

Logistics Support as a Key Success Factor in Gastronomy

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Abstract—Gastronomy is one of the oldest forms of commercial activity. It is currently one of the most popular and still dynamically developing branches of business. Socio-economic changes, its widespread occurrence, new techniques or culinary styles affect the almost unlimited possibilities of its development. Importantly, regardless of the form of business adopted, foodservice is strongly linked to logistics processes, and areas of foodservice that are closely linked to logistics are of strategic importance. Any inefficiency in logistics processes results in reduced chances for success and achieving competitive advantage by companies belonging to the catering industry. The aim of the paper is to identify the areas of logistic support, occurring in the catering business, and affecting the scope of the logistic processes implemented. The aim of the paper is implemented through a plural homogeneous approach, based on direct observation, text analysis of current documents, and in-depth free targeted interviews.

Keywords—Gastronomy, competitive advantage, logistics, logistics support.

I. INTRODUCTION

ACCORDING to Maslow's pyramid, one of the basic needs is related to the satisfaction of hunger. Nowadays, however, it cannot be limited only to strictly physiological needs. Now, the satisfaction of hunger has started to become more and more important, and over the years it has gained a clear emotional content. Holiday souvenirs are local alcoholic beverages and food products, and selected dishes are associated with the family home. The attractiveness of the gastronomic offer may result from the culinary traditions that have a long history or may be the result of current trends [1].

The catering sector has not been sufficiently researched in the literature on management sciences, and the available works are mainly based on marketing and tourism aspects. Scientific achievements in management sciences presenting the relationship between the catering sector and logistics can be considered insignificant; publications dealing with this topic can mainly be found in popular science works, but the number of publications listed in electronic databases such as: Ebsco, Emerald, Scopus or Google Scholar is very small. Considering the fact that both gastronomy and logistics are now considered to be one of the most dynamically developing business sectors [2]-[4], much more attention should be paid to researching the relationships between these sectors. Importantly, the analyses conducted so far in the field of gastronomy identified only logistics aspects in terms of location, which is a large simplification.

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The perception of catering services by buyers in market conditions is based on a multi-dimensional identification of the essential features of these services in the space of market communication, with a simultaneous strong impact of the specific nutritional needs of consumers [5]. The strategic areas of gastronomy operation that affect the level of customer service are primarily the areas of logistic character [6], and ensuring accessibility is the overriding goal of every entrepreneur in the HoReCa sector (joint definition of the hotel and catering sector - Hotel, Restaurant, Catering/Café).

II. LOGISTICS UTILITY

For some time, scientists and practitioners have been discussing the logistics utility. Identified with the field of practical knowledge, logistics, as a field of science, applies not only knowledge in the field of economic sciences, but it more and more often goes beyond the usual framework and patterns. The discussions related to the classification of logistics application and their dynamic development causes that more and more areas of its use are recognized as "logistic". Recently, the phenomenon of deriving of new ideas, on the basis of sometimes strange assumptions of a "theoretical" nature is growing. The ideas are based on such an understanding of the essence of logistics that has little to do with its classical perception. For this reason, it becomes necessary to properly indicate the usefulness of things and phenomena.

Usability is often associated with usefulness, and these words are also frequently used as synonyms in scientific texts. However, attention should be paid to the fact that this concept is used in many areas of science and as can be easily guessed, it is not interpreted unambiguously. Discussions about the essence of logistics often refer to its usefulness, which is perceived as ensuring the availability of material goods or the availability of places. This availability is also the goal of logistic activities [7]. Utility is often understood as the assessment of the difference between a potential effect and a desired effect. It is therefore an assessment of satisfaction of needs [8]. Therefore, identifying utility with achieving the assumed goals should not be surprising.

It should also be emphasised that in the English-language literature there are three notions related to the meaning, i.e. *usefulness*, *usability*, *utility*. The second term replaced the *user-friendly* notion. For example, in recent years, as a result of the work of the EU Commission and Parliament, documents that contain the word logistics in their title and content have occurred. In translation into Polish, these documents raise substantive doubts. In the case of logistics - where so far there

has been no well-established, unambiguous vocabulary and interpretation of terms on a national and global scale - the matter becomes quite serious in practical terms. Critical words expressed in discussions in many forums confirm the substantive and semantic doubts related to the use of logistic terminology in the work of the EU Commission and Parliament [9].

