



Brunch Menu Planning for Mekong Restaurant

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Degree in Hospitality, Tourism and Experience Management

Bachelor's Thesis

2022

Abstract

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Degree Bachelor of Hospitality, Tourism and Experience Management
Report/Thesis Title Planning Brunch Menu for Mekong Restaurant
Number of pages and appendix pages 34 + 6
<p>Mekong Restaurant in Helsinki commissioned this thesis, and the study is used as a project-based method. The thesis topic was based on the author's interest in restaurant business operation and menu creation, especially brunch menu development. The author decided to create a Vappu Asian Brunch menu for the restaurant, and the planning took place from the end of March 2022 to 30 April 2022, when the Vappu menu was served. This thesis aims to demonstrate essential stages of developing a brunch menu for a restaurant based on the restaurant concept and features by applying the theory, collecting and analyzing data from the company and its competitor.</p> <p>The thesis starts with the theoretical framework consisting of the cultural background of Vietnamese and Finnish cuisine with the comparison of the two food culture's ingredients and cooking methods. The food culture background was applied to manipulate the basis for proposing menu ideas for the Vietnamese restaurant, the author studied Vappu – Finnish May Day Celebration and the menu that the Finns consumed on this day to analyze and create an Asian version of the Vappu menu. Following that was the foundation theory to produce a brunch menu, including the theory of new product development process with six critical phases, theory of menu planning combine with brunch origin and typical brunch menu varies in cultural. Competitive analysis was made by benchmarking four nearby competitive restaurants that offered similar Vappu brunch menus. The SWOT analysis was also explained to determine the business's challenges and opportunities to enhance it.</p> <p>In the empirical part, the final thesis product was presented, the author stated the purpose of this product and clarified how an Asian Vappu brunch menu was created by applying the theory. In addition, the feedback survey was conducted by quantitative research methods, and the result was also analyzed in this part.</p> <p>The outcome of the thesis is the Mekong Restaurant had an Asian Vappu brunch menu that matched the concept of the restaurant and the tastes of the Finns and foreigners in Finland. The restaurant received positive feedback from customers with the new menu, which is an opportunity for the restaurant to develop its product and service. Besides, the fact that feedback collected from both customers and the commissioning company has encouraged and supported the author a lot that she was able to understand and evaluate the successful and unsuccessful factors to consider in the next menu planning project in her future career.</p>
Key words Brunch, Vietnamese food culture, Finnish food culture, Vappu, Mekong Restaurant, Menu planning, New product development

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1 Introduction

Brunch is a meal combining breakfast and lunch, has been receiving lots of attention in Finland lately. During the 2000s, Finland caught on to the idea of breakfast stretching into the afternoon, and there are an increasing number of cafés and restaurants that added brunch to their menus (Soila, 2013). Thus, people can easily find restaurants in Helsinki that offer brunch menus on Saturdays and Sundays. Brunch in Helsinki defines as a fusion of foreign and local. There are many kinds of brunches with different price ranges, menus, and concepts, however, the Asian brunch is not as popular as other brunch concepts.

Therefore, this thesis aim is to create a Vappu Asian brunch menu for Mekong Restaurant by integrating Asian culinary culture with Nordic culture based on the theoretical background. The purpose when planning a menu is to develop a menu that suits the taste of the Finns by integrating the two countries' food cultures.

The commissioning for this thesis is Mekong Restaurant, and the main contact with whom the author worked together is the restaurant owner. Mekong Restaurant is a small and cozy Vietnamese restaurant located in Helsinki. It was opened in 2019 and is well-known as a place that offers authentic Southern Vietnamese food. The author has been working in the Mekong Restaurant for nearly two years, so she has opportunities to understand and get a better insight into the company's operation. The commissioner was willing to provide the author with the necessary information to plan a brunch menu.

The thesis consists of six main chapters. For the theoretical background, the author first describes the food culture background of Vietnamese and Finnish cuisine. Then, the author outlined the similarities and differences in the culinary cultures between the two countries to manipulate as a basis of proposing idea for the restaurant in next chapters. After analyzing the food background, the author explained the theory that are needed for creating a menu which includes the theory of new product development, consists of the definition and success factors for new product development; menu planning steps and brunch concept were defined in the following chapter. Lastly, in the thesis's theoretical part, the commissioning company is presented, combined with market research and competitors' analysis. The next part is the empirical part which involved the product purpose, planning process, and the outcome. Lastly, in the discussion chapter, the author mentioned feedback from the commissioning company, development suggestions, and personal development in the future career.

2 Food Culture and Concept Background

This chapter includes the main theories that support the thesis “Planning Brunch Menu for Mekong Restaurant”. The author studied the major food and ingredients of Vietnamese and Finnish food cultures through online research, articles, and books. Following that, the author analyzed the similarities and differences between these two countries' cuisines to determine whether combining Vietnamese cuisine with Finnish cuisine was possible. This food culture background chapter provides insight knowledge about the two countries that support the author in identifying the most suitable ingredients could be developed in a brunch menu that integrates a Southeast Asian country's culinary culture with a Nordic country's food culture. In addition, the chosen menu concept was Vappu, so the author explained about Vappu history and the typical dishes that the Finns consumed on this special day, along with Vappu was brunch defining.

