

Innovation in catering enterprises: benefits and barriers

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Streszczenie

Problemem badawczym jest innowacyjność przedsiębiorstw gastronomicznych, szczególnie w obliczu sytuacji kryzysowych. Celem badań jest diagnoza barier utrudniających lub uniemożliwiających wprowadzanie innowacji oraz identyfikacja korzyści z ich wdrożenia. W badaniach zastosowano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego z wykorzystaniem internetowego kwestionariusza ankiety (CAWI) i kodu QR. Badania przeprowadzono w środku kryzysu wywołanego pandemią wirusa SARS-CoV-2. Wynikiem badań jest diagnoza licznych barier dla innowacyjności w przedsiębiorstwach gastronomicznych, z których najistotniejszą jest obawa (lęk) przed porażką. Mimo to respondenci reprezentujący 50 firm cateringowych wskazali na liczne korzyści wynikające z wprowadzenia innowacji, z których najważniejszą jest przetrwanie firmy na rynku. Wyniki badania wpisują się w dyscyplinę nauki o zarządzaniu i jakości i stanowią bodziec do dalszej dyskusji.

Słowa kluczowe

innowacje, innowacje w przedsiębiorstwach turystycznych, innowacje w gastronomii, pandemia SARS-CoV-2, województwo podlaskie

Introduction

Innovation is one of the most important factors in increasing the competitiveness of enterprises. In the era of globalisation and strong market competition, with a constant increase in the demands of buyers and consumers, it acquires significant importance. Innovation is particularly important in a crisis situation, therefore the period of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic should be regarded as such. Researchers agree that the enterprises hardest hit by the crisis caused by the pandemic include companies in the tourism industry, i.e. travel agencies, accommodation establishments, passenger transport companies and catering companies. This research is aimed at this last group of businesses. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that, until 2019, catering services were one of the most dynamic industries in the global economy. However, it is a market that is highly susceptible to any changes in the environment, including crisis situations. As a result of the pandemic, numerous restrictions were imposed on the catering industry, significantly limiting its business opportunities. Companies operating in the sector were forced to take radical measures to continue to operate and survive this difficult situation. Consequently, innovation became a necessity rather than a choice for entrepreneurs.

Research into the innovativeness of catering enterprises has not yet been the subject of wider academic inquiry, being a secondary topic when examining the innovativeness of tourism enterprises [Hjalager, 2022; Szymańska, 2021] – ‘restaurants’ section). It should be noted that this is an important topic, as it concerns a large group of enterprises on the one hand and, on the other, refers to the businesses that required the greatest changes due to the pandemic threat and the associated restrictions.

The research problem is the broad question of the innovativeness of catering enterprises in the face of a crisis situation. The topic is relatively new and the conducted research should be considered *in statu nascendi*. Furthermore, the catering industry is considered to be hardly innovative [Makala, 2015]. To address the posed problem, the authors formulated two main objectives:

- O1 – identify the benefits for catering companies of implementing innovation in the face of the crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic,
- O2 – diagnose and assess barriers to innovation in catering businesses.

In addition, the following hypothesis was formulated and verified during the research process:

- H – the main barrier to innovation in the surveyed catering businesses is psychological in nature.

1. Innovation in tourism in the scientific literature

Innovativeness is a driving force for the development of companies, taking into account novel aspects that improve the company's processes [Szymańska, 2021]. The term 'innovation' has an interdisciplinary and heterogeneous character, depending on the adopted research perspective [Carvalho and Costa, pp.23-33]. Referring to the root word, the term 'innovation' is derived from the Latin 'innovare', meaning 'to do something new [Zawawi et al., 2016], or 'innovatio', translated as 'renewal' [Pałka-Łebek and Brambert, 2018]. In common parlance, innovation is understood as something new, different from current and previously used solutions and the existing state of affairs [Ober, 2022]. T. Kogbayew and A. Maziliauskas [2017] use the term to describe 'the economic impact of technological change as the use of new combinations of existing productive forces to solve business problems. Innovation is defined, *inter alia*, in documents and publications issued by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), where it is accepted that it is 'the implementation of a new or significantly improved product (product or service) or process, a new marketing method or a new organisational method in economic practice, workplace organisation or relations with the environment [Oslo Manual, 2018]. This definition was also adopted in this study.