We can distinguish two dimensions of "utility". The first, practical (implementational) concerns the material and non-material potential of the area in which a given utility is to be implemented. This area is used due to the fact that it enables the achievement of the assumed goal in a favourable manner. In other words - it supports the implementation and can be considered useful; furthermore, it is possible here, to use resources, which are most often assigned a practical role. The second area - economic, is inseparably associated with the economic interpretation of the concept of utility. It is closely related to the issue of consumption and assesses the effect of implementation (practical) activities. Considering the logistics aspect, economic utility is responsible for the improvement of activities enabling the achievement of the assumed goal; it is mainly about improving the usability of already implemented solutions.

In comparison with other theoretical concepts, the concept of logistics has spread incomparably faster as an economic way of thinking [10]. Logistics is a field of practical knowledge, which means that apart from theoretical aspects, it also offers practical tools. Unfortunately, the multitude and variety of definitions of logistics blurs its image [11]. For this reason, the most important thing in defining logistics is to rely on the domain paradigm.

The paradigm of logistics is its flow orientation, i.e., the existence of material (including personal) and information flows, which are shaped in the management process in a way that allows for achieving access to products (and places) within the determined rules and priorities [6]. On the basis of the above-mentioned paradigm, logistics represents shaping (through logistic management) material and information flows for the purpose of achievement of accessibility (to material goods or places) in accordance with established principles and priorities of operation [6]. The essence of logistics is to model resources in such a way that the shaped material and information flows lead to the achievement of maximum utility. Maximum utility is related to the above-mentioned availability, which is considered the goal of logistics activities, both in terms of products and reaching the desired location.

Logistics as a field of knowledge can find application wherever we deal with material flows to various destinations, in compliance with the requirement of the usefulness of place and time [12]. The paradigm presented before and the knowledge of the basic applications of logistics allow for building complex logistics functions based on specific elements (data) referring to temporal and spatial aspects. Thus, creating the usability of place and time is equivalent to ensuring accessibility, and therefore achievement of the logistics goal. This goal is implemented in accordance with the needs of users towards the logistics branch. Problems

faced by the army or business will be solved differently, and yet a different approach will have to be applied in the case of new applications of logistics that create a specific hybrid of business and military assumptions (e.g., rescue operations, operations of humanitarian character, or mass events).

III. LOGISTICS SUPPORT IN GASTRONOMY

The way a customer of a restaurant feels is the result of many carefully planned elements, including the organization of the meal preparation and serving process, which has significant impact on the customer's mood, as well as affects their behaviour and decisions about purchasing the service, and their subsequent loyalty [13]. Food services are a symbol of social and cultural status; new dishes, alternative use of traditional recipes, typical and local ingredients and spices, features of future solutions and current trends in food consumption are analysed and created here [14]-[16].

For the purpose of the conducted research, 7 areas of logistic support approached as a set of activities aiming at deliberate shaping material flows in the logistics system of a catering entity are distinguished (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Areas of logistic support in gastronomy

It should be emphasised that analysing the operation of enterprises should be approached not in terms of a potential offer, which should probably satisfy the customer with the use of a push strategy, but from the perspective of how to construct an offer from the other side. It should start with the needs of customers, and, through the offer, these needs should be satisfied at the highest possible level, while implementing the pull strategy. In market economy, characterised by a high level of competitiveness, to be successful, it is important to build durable relationships with buyers. The representatives of HoReCa sector must have knowledge of what constitutes value for customers and focus on the processes that enable delivery of this value [17].

Location is the first area of logistic support. Decisions concerning business location are a comprehensive and multi-factor process of qualitative and quantitative process [18]. Choosing the right location is a very important logistic issue, due to the fact that it determines many other areas, such as the level of customer service, transport costs or the level and

structure of inventories [18]. Therefore, location cannot be selected only on the basis of only one criterion, as it may negatively affect the others (the trade-off principle).

Transport is another of the analysed aspects. In the case of gastronomy, it is primarily about food transport, which, due to the conditions of storage and transport of food, is not the easiest to organize. Food exposed to too low or high temperature, too high or low air humidity significantly loses its quality and may eliminate a given product from the offer [19]. Attention should also be paid to the ecological aspects, i.e., food miles. Food Miles is the distance that food must travel from the production site to the consumer [20]. According to environmentalists, this distance should not be greater than 100 km.