2.1 Vietnamese food culture

Vietnamese cuisine could be understood as the method of food processing, the principle of mixing spices, and the general food habits of all Vietnamese people. Although there are differences between regions and ethnic groups, Vietnamese cuisine includes the most general meaning to refer to all the popular dishes in the Vietnamese community. Social and historical processes shape Vietnamese culinary culture. In their minds, Vietnamese cuisine is not simply used in the meals, but it also conveys the meaning of traditions and cultural values.

Vietnam is a country with a tropical ecology of warm weather, plenty of rainfall, and many rivers that allowed for intensive agriculture, therefore, growing rice as the staple was the most suitable choice under these conditions (Avieli 2011). Rice - the main staple starch in the Vietnamese diet, is a central source of calories and it can be used to make noodles, rice flour, rice wine. According to Thaker and Barton (2012, 170–171), the author of *Multicultural Handbook of Food, Nutrition and Dietetics*, many types of noodles can be made from rice, wheat, or green beans, and noodles are cooked as noodles soup, or boiled or stir-fried noodles served with salad are very common in Vietnamese daily meal. Other Vietnamese starchy foods are tapioca, sweet potato, cassava, and corn.

Pork is widely used as a protein in Vietnamese meals, followed by chicken, beef, and duck. However, meat is not often the central focus of Southeast Asian meals because many dishes' recipes contain a small quantity of meat like pork, beef, or chicken. Fish and seafood such as shrimp,

mussels, crab, snail, and clams are also widely consumed, especially in the coasted areas. Meat or fish is cooked by boiled, stir-fried, roasted, grilled, and braised and the skin or fat from meat or poultry are not removed. Tofu (bean curd) is common as well because it is cheap and easy to add to any dish. Beans and nuts are used sometimes in daily main meals, especially with salad, but commonly used in desserts and snacks as garnish. (Thaker & Barton 2012, 171.)

In Vietnam, greens, vegetables, and aromatic herbs are available from household gardens and local markets and they are particularly used and valued for their texture and freshness (Esterik 2008, 27-28). The leafy green vegetables are usually stir-fried, or lightly boiled into a thin soup and added with various ingredients such as meat/prawns, garlic, ginger, etc., it is called “canh”. “Canh” is a light soup that is included in almost basis meal, it is served as a side dish with hot rice. Besides, fresh, uncooked vegetables and salads are also an integral part of Vietnamese daily meals, and spring onion, coriander, cucumber, and lettuce are almost always included. Figure 1 shows a list of widely consumed greens and vegetables in Vietnamese cuisine.

Vietnamese name	English name	Vietnamese name	English name
Cà rốt	Carrot	Mồng tơi	Ceylon spinach
Cà tím	Aubergine	Ớt	Chilli pepper
Cải bắp	Cabbage	Rau dền đỏ	Joseph's coat
Cải bó xôi	Pak choi	Rau muống	Water morning glory
Cải xoong	Watercress	Rau cần ta	Hemlock water dropwort
Cải cúc or Tần ô	Crown daisy	Rau ngót	Katuk
Củ cải trắng	Daikon	Su su	Chow chow
Dưa leo/ chuột	Cucumber	Súp lơ or Bông cải	Cauliflower
Mướp đắng/ Khổ qua	Bitter Melon		

Figure 1. Vegetables are commonly used in Vietnamese diet (Thaker & Barton 2012, 172)

Vietnamese cuisine is characterized by the neutrality of ingredients that are not too spicy, not too sweet, or too fatty. Vietnamese has vibrant ingredients (seasonings) in food processing including aromatic herbs such as basil, spring onion, perilla, marjoram, etc.; spices such as chili, pepper, lemongrass, chives, garlic, ginger, lime, chives, etc.; fermented condiments such as batches, shrimp paste, vinegar, coconut milk. Especially fish sauce, one of the most crucial ingredients in every Vietnamese dish, is used commonly in cooking rather than salt. Fish sauce is known as a basic ingredient and condiment present in all meals. (Esterik 2008, 31.)

Vietnam is a hot agricultural country, tropical monsoon is divided into three distinct regions: North - Central - South. The characteristics of geography, ethnicity, culture, and climate have

determined the specific characteristics of the cuisine of each region - region. Each region has a unique feature and taste, contributing to rich and diverse Vietnamese cuisine. Northern cuisine is lighter and fresher in taste compared to other regions, they mainly use fish sauce and shrimp paste to add flavor. Southern cuisine is a region of more diversity that is influenced by Cambodia and Thailand cuisine. Southern Vietnamese prefer sweet/tangy flavor in many dishes that they add sugar and use pineapple, tamarind, and galangal, or use coconut milk for extra fatty flavor. Central Vietnamese cuisine is more focused on the food preparation and presentation with many small side dishes because it is influenced by the royal culinary style, its cuisine is also spicier with the use of chili peppers and shrimp paste. (Thaker & Barton 2012, 170.)