Innovation activity in tourism is a relatively new research focus. A.-M. Hjalager [1994] should be considered as its precursor. A prominent place in the research is given to the consideration of variables that contribute to increasing the innovativeness of tourism enterprises [Zontek, 2013; Szymańska and Panfiluk; Szymańska, 2016]. Innovation is often combined with the concept of sustainable development [Abreu et al., 2023; Kiryluk et al., 2021], in which tourism and the related concept of sustainable tourism are being increasingly embedded [Dodds, 2012; Szymańska, 2018]. A region's tourism development strategy is often linked to innovative tourism solutions [Krupa and Dec, 2015]. Specific research may relate to a specific area, for example, innovation implemented in health tourism businesses [Szymańska, 2015; Szymańska et al., 2017].

The research to date is, as can be seen, concerned with the classification of areas of innovation in tourism and the extent of innovation and the effects, paying particular attention to the determinants and sources of innovative ideas. Guidance for the classification of the different forms of innovation is mainly drawn by the authors from international studies performed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), following the guidelines of the Oslo Manuals [2005 and 2018]. Within the classification of innovations occurring in tourism, a distinction can be made among product [Szymańska, 2009], organisational, mar-

keting and process-related, including technological, innovations [Panfiluk et al., 2022]. Product innovations seem to dominate among the changes introduced in tourism companies, but an area somewhat overlooked in the research refers to marketing innovations implemented in these companies [Szymańska, 2012]. In addition to those mentioned above, the European nomenclature also distinguishes social innovation, which formed the basis of the Horizon 2020 programme [Research..., 2020]. Furthermore, based on a proposal promoted in the European Union, among the innovations also in tourism, one can distinguish social innovations [Szymańska, 2019]. An important area of research is the role of new technologies in tourism [Panfiluk, et al., 2022]. The application of modern management methods in tourism fits into the research concept of the impact of organisational innovation on the development of tourism enterprises [Berbel-Pineda and Ramirez-Hurtado, 2012]. Still, any innovation, especially one that is financed from European funds, requires the preparation of a business plan in which the innovation element will be included [Szurmiej et al., 2022].

2. The role of catering in the economy and the study of innovation in catering enterprises

A catering service is understood as a complex set of activities, including primarily production, commercial and service activities and sometimes entertainment, aimed at the preparation of culinary products for consumption and their subsequent sale as well as the creation of conditions that allow their consumption in an atmosphere conducive to psychological regeneration [Górka-Chowaniec, 2018]. Catering businesses are those that focus on organising the consumption of the products on offer, primarily at the point of sale (but also off-site) and providing other services to fulfil the needs for entertainment, rest and mental regeneration [Sala, 2011]. The catering industry in Poland is diversified, both in terms of nature as well as quality and ownership. These are often sole proprietorships, but others also include global corporations [Lipiec, 2022]. Systematisation of catering enterprises, used by Central Statistical Office of Poland [GUS, 2023] and adopted in research studies [Dziedzic and Skalska, 2012] distinguishes the following categories: restaurants, bars, canteens and catering points. Restaurants are catering establishments with full waiter service and characterised by a variety of dishes and drinks on offer, served according to a menu list [Kosowska et.al. 2021] a well as allow both the satisfaction of basic nutritional needs and entertainment [Stangińska, 2013]. Bars are catering establishments offering a smaller assortment than restaurants, usually limited to the most popular food items, often available in self-service form (eateries, snack

bars, milk bars, bistros, tea rooms, beer bars, wine bars) [Levytska, 2011]. A separate form are canteens, which usually operate within an institution (schools, hospitals), offering mass catering services, usually to a selected group of consumers, offering them: breakfasts, lunches and dinners. Catering points offer limited food services and often takeaways (fries, ice cream points, or buffets in various public facilities) [Levytska, 2011].

The vast majority of catering enterprises in Poland are private (almost 99%) [Lipiec, 2022, p. 9], employing almost half a million people [Central Statistical Office figures for 2022]. According to M. Sidorkiewicz and A. Tokarz [2011], the demand for catering services is mainly influenced by the wealth of the country's population. Research conducted by the Polish Economic Institute [2020, p. 5] has shown that the most popular establishments are pizzeria-type catering points. Statistical data [GUS, 2023, p. 193] show that on 31 December 2022, there were 78,010 thousand catering establishments in Poland, of which catering points were the most numerous (38.9%). The number of restaurants (28.5%) and bars (26.10%) was also relatively high, while canteens were the least recorded, with only 5.6% [Mały Rocznik Statystyczny Polski, 2023, p.193].

The number of catering businesses in Poland had grown rapidly in recent years, with the exception of bars, until 2020, when there was a noticeable decline, as shown in Figure 1.