Storage is the fourth area shown in Fig. 1. The organization of storage space in gastronomy is very complicated and is governed by many rules. It is not allowed to store raw foods and foods that are already edible, or half processed (fried meat with raw meat) next to each other. The meat should not be stored with the fish. Some fruit or vegetables stored together may cause their faster ripening and, as a result, spoilage of others, etc. 6 basic storage zones can be distinguished in gastronomy. The order of releases from the warehouse is based on the FIFO (first in first out) principle.

Another sphere of logistic support is related to shaping the level and structure of inventories. Effective inventory management requires the ability to predict future events. From the operational point of view of inventory management, the future demand for goods or materials is the most important subject of forecasting [21]. Establishing an inventory management policy is a tactical issue [22].

In the case of waste management and catering, the focus should primarily be on unit packaging. From the point of view of logistics, the functions thanks to which the packaging facilitates (or even enables) processes related to the flow of materials and goods are particularly important [18]. The use of vacuum packaging machines is a popular solution. It allows for hermetic sealing of products and semi-finished products, which reduces the space they occupy and extends their shelf life.

Waste management is the last analysed element of logistic support. According to GRA data (Green Restaurant Association), a single restaurant can easily produce from 50,000 to 100,000 pounds of waste per year, i.e., from 22,000 to almost 50,000 thousand kilograms of waste [23]. However, it should be noted that as much as 95% of it can be recycled or composted [23]. In gastronomy, implementing a management style based on the 3R principle (Reduce-Reuse-Recycle) is becoming common. Minimization of waste generated in gastronomy is reflected in the principle of maximizing the use of raw materials.

IV. BUILDING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE BASED ON LOGISTICS

The fact that the logistical capabilities of an organization should be directly related to the objective (not subjective) results of the entire company is a frequently emerging issue in

logistics research [24]. Activities in the field of logistics are more and more often identified with the most important activities of the company enabling building a competitive advantage and, above all, allowing for dynamic response to changes taking place in the environment. For this reason, logistic strategies are now becoming a way of competing or an important element of this method, as well as an operational development of the already adopted method of gaining a competitive advantage of an enterprise [25]. It is impossible not to notice that currently, logistics plays a huge role in the implementation of strategic goals of the company contained in its implemented competitive strategy [26].

Increasingly, the competences (including key competences) of enterprises are identified with the sub-discipline of management - logistics, despite the fact that it is related to the functional level, and not the strategic level of management. Logistics, as an element of management, may, alone or in connection with other types of activity, also participate in building a competitive advantage [27]. Logistics may independently, or together with other types of activity, determine the way of achieving a competitive advantage, within competitive, negotiating and bargaining struggle [28]. Therefore, it has a wide range of tools, and it can be safely stated that due to its nature it can be considered to be highly flexible.

The point of view of logistics as a field also allows for a wide scope of influence on customer satisfaction. Currently, as researchers, we are aware that the catalogue of elements that can be (mainly indirectly) modified by logistics in order to increase this satisfaction has significantly expanded. Customer satisfaction is influenced not only by a positive assessment of the very product, but also by quality, price, and availability in time and space. Logistics activities therefore serve to ensure the utility of the product in a given place and time [27].

Through its activities, logistics has an impact on the growth of competitive advantages of the enterprise [28]. The advantage in the field of logistics is manifested in the form of such competitive attributes as better availability or longer product life. Defining a logistic advantage is directly related to determination of clear, measurable and qualified goals [30].

Logistics competences, as determinants of achieving success and building a competitive advantage, affect the accomplishment of a number of market and economic effects by the company, such as the assumed market share, the expected level of customer loyalty, the planned size of profit or the planned profitability of products and customers [31]. Identification and operationalization of the strategy should first of all consider the competences of the enterprise related to the resource trend of strategic management.

It should be emphasised that logistic strategies are constantly modified as a result of changes in views and concepts of management and the requirements set by the economic reality [25]. They should be characterised by considerable flexibility. Two basic aspects, i.e. time and cost are distinguished within logistics strategies. These are priorities related to completely different logistical challenges [30].