Food-sharing is common throughout the Asian culinary culture, particularly in Vietnamese food. Vietnamese meals are served family-style, and all the dishes, except the individual bowl of rice, are shared communally with the serving spoons. Each individual has their personal chopsticks and bowl of rice. (Thaker & Barton 2012, 175). In addition, a positive chaotic atmosphere is one of the characteristics of the eating experience in Asian countries. Conversations in every Vietnamese meal are more likely louder and boisterous than prim and proper (Chan 2020).

2.2 Finnish food culture

Finland is a Northern European country containing numerous lakes, rivers, ponds and forests with beautiful nature landscapes. Finland is a cold country where the temperature varies considerably between the southern coastal regions and the extreme north. As stated by Tanttu and Tanttu (1994, 6–7), “The climate is what makes Finland what it is, and Finland without the four clearly marked seasons would not be Finland”. The Finns are always waiting and welcome the next season no matter what the weather is like (Tanttu & Tanttu 1994, 8). Therefore, the Finns love consuming fresh, seasonal food and selecting local food over the imported items is eco-friendly and supports the local farmers and the most suitable theme that summarizes Finnish cooking is seasonality. The cuisine is more focused on the integrity of the food than the artifice with which it may be prepared, resulting in unaccomplished yet delicious and healthy dishes cooked with care. Finnish people take health concerns in their cooking so that they reduce fat and salt used. As a result, their diet includes the use of whole-grain products, seasonal fresh berries and vegetables, and meat and fish. (Hill 2007, 14.)

For domestic and wild meat in Finland, pork, beef, and chicken are mainly consumed as protein

sources, and pork is used to make sausages and preserved ham. Beef is also an essential part of the Finnish diet. It could be cooked by the slow-cooking technique or minced beef to make meatballs or meat sauce, mixed with potato to make pies and pasties, or served as steak. Lamb is also an option at Easter when it is traditionally roasted. The Finns had many choices for wild meat, such as reindeer, elk, hare, game birds, and bear; wild meat cooking methods could be smoked, stewed, or roasted. As a country with numerous lakes and rivers, Finland, catching and consuming fish is a national passion. Common ways of preparing fish are salting, hot and cold smoked, stewed, or grilled. The most popular varieties of fish are vendace, muikku, pike, burbot, perch, and salmon. (Hill 2007, 18–19.)

Root vegetables such as carrots, celeriac, swede, parsnips, beetroot, and the most essential – potatoes, are the typical staples. The root vegetables feature in many traditional recipes including stewed, mashed and slow-cooked dishes. Fruit, wild berries consist of strawberries, blueberries, lingonberries, cranberries, cloudberries, and other soft berries such as rowan, buckthorn, rose hips, etc. are flavored in using in Finnish food recipes, the berries are used in stews or in making jams and jellies (Hill 2007, 20.). In autumn, the forests in Finland are filled with mushrooms and people started their mushroom hunting to harvest the edible mushrooms. Mushrooms can be preserved and frozen after that, or put in sauce, soup, salad, or cream. (Tanttu & Tanttu 1996, 30.)

The Finnish frequently consume dairy products such as milk, cream, cream cheese, cheese, etc. Therefore, the supermarkets within the country provide a wide selection of dairy products. For example, many types of milk are available, including skimmed, semi-skimmed, full-fat milk, buttermilk, and curd milk. In addition, bread is generally part of Finn's diet, rye bread and barley loaves. The bread can be enhanced by cereals and oats that help to lend complexity to the bread and soften the dough. (Hill 2007, 21.)

2.3 Comparison between Vietnamese and Finnish food culture

Based on the study and research of Vietnamese and Finnish food cultures' typical ingredients and cooking methods in previous subchapters, the author will define and analyze the similarities and different characteristics of the two countries' cuisine. Thereby, the author can identify the capability of integrating an Asian food culture to a Nordic country food culture to manipulate as a basis for proposing menu ideas for a Vietnamese restaurant in the following section.

For the similarity characteristics, both countries used pork, beef, and chicken as a main source

of protein in daily meals with the similar cooking method such as stew, roasted or braised, minced meat to make meatballs, and encourage the low-fat cooking methods, major food spices are salt, sugar, and pepper. Fish is also a flavor food for Vietnamese and Finnish, however, based on the difference of geographical and climate factors that the diversity of fish types of two countries are not similar, since Vietnam is a tropical ecologic of warm weather all year round which is opposite to Finland. In general, Vietnamese and Finnish love greens and vegetables, particularly carrots, cucumber, potatoes, mushrooms and salad.

For the different characteristics, firstly, the Finns consumed the source of protein from wild animal that rarely found in Vietnamese recipe that are reindeer, bear, game birds, hare, and elk. In addition, Vietnamese certainly choosing rice as a main staple starch as a central of calories in their diet, in contrast, Finnish people flavor potatoes and rye bread as staple in diet which is considered as a characteristic of a Nordic country culinary. In cooking, dill is Finns' favorite herb that used to garnish dishes, especially potatoes, Vietnamese flavor spring onion and coriander to garnish dishes. Furthermore, contrast to Finland, milk and cheese are consumed in small quantities in Vietnam and coconut milk/cream is used for dessert, in drinks or curries to create the fattiness, but coconut milk/cream is not daily consumed.

