or nutritional value of the dishes offered. The implementation of sustainable menus in public food services also requires adapting how operations are organized. Establishments must optimize their technological processes, reduce energy and water consumption, and adopt modern solutions such as using energy-efficient equipment or biodegradable packaging. Particularly in the case of delivery services, reducing single-use plastic becomes a priority. Therefore, sustainable menus represent an essential direction for the responsible development of public food services. They contribute not only to environmental protection but also to improving public health and creating a more equitable and efficient food system. By adopting this model, food service establishments can meet current demands and actively contribute to a more sustainable future.*

Introduction

In recent decades, the food service sector has experienced accelerated development, driven by urbanization, changes in lifestyle, and the growing demand for fast and diversified services [9]. At the same time, this field faces major challenges generated by global issues such as climate change, depletion of natural resources, and the significant increase in food waste. These aspects have led to a paradigm shift, directing the attention of specialists and economic operators toward the adoption of more responsible and environmentally efficient practices.

The concept of sustainability has thus become a central element in the development of modern food service. The integration of sustainable development principles into this sector involves not only reducing the negative impact on the environment, but also ensuring a balance between the economic, social, and nutritional needs of the population. In this context, sustainable menus represent an innovative and necessary solution, contributing to the optimization of resource use and the promotion of responsible food consumption.

The concept of sustainability in nutrition derives from the general principles of sustainable development, which aim to meet the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Applied to the food sector, this concept involves the creation and maintenance of a balanced food system that is economically viable, socially responsible, and environmentally friendly.

The sustainable menu represents an essential component of modern food service and is defined as a set of dishes designed and prepared in such a way as to meet consumers' nutritional needs while reducing the negative impact on the environment and contributing to sustainable economic and social development. It is not limited only to the selection of healthy dishes, but involves an integrated approach that takes into account the entire food chain, from the production of raw materials to final consumption.

Material and method

The present paper is based on theoretical and applied research, using specific methods of scientific analysis in the field of food service and sustainability.

The study material consists of relevant bibliographic sources, both national and international, addressing the concepts of sustainability, sustainable nutrition, and food service management. Scientific articles, reports of international organizations, specialized publications, and legislative documents were analyzed.

Results and discussions

Sustainability in food systems is based on three main pillars: environmental protection, social equity, and economic efficiency [16]. From an environmental perspective, it involves reducing the negative impact generated by the production, processing, and distribution of food, including the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, conservation of natural resources, and protection of biodiversity. From a social point of view, sustainability involves ensuring equitable access to safe and nutritious food for all population groups, as well as respecting labor conditions throughout the food chain. The economic component focuses on the efficient use of resources and maintaining the viability of businesses in the food sector.

The implementation of sustainable menus in public food service is a complex process influenced by a variety of economic, social, technological, and legislative factors. Understanding these factors is essential for the effective adoption of sustainable practices.

1. Economic factors
2. Social and cultural factors
3. Technological factors
4. Policies and regulations

For the effective integration of sustainable menus, food service establishments must adopt a series of practical strategies adapted to the specifics of their activity.

1. Selection of suppliers and raw materials
2. Optimization of technological processes
3. Reduction of food waste
4. Use of eco-friendly packaging
5. Digitalization and innovation in services

Conclusions

Following the analysis carried out, it can be concluded that sustainable menus represent an essential component in transforming public food service into a responsible and efficient system.

The adoption of this model significantly contributes to reducing the negative impact on the environment through the reduction of food waste, the efficient use of resources, and the promotion of local and seasonal products. At the same time, sustainable menus play an important role in improving public health by promoting a balanced and diversified diet.

The results also highlight the importance of collaboration among all stakeholders involved — producers, economic operators, authorities, and consumers — in order to create a sustainable food system.