Increasingly closer cooperation between gastronomy and logistics has been the trend of recent years. Logistics companies enable restaurant owners to focus on their core activity segment, save time and optimize costs. The logistics partner takes care of everything that happens in the back office. Currently, even a small restaurateur can cooperate with a logistics partner. This type of cooperation is gaining popularity in the case of premises that require "specific" goods that are difficult to obtain on the local market. These can be, for example, fresh seafood or fruit, vegetables and types of meat not available locally, and necessary to implement activities consistent with the company's vision. Chain-type restaurants, e.g., fast-food restaurants, such as McDonald's or KFC, have been using the help of logistics partners for years. HAVI Logistics company, which has been providing comprehensive logistics services to McDonald's restaurants all over Poland for over 20 years is a perfect example here.

Thanks to the application of modern methods of logistics management, the company can achieve a dominant cost position on the market (by minimizing logistics costs), or it can offer the customer a product or service that they will not find at the competitors (delivering the goods to the right place, in the right quantity, at the specified time and at quality) [29]. Quick and flexible adaptation to the new reality proves to be a chance for survival. Importantly, it can be seen that it is the logistics aspects that will be crucial in this situation. It should not be forgotten that the improvement of logistics processes does not end with the introduction of changes and achievement of the intended values of indicators and measures, but it is a continuous process [32], [33]. Innovation, speed of reacting to changes and flexibility are the key factors of success nowadays.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research presented in this paper is exploratory in nature. It constitutes an introduction to in-depth quantitative and qualitative studies performed for the needs of an individual research project and the author's doctoral dissertation. For this reason, the presented data cannot be the basis for precise estimates, but they provide evidence confirming the thesis that logistics significantly affects the success in the HoReCa sector.

The complexity of the research is based on a pluralist homogenous approach relying on observation, text of current documents, time series analysis (seasonality, trend) and in-depth, free targeted interviews. This approach allowed for the performance of most complex and reliable analysis of the subject from the point of view of both entrepreneurs and consumers. The presented selection of research methods enabled performance of an extensive analysis of the research issue, both in qualitative and quantitative terms. In addition, the author's professional experience related to work in the HoReCa sector allowed for more accurate and professional observations.

The use of the Google Trends tool facilitated obtaining data on the studied trends in the catering sector. The subject of the research is related to the analysis of the inquiries of Polish

internet users in 2014-2019. The target group can be defined as millennials. The source of data in the Google Trends tool is the number of cases related to entering a given search term by Internet users.

In order to guarantee the comparability of the results, the CAWI questionnaire was used in the study of representatives of the catering sector, while purposefully selecting a sample of 30 representatives of the HoReCa industry operating mainly throughout Poland. The research was conducted from January 2016 to January 2017. Logistics support for gastronomy, analysed in seven areas: location, transport, storage, inventory management, customer service, packaging management, and waste management, was the subject of the research. The obtained research results allowed for the identification of the bottlenecks in the area of logistic support in the HoReCa sector.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the point of view of this paper, the two most important trends in the catering sector concerned the delivery of take-away food and mobile gastronomy (food truck). Bearing in mind the above-mentioned conditions and referring them to the current trends in the catering sector, we decided to select the following terms/phrases for an in-depth analysis:

1. "food for delivery" - the most popular slogan in this case proved to be "food for delivery" (analyses of both phrases provided similar results), and "delicious" (a mental shortcut for an internet platform related to ordering food), which was gaining popularity,
2. "food truck" - the most popular and at the same time growing phrase was in this case "food truck 2019", which narrowed down the search for the studied trend.

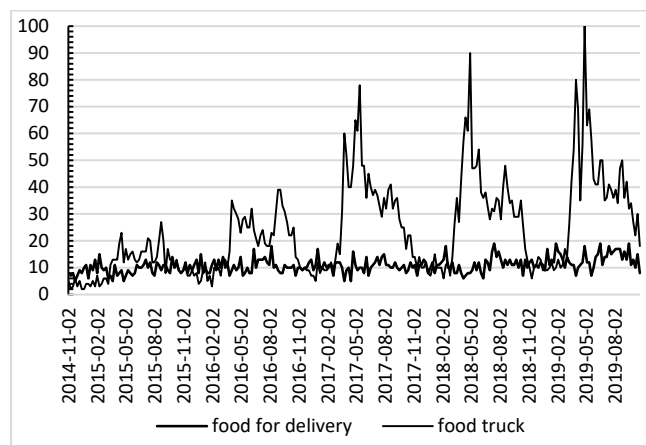


Fig. 2 Time series of enquiries

Graphical analysis of the data presented in Fig. 2 allows for the formulation of an assumption about the existence of seasonal fluctuations, which occur with different intensity in the case of the studied variables. It can be noticed that there are large fluctuations in the case of the phrase "food truck", which can be related to a greater seasonality of the phenomenon, mainly due to the specific character of the