2.4 Brunch

Before explaining about Vappu, the author will first define one of the most essential key words of this thesis – brunch. Brunch is a meal combining breakfast and lunch, and it is served late between breakfast and lunchtime. The distinction between brunch and breakfast is that breakfast begins a workday, and brunch occurs on weekends. The term brunch was first used in England in the 1890s, and it started as a meal for the British upper classes. Even though brunch was of British origin, it was popularized in the United States in the 1930s, and brunch became an American tradition. In recent decades, brunch has been defined as a meal of both comfort and casual entertaining and as an occasion for indulgent dining. Brunch has appeared as a meal for people to relax and enjoy good food on any occasion, such as a casual brunch to spend time with friends or a holiday brunch to connect with family members. (Ternikar 2014.)

Brunch is typically served between late breakfast and lunch time, so it usually offers food traditionally associated with both meals. A simple brunch menu often includes omelets, boiled-egg dishes, different versions of pancakes, waffles, and French toast. Lunch options can range from salads to sandwiches and simple main dishes, desserts are also typically offered in the brunch menu. A brunch

can also be served buffet style to allow guests to have a wider selection of foods in a single sitting. A buffet brunch may include displays of breakfast bread, fruits, salads, egg dishes, potatoes, and cured pork alongside chilled shellfish and cured or smoked seafood, and dishes full of hot components such as meats, starches, and vegetables, and station of dessert. (Traster 2018, 84 – 86).

As mentioned above, brunch began in England and quickly spread to the United States and then to other parts of the world as well. While the United States has a typical brunch menu, including eggs Benedict and mimosas or fried chicken, waffles, and coffee, there are many diverse versions of brunch food around the world. In China, Chinese brunch tradition is dim sum, including small plates of sweet and savory steamed or fried dishes. In India, Sunday brunch often includes aloo puree (curried potatoes and fried chapattis), eggs cooked with onions, spices, pepper, and yogurt drink. In Dubai and other parts of the Middle East, brunch is a Friday midday post-prayer meal. As stated, there are different versions of brunch across the world that demonstrate how religion and culture shape the diversity of brunch times and menus. Brunch worldwide varies between cultures, but it is still a leisurely weekend tradition. Brunch is diverse in its beginnings, and brunch is diverse today in its offerings. It is a time to experiment with ethnic recipes or sample foreign cuisines. (Ternikar 2014.)

2.5 Vappu in Finland

After studying about Vietnam and Finland culinary culture and characteristic, in this chapter the author explained Vappu or May Day celebration in Finland, including history and the typical Vappu menu that the Finns frequently consume. The reason to analyze this chapter is the author decided to choose the menu theme is Vappu and the celebration is coming up, it would be a perfect occasion to create an Asian brunch menu. As in any country, Finnish festivals and holidays provide an opportunity for people to go out to observe traditional rites, socialize, share meals, and have fun. Most of Finland's national holidays are religious in origin, except Independence Day (December 6), Midsummer's Day, and May Day (Hill 2007, 12–13). Vappu, or Finnish May Day Celebration on May 1st, is one of four of the biggest Finnish traditional festivals alongside Christmas, New Year, and Mid-Summer Day. Typically, May 1st in Vietnam and other countries around the world is the International Labor Day; however, in Finland, this day has many other meanings, and the celebration on May 1st started a long time ago before International Labor Day was first celebrated in 1886 (Truong 2015). May Day Celebration is a mixture of other feasts such as Labor Day, Pagan spring feast, St. Walburga's Day, and student feast.

Pagan spring feast: In pre-Christian Europe, in rural areas, May Day was celebrated as the beginning of spring, honoring the pagan fertility gods and the gods of crops and fields. In the past in

Finland, an ancient spring party called 'hela' was celebrated in May. At this time, the farm animals are released into the pasture for the first time after the long winter. During hela, people burnt the bonfires and made loud noises by blowing horns and clanging bells to ward off evil spirits and witches to protect the cattle from wild animals. Besides, people gathered around the fires to celebrate and dance, drinking beer and mead. May Day is also the day to celebrate the beginning of spring in modern-day Finland, although the weather might be snowing. When the weather is good enough, people may go out to have a picnic or just a walk in the wild to enjoy the first signs of spring. Many restaurants offer outdoor terrace areas for the customers to enjoy the spring sunshine. (Nordic Recipe Archive 2005.)

St. Walburga's Day: Many holidays in Finland and many northern European countries have traditions from Christian holidays that originated in Germany. May Day is traditionally the day of Saint Walpurga, the eighth abbot of Germany. In German folk stories, the night before Walpurgis is called the night of the witches when all witches gathered on a hill. Saint Walburga was known as a protector against witchcraft and sorcery. The Swedish name for May Day, Valborg, and its Finnish name, Vappu, is emanated from her name. (Nordic Recipe Archive 2005.)