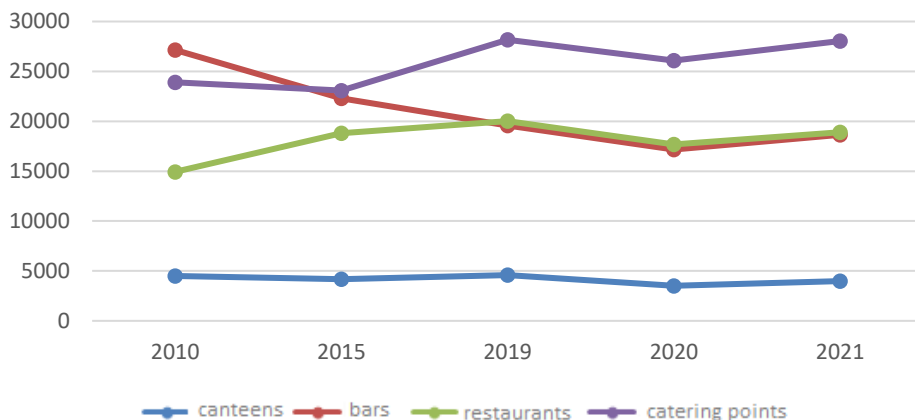


Fig. 1. Number of catering establishments in Poland between 2010 and 2021 (in absolute numbers)
Source: own elaboration based on [Mały rocznik statystyczny Polski 2022, 2023, p. 192].

The statistics presented in Figure 1 show that the catering industry developed relatively dynamically from 2010 until 2020, when there was a visible decrease in the number of all groups of entities. The growth dynamics can be observed especially over the period 2015-2019, with the exception of the group of bars, the number of which fell steadily over the decade from 2010, when it numbered 27,145 entities, while 2020-2021 saw a change and a level similar to restaurants (in 2021 their number was: bars – 18,658, restaurants – 18,897). The reason for the slump in 2021-2022 was undoubtedly the pandemic [Aldao and Blasco, 2022]. The tasks of supervising the epidemiological course, informing on the possible course and the hygiene rules were entrusted to the National Institute of Public Health – National Institute of Hygiene [2022]. The COVID-19 disease is caused by infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The impact of the pandemic on the global economy can be compared to major economic crises [Andújar Trabazos et al., 2021; Kaňovská and Vlčková, 2022; Zaniewska and Kobylińska, 2023] that have so far occurred in human history. International studies show that the pandemic had a negative impact on the entire tourism industry [Covid-19, 2020]. Governments, in order to stop the spread of the disease, introduced restrictions on the movement of people and on the availability of many services, including catering. In Poland, too, a number of tools aimed at limiting the spread of the virus were implemented [Malinowska, 2022]. The State Sanitary Inspectorate, within the framework of its powers, ordered the shutdown of catering businesses during the initial period of the outbreak, except for those offering take-away products, and after a while these businesses were allowed to operate with restrictions on the number of people present on the premises at the same time [Szymkowiak, 2021]. In order to survive in the market characterised by a high level of competitiveness, catering companies introduced on their own initiative or were obliged to introduce changes to their offer and their operations, including innovative solutions. Data published by the Central Statistical Office show that due to the pandemic more than 80% of catering companies experienced serious or highly threatening to their existence difficulties as well as negative consequences for their stability [GUS, 2022]. In response, these entities may have taken numerous measures to reduce losses, such as reducing staff or wages, or implementing innovations.

3. Research assumptions and methodology

The research employed a diagnostic survey method using a survey questionnaire made available through a web-based questionnaire (CAWI) and a QR code.

The research was conducted in the midst of the crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

The research process employed a diagnostic survey method, using a questionnaire technique and the CAVI technique. The survey questionnaire consisted of 10 questions, closed and semi-open, whose order was determined by the formulated research problems. The survey was conducted in April and May 2023 using Google tools. The survey questionnaire was placed in a web form and a link to it was made available on social networks, groups and online forums for staff of catering enterprises in Podlaskie Voivodeship. In addition, a QR code with a link to the survey was generated and used during face-to-face contacts with respondents, who were employees of various catering establishments in Białystok. Participants in the survey were managers and other staff representing catering businesses.

The research sample consisted of entities conducting catering activity in Podlaskie Voivodeship. According to the list of entities of the national economy registered in the REGON register by basic activity in Podlaskie Voivodeship (as at 31 December 2022), there were 2,084 entities operating in section I56 of the PKD 2007 classification (Food and beverage service activities), while in Białystok alone there were 683 entities¹.