examined facilities, while the food for delivery has a rather increasing tendency.

The observations of the HoReCa sector conducted now, prove that in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the trend related to take-away food has recorded a significant increase as a result of the closure of stationary facilities in Poland (on March 13, 2020, the government announced a decision to suspend the operation of restaurants and other catering outlets). It is important that order aggregators and not individual websites of premises are gaining popularity. Already at the beginning of 2020, 76% Poles ordering food online did so with the help of aggregators [34], which significantly increased the availability of the offer to customers (and thus achieved the basic goal of logistics).

Currently, dishes from virtually any type of cuisine can be ordered. Increasingly, ordering food is also associated with meals at the workplace, and not only, as a few years ago, with those eaten at home. Dietary catering should also be mentioned here. For this reason, the Dark Kitchen phenomenon is often referred to “a restaurant without a hall, focused only on delivering meals, usually located far from the centre, with good transport logistics; low cost of running a business affects the possibility of offering competitive prices, which leads to rapid development of the segment”. Most of the companies delivering food to companies and larger office buildings already operate in this format [35]. This formula allows for quick response to culinary fashions and new trends, and the savings that can be generated by the lack of additional

employees serving customers translate into lower prices of meals, and thus a better competitive position on the market. Moreover, these facilities are usually located in places in cities that are attractive in terms of transport, or on the outskirts, which allows for increasing the range, and reaching a larger group of customers. Dark kitchens can also affect the market of online food orders, the value of which is currently estimated at PLN 1.8 billion [34].

When it comes to mobile gastronomy, its offer has features similar to catering establishments specializing in fast food dishes, but the specificity and nature of the offer are mainly determined by the creativity and personality of the facility owner. It is also much easier to introduce changes in the offer or adapt it to the individual needs of customers. In the case of mobile gastronomy, frozen products will not be found either. In the USA, this type of restaurant is already commonplace, but in Poland food trucks are just beginning their development phase [36]. However, it is impossible not to notice that the ability to constantly change the location and reach customers directly is closely related to one of the most important areas of the location already mentioned in the theoretical part - one of the most important aspects of logistics support.

The obtained research results allowed for the specification of key elements and model solutions in the areas of logistic support distinguished for the needs of this paper. Fig. 3 presents a type of mind map related to particular areas and solutions that allow for achieving a competitive advantage. Further case studies were conducted for each of the areas.



Fig. 3 The most important elements of the distinguished areas of logistic support

As shown in Fig. 3, in the area of suppliers, delegating the obligation to select suppliers to chefs or cooks, as people with the greatest knowledge about products, is the most important thing. The owners also often deal with it, but the decisions should still be perfectly made after consultation with the person with the greatest knowledge in this area. In addition, the surveyed entrepreneurs emphasize the importance of close relationships that are established with suppliers, mostly

through close cooperation with several of them (3 to 4) from the local market. Sometimes, close suppliers include, for example, a local food wholesaler, such as MAKRO Cash and Carry chain store. Nevertheless, it should be indicated that all employees emphasize that the quality of the offered products is extremely important, if not the most important, to them, which translates into systematic quality control of both products and suppliers.

Orders should be placed daily, and deliveries should be made on the same basis. In order to minimize the potential amount of waste, entrepreneurs try to fulfil orders on the basis of systematic analyses of the demand for specific menu items. It is closely related to ecological aspects, both in the area of waste minimization and full use of food products. The currently conducted research on gastronomic trends confirms that the so-called the fifth quarter, i.e., using everything that can be served to guests, mainly referring to offal, which more and more often appears in the menu of top restaurants in the world, awarded with Michelin stars is increasingly popular.