Student feast: Since the 19th century, Vappu has become a significant student holiday, perhaps an occasion to have fun, celebrate spring, and celebrate the end of the school year. In any major city in Finland, going out on May Day Eve, it is easy to see many people wearing the traditional white student caps, and colorful overalls gather in the city center. The white student caps are received as a symbol of their graduation from high school. (Nordic Recipe Archive 2005.)

As a day that celebrates a mixture of traditions, celebrating May Day has spread throughout the country by numerous people including both the Finns and foreigners living in Finland to welcome the long-awaited spring. On Vappu Day in Helsinki, the downtown streets, bars, and restaurants start to fill with people in the party mood. (Jacky 2017.)

Typical Finnish dishes that are frequently included on the May Day menu are cold salty dishes such as pickled herring – a small saltwater fish found mainly in the North Atlantic and the North Sea and the Pacific Ocean, gravlax – a Scandinavian dish of dry-cured salmon marinated in herbs, Jansson's Temptation – Swedish anchovy and potato gratin (Nordic Recipe Archive 2005). In addition, there are other typical and traditional Vappu dishes, such as 'nakit' sausages, 'lihapullat' meatballs, savory pie with minced meat, ham, chicken, smoked fish, vegetables, mushroom or cream, and cheese filling. Fresh salad, especially 'perunasalaatti' potato salad, is highly

recommended for adding to the Vappu menu (Arla s.a.). In addition, 'Munkki' and 'tippaleipä' are Vappu tradition dessert. Munkki is the Finnish doughnut, and tippaleipä – May Day fritter, is a round, deep-fried pastry made similarly to funnel cakes and coated with sugar on the top. The perfect traditional drink to accompany the tippaleipä and munkki in Vappu is sima. Sima was traditionally a mead, but today honey is replaced with sugar. Finnish sima has a tangy lemon flavor, dotted with raisins to control fermentation. (Truong 2015.)

3 Menu Development Process

This part of the thesis includes main theories of menu development which are the based model that the author applied when planning the menu. To design a menu, the menu planner must considerate all the necessary factors of the operation to ensure that the menu meets the company's requirements, in order to develop the company brand and drive more customer. However, before designing a menu, it is necessity to understand the steps of the new product development process and be able to apply it in practical as an important procedure that distribute to the menu successful. In order to understand about the current situation and the position of the company in the market, the SWOT and competitive analysis were mentioned and defined.

3.1 New Product Development process

New product development (NPD) is identified as a comprehensive set of multi-disciplinary activities that transform a market opportunity into a saleable new product to meet customer needs. NPD is key to a business's growth and survival that differentiates it from the competitors in the marketplace. The need to continually refine NPD sources from constantly changing consumer desire and buyer behavior, global competitive forces, new technology applications, and other factors. (Mukhopadhyay & Mukhopadhyay, 2022.)

According to Ulrich and Eppinger (2012, 12–13), a product development process is the sequence of steps or activities that a business develops to conceive, design, and commercialize a product. A well-defined product development process is helpful for the reasons as follows:

- Quality assurance: A product development process specifies the phases and checkpoints are wisely chosen. Following the development process is a key to ensuring the quality of product results.
- Coordination: A clear development process is identified as a master plan that informs team members of the needed distributions in the project.
- Planning: A process development includes each phase's critical milestones and completion time, and the milestone anchors the overall project development schedule.
- Management: A development process is a measure for evaluating the performance of the project. The manager is able to determine possible problem areas by comparing the actual events to the established process.
- Improvement: The careful documentation and continuing review of an organization's development process and its results may support identifying improvement opportunities.

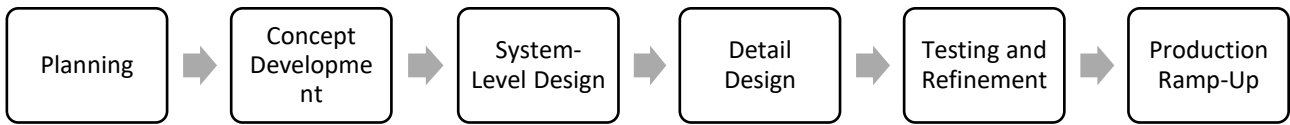


Figure 2. Product development process consists of six phases (Ulrich & Eppinger 2012, 14–16)

As illustrated in the figure 2, planning is often referred as “phase zero” because it happens before the product approval and the launch of the actual product development process. Planning is the phase that considers the portfolio of the product development project and evaluates a product’s potential in the market. In this phase, the business first identifies the product’s opportunities through suggestions from marketing, research, customers, current product development teams, and benchmarking of competitors. Then evaluate, allocate resources, plan the timing, and reflect the finding results. Overall, the planning process creates a big picture of the product to prepare for the subsequent phases.

Concept development is phase one, where the target market’s needs are defined, and the product’s concept is generated and evaluated. Identifying customer needs is a crucial part of this phase by gathering customer raw data and interpreting the data in terms of customer needs. After getting results, the specifications will be developed, and following that, the concept of the new product is generated, selected, and tested. One or more concepts can be chosen for further development and testing.