As calculated by the sampling size calculator [<https://www.naukowiec.org/dobor.html>], with a maximum error rate of 5% and a confidence level of $\alpha = 95$ and fraction size = 0.5, the size of the research sample should be at least 243 entities. The research carried out on a sample of 50 respondents representing catering service providers in the Podlaskie Voivodeship is therefore of a pilot nature and falls within the discipline of management and quality science.

The survey questionnaire, which constituted the research tool, consisted of 10 questions of a closed and semi-open nature, the order of which was determined by the formulated research problems. The survey was conducted in April and May 2023 using Google tools. The survey questionnaire was placed in a web form and a link to it was made available for individuals, on social networks, in groups at online forums. Most of all there were catering groups at the Facebook: „Gastronomia – Kupię – Sprzedam – Zamienię - Oddam”, „Gastronomia Podlaska”, „Gastronomia/Kupię/Sprzedam”, „urządzenia gastronomiczne i nie tylko”. They were dedicated to staff of catering enterprises in Podlaskie Voivodeship. In addition, a QR code with a link to the survey was generated and used during face-to-face contacts with respondents, who were employees of various catering establishments

¹ Information received in written form in response to an enquiry addressed to the Statistical Office in Białystok (letter No. BST-POB03.7041.2.2023.2).

in Białystok. Participants in the survey were managers and other staff representing catering businesses.

4. Research results

In the face of the crisis, one of the main actions taken by entrepreneurs should be the implementation of innovation, as already described by J.A. Schumpeter [1932], considered the father of innovation theory and the creator of the concept of creative destruction. It was Schumpeter who noted that crisis contributes to the creation of new combinations, as called by him ‘innovation’. Innovation is generally assumed to be the one that contributes to increasing competitiveness or reducing business costs [Szymańska, 2009]. The subject of this research, therefore, involved the benefits of implemented innovations for catering entrepreneurs. The results are presented in Table 1.

Tab. 1. Benefits observed in catering companies after implementation of innovative solutions (multiple indication)

Benefits	Number indications	of % (n=50)
There were no benefits after the implementation of changes and new solutions	8	16
Improving the company’s market position	11	22
Increasing company income	11	22
Survival of the company in the market	29	58
Increasing market share	5	10
Reducing product costs	5	10
Reducing the cost of service delivery	1	2
Faster order processing	10	20
Increase in sales	10	20
Opportunity to stand out from other offers	7	14

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

For almost 60% of the catering companies surveyed (Tab. 1), the main benefit of implementing innovations during the SARS CoV-2 pandemic was for the company to stay in business (29 indications, 58%). This should not come as a surprise, as the shutdown of the industry for several months and the numerous sanitary restrictions imposed on catering afterwards made it significantly more difficult for

entities to operate in this market. Numerous businesses were closed,² and those that wanted to stay in the market had to adapt to the conditions in order to generate revenues that allowed them to make recurrent payments. In only one in four catering businesses did the innovations implemented during the coronavirus outbreak allow the company to improve its position in the market and increase revenues (11 indications each, 22%). For one in five, on the other hand, innovations allowed for faster order processing, which translated into higher revenues (10 indications each, 20%).

The introduction of innovative activities is associated with numerous difficulties and barriers. The surveyed catering companies also encountered problems when implementing innovative ideas, as shown in Table 2.

Tab. 2. Difficulties and barriers experienced by catering companies when implementing innovative solutions (multiple indication)

Difficulties, barriers	Number indications	of % (n=50)
Reluctance of staff to novelty	10	20
Business owner's reluctance to novelty	9	18
Fear of failure	26	52
Lack of own financial resources to implement new solutions	7	14
Lack of system support for catering enterprises in the implementation of innovative solutions	12	24
Lack of external funding opportunities, co-financing of innovations	10	20
Lack of trust in new solutions	13	26
Fear of numerous organisational and administrative procedures	17	34
Low skills and qualifications of staff to implement and operate new solutions	7	14
Lack of technical resources to implement innovations	4	8

Source: own elaboration based on conducted research.

Referring to the results presented above, it can be noted that slightly more than half of the respondents indicated fear of failure as the main barrier to implementing innovations (26 indications, 56%). Furthermore, the fear of organisational and legal procedures that are sometimes required when catering companies implement

² Statistics show that of the more than 76,000 catering establishments operating in 2019 around 20% of businesses closed as a result of the SARS COV-2 pandemic, which resulted in the loss of employment and a source of income for around 200,000 people [Szymkowiak, Gutowski, 2021].

innovative ideas was also a problem (17 indications, 34%). For one in four companies, the barrier was also the lack of trust in new solutions that have not been tested by others (13 indications, 26%) the lack of systemic support aimed at helping to implement innovations (12 indications, 24%). For one in five catering companies, the difficulty of financing innovation, but also the unwillingness of staff to innovate was also a barrier (10 indications each, 20%).