In terms of transport, the importance of the above-mentioned order aggregators is emphasized. Entrepreneurs unanimously emphasize that despite the fact that it involves additional costs, cooperation with several different suppliers and having own crew and fleet allows for increasing customer satisfaction and extending the range of deliveries, and thus reaching a wider group of recipients. Packaging also plays a key role here; its environmental friendliness, but also quality aspects that will not adversely affect the served dishes are emphasized.

The research conducted on entrepreneurs allowed to identify problem areas that slow down the functioning of gastronomic facilities. The bottlenecks concern the areas of:

- location;
- transport and inventory management;
- packaging management.

From the point of view of running a business, location is extremely important, entrepreneurial respondents often emphasize the fact that the inability to comfortably park the car next to the premises is often of key importance for their customers. Moreover, if the premises are not oriented towards the Dark Kitchen formula, the most attractive locations are in the city centre, which makes it difficult to organize supplies and deliver orders to customers during peak hours.

Almost all respondents unanimously emphasize that they would not decide to change products to cheaper ones if it were to cause a quality detriment; nevertheless, providing fresh products of good quality is not easy. Additionally, specialized kitchens that need a specific type of products must find dependable and reliable suppliers. Not all of them can meet the high requirements of chefs. Frequent shortages in supply can, on the one hand, provide the opportunity to creatively change menu items, but also cause frustration among employees. It is not always possible to plan the stock level well, which also forces changes in the menu. Unfortunately, customers are not satisfied with such a situation, and the owners - as they unanimously emphasize - do not always have some other alternative. Here it can also be seen how important the usefulness of place and time is from the point of view of customer service.

The last area is related to the packaging economy. First of all, it is necessary to test the packaging in advance. It is about two basic aspects: durability and convenience of eating. There are situations in which, under the influence of temperature, the packaging simply dissolves and eating food is difficult for customers. Moreover, in the case of organizing deliveries, the

food may "steep" or excessively cool, which has a negative impact on the quality of the final product, and thus customer satisfaction.



Fig. 4 Understanding the concept of logistics and its areas

Despite the differentiation by the type of conducted activity, the surveyed companies perceive the importance of logistics activities in relation to building a competitive advantage. Even if they do not call the key processes for achieving an advantage as logistics, it is impossible not to notice that instinctively it is the aspect of timeliness, organization of deliveries and cooperation with suppliers, transport, customer service, and appropriate product matching that is considered the most important from the point of view of running a business (Fig. 4). It should be noted that the HoReCa sector enterprises are characterized by a large dispersion and fragmentation of entities and a significant diversity of the offer. They are forced to constantly search for new sources of competitive advantage and strengthen their position on the market. About 60% of catering enterprises close down within the first three years of operation [37].

VII. CONCLUSION

The catering sector currently represents a series of challenges related to the organization of supplies, deliveries, storage or preparation of goods as part of providing customer service at the highest level. On this basis, it can be concluded that majority of the processes that are most important for the HoReCa sector are related to the area of logistics. Regardless of the adopted form of activity, gastronomic establishments are strongly associated with logistics processes. In order to make the operation of gastronomic establishments efficient and effective, it is necessary to apply the principles of logistics in practically every sphere of activity. Therefore, logistics strategies (of all types) are implemented by restaurants on a daily basis. Improving logistics processes and their management is a challenge and a priority for many companies. The research results confirm the assumption that the strategic areas of gastronomy operation, directly and indirectly influencing the success in the sector, are primarily logistic ones. Increasingly, attention is paid to the relationship between logistic elements (ever-present in restaurants) and building a competitive advantage for enterprises, while the benefits of using tools to improve the logistics area are clearly visible. Restaurant owners can improve their activities very often unconsciously, on the basis of their own experience, and

not modern management concepts. Research conducted in this paper shows that the owners of gastronomic establishments intuitively associate the success of their businesses with effectively implemented logistics.

The trends of further research in the field of creating a competitive advantage of enterprises should primarily include the identification and operationalization of factors determining the building of advantage towards a logistically oriented organization strategy. Attempting to conceptualize gastronomy in the area of logistics and include it in the logistics discourse is an innovative undertaking, and the implementation of research in this area will contribute both to the development of the logistics sub-discipline, as well as to the development of practical models that can be used by entrepreneurs in the HoReCa sector.

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