System-level design is the next phase of the product development process. This phase consists of specific development product descriptions in manufacturing, such as a geometric layout of the product, a functional specification of each of the product’s subsystems, and a preliminary process flow diagram for the final assembly process. After the System-level Design phase, the next phase is Design Detail which describes the detailed technique and material of the product, including the complete specification of the geometry, materials, and tolerances of all the unique parts in the product. The product cost calculation must be mentioned in this phase as well.

Testing and refinement belong to the next phase, at this phase, the product prototypes are implemented to identify whether the product will work as designed and satisfy customer needs. Furthermore, the product prototypes are tested by customers in their use environment to identify the necessary modifications for the final product.

Production ramp-up is the last phase. After the production approval, the product is made using the intended production system. The objective of the ramp-up is to train the workforce and resolve any remaining problems in the production processes. Products that were produced in the ramp-up can sometimes supply to preferred customers and are carefully evaluated to identify any remaining flaws. After the launch, a postlaunch project review includes an assessment of the project from both commercial and technical perspectives to identify ways to improve the development process for future projects.

3.2 SWOT & competitive analysis

SWOT analysis is implemented at the first phrase of product development process – planning. It is essential for the company to understand the company's SWOT a pre-requirement to taking any actions in response to a competitive analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. SWOT analysis is a framework used to evaluate a company's competitive position and to develop strategic planning that assesses internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors in business environment (Fleisher & Bensoussan 2015, chapter 1). First step of SWOT analysis is that the organization listing and evaluating sections included in the SWOT framework with description as follow:

- Strengths describe the factors that make the organization more competitive than its marketplace peers. Strengths include resources or capabilities can be used effectively for the organization to achieve its performance objectives.
- Weaknesses is limitations of the organization, and it is the factors that needed to be improved to remain competitive.
- Opportunities: Opportunities include favorable external factors which support the demands for product and service as well as enhance the organization competitive position
- Threats refer to unfavorable situation, trend or change in the company that currently or potentially harming the organization ability to compete
(Fleisher & Bensoussan 2015, chapter 1.)

Following SWOT analysis, the theory of competitive analysis was defined, and the author explained how the theory was applied to identify the competitors in the market. Identifying business competitors and sorting out what and how their business is doing is undoubtedly significant to developing the company. Determining the factors from the competitors might be missing that the company could use to improve the company's product or service that differentiates itself from the competition.

Following SWOT analysis, the theory of competitive analysis was defined, and the author explained how the theory was applied to identify the competitors in the market.

Competitive analysis or competitor analysis is a process of identifying, gathering, and analyzing the collected information of the business's competitors to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the business and its competitors in the market competition to enhance the business product and service and plan for future growth (Fairlie 2022).

Before conducting market research to analyze the competition, the business must first determine the current and potential competitors. According to Levy (2015), there are two types of competitors: direct and indirect. Direct competitors are companies who offer the same or similar product that can be a direct substitute product in the same geographic area to the same market. Indirect competitors are companies that have similar products to a different customer segment or target the same customer base without offering the same products. (Levy 2015, chapter 4.) After the business determines the potential competitors, the next step of competitive analysis is analyzing each competitor by benchmarking product features and performance. Benchmarking is a method of evaluating and improving the business performance by comparing it to the most challenging competitor (Stapenhurst 2009, 3 – 5).

3.3 Considerations in menu planning

Menu is a list of products that could be purchased at a food service organization. The menu describes the dish's detail and its component to market the food and drinks to encourage sales. It is used as a control tool that helps to maintain a business efficient, functional, and draw profit. The menu can add to the dining experience by providing stories, entertainment, and support for the restaurant's theme. Menu planning is the menu creating process that including all of the goals mentioned in the menu definition. To be able to create an effective menu that meet both customer and business needs, the menu planner is required to analyzed each of the factors that might impacts the menu development. (Traster 2018, 1.)

According to Traster (2018, 1–2), there are several factors that define a menu, and all the factors should be taken into consideration. The menu planner must consider the logistical limitations of the operation, such as employee skill levels, available kitchen equipment, workflow, and product availability. In addition, the composition and desires of the market, and the presence of competing businesses, all impact the final menu. At the first step of menu planning, the business must analyze the

market environment with potentials, identify the market target, then tailoring a menu to meet the needs of one or more segments of that market. Furthermore, a brand is the soul and identity of a business, that is the set of qualities and features that people associate with the business and the reason that they use the service here. A restaurant's brand is defined by its operation's mission and vision, such as location, decoration, style of service, menu, cuisine, price point, etc. A brand draws customer, a properly constructed menu supports the brand. Therefore, the menu planning must follow and encourage the business's brand. (Traster 2018, 1–2.)

