



Aromatherapy in tourism, hospitality and gastronomy as an innovative tool for improving service quality – results of the Erasmus+ project “Future Competences in the Tourism Services Sector” implemented by Fundacja Drogowskaz (Poland) and HRC Culinary Academy (Bulgaria)

Introduction

How can a unique customer experience be created in a hotel or restaurant? One of the increasingly popular tools is aromatherapy – the conscious use of scents that influence the well-being and emotions of guests. Within the Erasmus+ project in the field of vocational education and training, implemented by Fundacja Drogowskaz in cooperation with HRC Culinary Academy, the possibilities of using aromatherapy as an element of sensory marketing in tourism, hospitality and gastronomy were explored. The project demonstrates that such solutions can not only improve service quality but also support the development of professional competences for people preparing to work in the hospitality sector.

The beginning of this implemented good practice and the application of solutions dedicated to the tourism sector dates back to the partner meeting in Bulgaria in October 2025, where Edyta Multarzyńska-Badzioch, Vice-President of Fundacja Drogowskaz, conducted an inspiring workshop on aromatherapy and the use of scents in various areas of everyday life. The workshop became the starting point for further activities and implementations, including the innovative idea developed by the partner organisation HRC, which runs the restaurant Restaurant Talents (<https://www.restauranttalents.bg/>).

In their menu they introduced a scent panel as part of the tasting experience, allowing guests to make a choice through their sense of smell. This remarkable experience is gaining increasing popularity and represents a

unique concept among restaurants in Sofia and Bulgaria. It improves the quality of services offered to customers in the gastronomy sector and enriches the professional skills of hospitality staff.

Alongside the implementation of this aromatic practice, a number of inspiring ideas were developed. These will be implemented both by the project partnership and by the leader of another project, Agility – Magdalena Stusińska-Krywalska, as a good practice strengthening vocational training programmes dedicated to the HORECA sector.

Aromatherapy as a tool for building service quality in the hospitality sector

The tourism and gastronomy industries are increasingly focusing on creating a comprehensive customer experience. Guests visiting hotels or restaurants expect not only high-quality services but also an atmosphere that allows them to relax and remember the place.

In this context, sensory marketing is becoming increasingly important. It involves managing customer experience through different senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. Among these, smell plays a particularly significant role because it is strongly linked to emotions and memory.

Aromatherapy involves the use of natural essential oils and fragrances to improve well-being and create a welcoming atmosphere within a given space. In the hospitality industry, scent can fulfil many functions:

- creating an atmosphere of relaxation and comfort
- strengthening positive emotions among guests
- building a distinctive identity of a place
- influencing the perceived quality of services

Thanks to these benefits, aromatherapy is becoming an interesting tool supporting customer experience management.

As emphasised by Anna Salamończyk-Mochel, President of Fundacja Drogowskaz, who coordinates the project activities in Poland, aromatherapy can have very practical applications in the service sector:

“In tourism and gastronomy, designing customer experience is becoming increasingly important. Aromatherapy is a simple yet very effective tool that can enrich the service offer and create a unique atmosphere in a place.

Through our project activities we demonstrate that even small elements, such as the conscious use of scent in a restaurant or hotel, can significantly influence the perceived quality of services and guest satisfaction. At the same time, it represents an inspiring area for developing professional competences among people working in the HORECA sector.”

The use of aromatherapy in hospitality and tourism

In hospitality, aromatherapy is increasingly used as an element of building a positive first impression and improving guest comfort. Already in the reception and lobby areas, a carefully selected scent can create an atmosphere of hospitality and relaxation after a journey. Many hotels use delicate citrus, lavender or woody aromas that help guests unwind. Scent diffusion systems can also be used in hotel rooms, where subtle fragrances enhance the comfort of guests' stay.

A natural area for the use of aromatherapy is also SPA and wellness zones, where the aromas of essential oils support relaxation and regeneration. In some facilities scents are also used in conference rooms, where citrus or mint aromas can enhance the concentration of participants.

Another important area for the use of aromatherapy is hotel and restaurant gastronomy. In cuisine, scent plays a particularly significant role because it is directly related to taste perception and influences how guests experience dishes. Aromas of fresh herbs, spices or citrus fruits can highlight the character of served meals and create a pleasant atmosphere in a restaurant. Many restaurants use natural scents derived from prepared dishes, such as the aroma of freshly baked bread, coffee, vanilla or cinnamon, which stimulate appetite and enhance the culinary experience.

More innovative approaches are also emerging, where aromatherapy is consciously used as part of designing a gastronomic experience. Restaurants may apply scents tailored to the character of the cuisine – for example basil and oregano aromas in Mediterranean cuisine, lemongrass in Asian dishes, or rosemary and thyme in meat dishes. Such an approach allows the creation of a coherent sensory experience combining taste, scent and the atmosphere of the place, influencing guests' positive evaluation of service quality.