In summary, it can be concluded that both the benefits of innovation and the obstacles standing in the way of its implementation are relatively numerous, although their importance varies greatly.

5. Discussion

The pandemic problem was global and affected many industries [Kaeo-tad et al., 2021]. The scientific literature suggests that the SARS CoV-2 epidemic provided the impetus for the development of selected innovations, particularly technological innovations [Kaňovská and Vlčková, 2022]. However, this is not the case for all industries, as for catering services the conducted research did not show such an effect. However, it can be noted, as confirmed by the presented studies, that the innovativeness of catering companies is moving towards greater openness [Szymańska, 2019], evidenced by numerous organisational and marketing innovations. However, the research did not confirm the thesis of Martin-Martin et al. [2022] and Hjalager [2022] on the increasing digitalisation of the catering industry, although undoubtedly marketing innovations required greater use of online channels. One has to agree that, due to the problems brought about by the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in the number of innovations introduced compared to the pre-pandemic period, so in the light of the presented research on the catering industry, one cannot agree with Makala [2015] and consider it as hardly innovative.

Conclusions

The research problem considered in the study involved the question of the innovativeness of catering enterprises in the face of the crisis situation caused by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The topic is relatively new and the conducted research should be considered *in statu nascendi*. To address the posed problem, the authors formulated and implemented two research objectives. The starting point, and also the first research objective, was to identify the benefits for catering companies of implementing innovations in the face of the crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2

pandemic. In this case, respondents showed considerable creativity and indicated a number of benefits, and among these, more than half of those questioned considered survival in the market to be the most important, which is indeed a great threat. A consequence and development of this issue was the next research objective, namely, to diagnose and assess the barriers to innovation in catering businesses. Of the numerous barriers proposed, respondents identified fear of failure as the main one (over 50% of indications). It should be emphasised that it was proven that all the indicated barriers were reflected in economic reality. Thus, the hypothesis assuming that the main barrier hindering the introduction of innovations in the surveyed catering enterprises is psychological in nature was positively verified.

The conducted research allows the following conclusions to be drawn:

- innovative activities are important, especially in the face of a crisis such as the effects of the restrictions introduced in Poland in connection with the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic;
- in addition to fear of failure and reluctance to innovate on the part of employees of the surveyed companies (this was the case for about 50%), an obstacle to their introduction was the lack of system support and administrative assistance in their implementation, and fear of procedures in this area (34%);
- during the pandemic the smallest number of implementations concerned product innovations.

On the basis of the results obtained from the research, several recommendations can be proposed, through which the level of innovation in catering enterprises can be increased, especially in crisis situations:

- it is necessary for the government to prepare a strategy for dealing with crisis situations, such as a pandemic;
- it is desirable to simplify procedures and regulations, since one of the most significant barriers to innovation is the fear of numerous administrative and legal procedures;
- it is worth considering action at the European (EU), national and regional level to link the scientific community with the catering sector. Most innovations have their origins in scientific research.

In light of the above, the main recommendation for business practice is that it is necessary to implement innovations in catering companies, as they condition the company's survival in the market, especially in times of crisis. Nevertheless, whenever faced with strong competition, the company to stand out from others by virtue of innovation.

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Innowacje w przedsiębiorstwach gastronomicznych: korzyści i bariery

Abstract

The research problem is the innovativeness of catering enterprises, especially in the face of crisis situations. The aim of the research is to diagnose the barriers that hinder or prevent the introduction of innovations, and to identify the benefits of their implementation. The research applied a diagnostic survey method with the use of a web-based survey

questionnaire (CAWI) and a QR code. The research was conducted in the midst of the crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The result of the research is the diagnosis of numerous barriers to innovation in catering enterprises, the most prominent of which is the fear (apprehension) of failure. In spite of that, respondents representing 50 catering businesses pointed to numerous benefits of introducing innovations, the main one being the company's survival in the market. The results of the study fit into the discipline of *management and quality science* and provide a stimulus for further discussion.

Key words

innovations, innovation in tourism enterprises, innovation in gastronomy, SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, Podlaskie Voivodeship