After determining market target and brand, the business next identifies other factors that would limit a menu's feasibility, such as the employees' skill, the physical space, and supplier product availability. For the employees' skill, it would be inefficiency that the menu exceeded the staff current abilities and skill level as the staff would likely to put out a product that does not meet the business's standard quality. In this case, the employees could be replaced with a more highly- trained staffs. However, it would increase the labor cost and affect the cost of the menu which lead to undermine the business brand and decrease business profit. Next is the needed issue to considerate in physical space section, cooking equipment is a significant factor that impact the menu. Besides, the menu planner must concern about the storage capacity for menu ingredients and the workflow in the kitchen. For product availability, menu planner needs to ensure the ingredients required are available during the time that the next menu will be in place. (Traster 2018, 8–10)

3.4 Menu Styles

When the menu planner has identified menu concept and menu items that meet the needs of customer and business, the following step in menu planning is select the menu style and pricing it. In the food service industry, menu typically fall into four pricing types: à la carte, semi à la carte, table d'hôte, and prix fixe (Traster 2018, 32).

Some restaurant provides à la carte pricing for some or all of their menu items in addition to another pricing approach. À la carte menus allow for a large number of set of menu headings, including at least one heading for side dish. On the à la carte menu, every item on the menu is priced separately, from appetizers to desserts. Next type of menu is semi à la carte menu that offers a set of the main course components at a single price but charges separately for other courses. For instance, a semi à la carte menu includes a main protein, vegetable, starch, and sauce for one price. If a customer wishes to buy an appetizer or dessert, those items must be ordered separately and at an extra cost. The two last types of menus, table d'hôte menu and prix fixe menus offer a complete set of courses

for a set price. The difference between the two menu types is that a table d'hôte menu lists different prices next to each main dish, so the price that the customer pays depend on the choice of the main course. However, for prix fixe menu, it remains a single set price no matter which of the main course the customer selected. (Traster 2018, 32.)

Depending on the business's theme and target market, the company chooses the menu pricing type. A prix fixe or table d'hôte style would be suitable for a special occasion in that the customer accepts the price for an inclusive set of the menu, and they can focus only on the food choices rather than the additional cost for each added dish. The business typically selects a table d'hôte menu pricing instead of a prix fixe pricing strategy when the food cost for each main course varies significantly. However, both types of menus appeal mainly to customers who are looking for a leisurely indulgent dining experience. Correspondingly, à la carte and semi à la carte menus attract customers who prefer flexibility in how many courses they order. These types of menus appeal to more price-sensitive customers who have less time available or do not want a multi-course dining experience for that meal. Semi à la carte menus provide a sense of value over à la carte menus because the components of the entrée are packaged and priced together. À la carte menus function well when the portions are substantial enough to satisfy customers with a purchase of a single item and one (or fewer) accompaniment; the sharing of side dishes at a table is common in à la carte restaurants. (Traster 2018, 32.)

4 Commissioning organization and competitive analysis

In this chapter, the commissioner was mentioned, and the author described basic information of the restaurant. In a product development process, it is important to understand about the organization to identify the potential of the new product and to find out the current product and service of competitor, which help the organization to develop a successful product that stand out from the competitive market. Therefore, the author implemented a competitive analysis for Mekong Restaurant by applying the theory in the previous chapter. The commissioner analysis chapter was mainly based on the author's observations and research about the available information from the webpage, and social media, as well as other online platforms.

4.1 Mekong Restaurant Helsinki

Mekong Restaurant is a Vietnamese restaurant located near Kamppi shopping center in Helsinki, within five minutes walk. The restaurant opened in October 2019 and is known as a small cozy restaurant with about twenty-five seats. The name – Mekong was taken from the Mekong River Delta in southwestern Vietnam, which is crisscrossed with hundreds of waterways and home of floating markets. The street-food vendors in Mekong Delta region are the ones who hold the key to unveiling genuine Vietnamese cuisine. Thus, being a Vietnamese restaurant in a Nordic country, Mekong presents their customer the authentic Vietnamese cuisine with family chef recipes that highlight the Southern Vietnamese flavor. (Mekong Restaurant 2019.)

According to the information from the owner and the observation at work of the author in Mekong Restaurant, the restaurant currently serves a la carte lunch and dinner menu. The lunch menu is served from Monday to Friday from 11:00 to 15:00, consists of vegan and meat options along with 7 to 8 items, and the costs differ from 10.5 euros to 13.9 euros. The lunch menu is varied from pork, beef, vegan noodle soup, stir-fried pork noodles served with salads to tofu and veggies with rice dishes, and the items are changed regularly based on customer interest. Similarly, the dinner menu has more options with 26 items, including appetizers, mains, and drinks. The restaurant's main customer segments are the locals, office workers nearby, and vegetarians, as the menu consists of many interesting vegan dishes. In addition, the restaurant frequently offers additional exclusive menus or themed menus on Saturdays that include special Vietnamese food. For instance, River Crab Hotpot, Vegan Mushroom Hotpot, Thick Rice Noodle Soup with Beef, Vietnamese vegan set menu, and Lunar New Year-themed brunch menu appeal to Vietnamese customers who

want to eat hometown food and to the Finns or foreigners in Finland to enjoy a new different taste from Vietnamese cuisine.

4.2 Competitor analysis

Before the competitor analysis was conducted, the author implemented the SWOT analysis to determine the position of Mekong restaurant among its potential marketplace peers, and the SWOT framework defines the company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to identify challenges affecting the restaurant and opportunities that can improve it.