Scent is one of the key elements influencing taste perception. Properly selected aromas can stimulate appetite, strengthen the perception of dishes and create a unique atmosphere in restaurants. Aromatherapy can be used in gastronomy in several ways. The most natural solution is to use aromas related to the preparation of dishes, such as the smell of freshly baked bread, coffee or herbs. However, more advanced solutions are increasingly appearing, where aromas are consciously used as part of designing the customer experience.

Thanks to such solutions, scent becomes an integral element of the hotel stay experience. The conscious selection of aromas and the professional knowledge of staff in the tourism sector are also important. As emphasised by Yoanna Mileva, Director of HRC:

Today's hotel guest expects not only a comfortable room and high standards of service but also an experience that engages the senses and creates positive emotions. Properly selected aromatherapy can become an important element enriching the hotel's offer, improving service quality and creating a unique atmosphere that promotes relaxation and well-being among guests.

Good practice – aromatherapy integrated with a restaurant menu.

One of the innovative ideas analysed within the Erasmus+ project is the concept of combining culinary experience with aromatherapy through guest-selected scents. This solution is based on the idea of sensory marketing, where the gastronomic experience is enriched with an additional element – a consciously selected aroma accompanying the meal.

In the proposed model, restaurant guests receive a special scent fan, containing several fragrance samples corresponding to different categories of dishes. The fan functions as an interactive selection tool – guests can smell individual fragrance notes and decide which aroma best matches their preferences and the dish chosen from the menu.

After making their choice, the guest indicates the main scent note that will accompany the served dish. The restaurant staff or a scent diffusion system then introduces the selected aroma in a subtle way around the table. The scent acts as a delicate background for the culinary experience and does not dominate the natural aroma of the food.

Suggested fragrance notes may be matched to the type of cuisine or dish, for example:

- basil or oregano – for Mediterranean dishes

- lemongrass or ginger – for Asian cuisine
- rosemary or thyme – for meat dishes
- lemon or lime – for fish dishes
- vanilla or cinnamon – for desserts

Using a scent fan allows restaurant guests to actively participate in creating their own culinary experience. The selection of aroma becomes part of interaction with the menu and an additional element building the atmosphere of the restaurant visit.

This solution creates a personalised gastronomic experience engaging the sense of smell and enhancing the perception of dishes. At the same time, it represents an interesting example of good practice demonstrating how aromatherapy can be used in gastronomy as a tool to improve service quality and differentiate restaurant offerings on the market.

Erasmus+ and the development of professional competences in the tourism sector

The project implemented by Fundacja Drogowskaz and its Bulgarian partner demonstrates that introducing modern concepts such as sensory marketing and aromatherapy can support the development of professional competences for people learning in the tourism, hospitality and gastronomy sectors.

Project participants had the opportunity to explore new methods of designing customer experiences and innovative solutions used in the hospitality industry. As a result, they developed competences related to:

- designing customer experiences in tourism and gastronomy services
- applying sensory marketing in professional practice
- creative approaches to service design
- international cooperation and exchange of good practices

International cooperation between partners from Poland and Bulgaria enabled the exchange of experiences and different perspectives on vocational education in Europe.

Aromatherapy can therefore become a modern and creative tool supporting the improvement of service quality in tourism, hospitality and gastronomy. Properly selected aromas influence guests' well-being, enhance culinary experiences and help create a unique atmosphere in a place.

The results of the Erasmus+ project show that including such topics in vocational education programmes can prepare future hospitality professionals to apply innovative solutions in their professional practice.

We encourage readers to download the project results from our website:

FUNDACJA DROGOWSKAZ- LEADER (POLAND)

<https://fundacjadrogowskaz.pl/produkty/>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61558189992653>

HRC CULINARY ACADEMY- PARTNER (BULGARIA)

<https://www.hrcacademy.com/en/>

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About the Partnership

The project is carried out by an international partnership of three organizations that have combined their expertise to support the development of quality services in the hospitality sector.

The project leader is the Drogowskaz Foundation, an organization with extensive experience in adult education and tourism sector development. The Foundation implements training projects, promotes sustainable tourism and service accessibility, and its team combines expertise in education, promotion, research, and tourism product development.

A project partner is the Academy of Applied Sciences in Nowy Targ, a vocational higher education institution with 25 years of experience in practical education. The institution offers educational programs in tourism, recreation, HoReCa management, digitalization, and entrepreneurship, while also cooperating with local businesses and supporting the development of accessible education.

The project also involves the Private Professional College HRC Culinary Academy (Bulgaria), a renowned vocational education institution specializing in gastronomy and the HoReCa industry. The institution offers accredited educational programs, vocational courses, and international internships, preparing future professionals in line with current market demands.

Project Results

The outcome of the partners' international cooperation is a set of practical tools supporting the development of professional competencies in the tourism and gastronomy sectors.

As part of the project, a handbook for tourism professionals, three educational packages devoted to sustainable tourism, accessible tourism, and tourism products, as well as an evaluation report on the testing of the developed materials, have been prepared.

All project results will be made available in three languages, increasing their accessibility and potential for use in various European countries.

Funding

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