Figure 3. SWOT analysis of Mekong Restaurant

As figure 3 illustrates, the Strengths of the Mekong restaurant show that the restaurant serves authentic southern Vietnamese cuisine with a varied menu from meat to vegan options alongside the typical menu, the restaurant is frequently adding new dishes to refresh the taste and let the customers enjoy different traditional Vietnamese food with fresh ingredients, and of course, at a reasonable price. The location is quite good that is near the Kamppi shopping center, and it is easy to visit the restaurant by public transportation such as tram, metro, or walking from the central railway stations. Mekong restaurant provides a cozy and relaxed atmosphere with friendly staff and services. As a result, the restaurant received many good online reviews.

Weaknesses of the restaurant are low performance on online resources due to lack of expertise in engaging online content, there also must be interacted with social media followers by posting quality content and be active on the online site. Another weakness is budget and resource limitations

related to the continually increasing food and operation costs in the current situation. In addition, the author analyzed that there are many substitutes competitive products due to the rising of new Vietnamese restaurants with similar concepts to the same traditional Vietnamese food.

Opportunities in SWOT analysis of Mekong restaurant include factors that can increase the sales venues, such as building brand awareness through the online presentation, and the restaurant can increase sales, drive more customers through special offers and develop the menu. Combining all of these factors, the restaurant has opportunities to raise brand awareness by updating and developing diversity menu with nice pictures of the food and then posting and marketing it on social media to get customers' attention on the new product or special offers.

The final section in the SWOT analysis is threats analysis, including factors that are beyond the control of the restaurant and can result in lower sales. The increasing competition in the marketplace is one of the most common factors that the companies face, leading to a decrease in market share and reduce the number of customers as they change and visit a new-opened restaurant to try a new taste. Next is the unpredictable economic conditions that may lead to rising fixed costs such as rent, employees' salary, loan payments, and costs to the supplier, increasing in price can lead to a sudden change in consumer preferences who become price sensitive as every item's price of everything is rising slowly due to economic fluctuations.

After implemented the SWOT analysis, the author started to analyze the competitors of the restaurant to identify potential competitors and sorting out what and how their business is going. Determining the factors from the competitors might be missing that the restaurant could use to improve and develop the menu differentiates from the competition. The author mainly used available online material to identify the company's competitors and to determine the competitor's products. The author identified three of the restaurants which are the potential competitors of the Mekong Restaurant. The competitors were chosen based on their location, concept and product. In detail, the three of the restaurants are located nearby Mekong Restaurant, and they offer the Vappu brunch menu that served in the same day. The competitors are Thai Vegan Kitchen, Hills Dumplings, and Piilo.

Thai Vegan Kitchen is a vegetarian Thai restaurant located nearest to the Mekong restaurant compared to two other competitors. The restaurant offers vegan and healthy products highlight Thai cuisine with variable of choices. They have new dishes in the menu daily and offer both a la carte menu and buffet, the prices are varied from 6.90 euros to 32.90 euros. The restaurant is actively build their brand on social media such as Instagram, Facebook by interacting and adding posts

about their new food daily, which engages and develop the customers' recognition on online platform. The reason for choosing this restaurant as a competitor is because Mekong Restaurant's customer segment also includes vegetarian, and the Thai Vegan Kitchen restaurant offered vegan Asian Vappu brunch menu. Their Vappu menu was served as a buffet style with the price is 16.90 euros per person, however, the menu was officially served on Sunday 1 May. The detail of menu items was not mentioned on the social media, but the author assumed that it was mainly vegan Thai dishes.

Hills Dumplings is a restaurant that offer fresh homemade dumplings as well as other related dishes such as bao, salad, bao burger, wonton, etc. They mentioned that their food flavors are inspired by dim sum and casual street-style Cantonese restaurants but with their own unique twist. The restaurant creates impressive social media account with professional taken pictures, and they also are active on the online platform such as Instagram, and regularly update the restaurant webpage with the current trend. The restaurant offers a la carte menu with the price varied from 2.60 euros to 18.90 euros. Hills Dumplings restaurant has Vappu brunch menu with Asian theme on both 30 April and 1 May which costs 39 euros per person. The menu consists of three course meal with both meat and vegan options, the menu includes mainly available items on their regular menu such as wontons and bao, however, they created the new dishes in the dessert such as mousse and ice cream.

Piilo Restaurant located in Hietalahti Market Hall, is one of the popular brunch restaurants in Helsinki that served variety of dishes on buffet table. The scale of the restaurant is fairly large, so it is favorite place for families with children. Piilo Restaurant offers Italian flavor in their dishes including both meat and vegan option. Piilo served Vappu brunch menu on 30 April and 1 May with the price was 32 euro per person. The restaurant has not added the detailed menu items for Vappu occasion yet, but in general, the menu includes mainly dishes highlight Italian cuisine.

After analyzing the competitors' products and prices that they serve on Vappu day, as a results, the author concludes that creating a Vappu brunch menu that integrating Vietnamese food culture with Finnish food culture is a potential product in the market. The Mekong Restaurant's brunch menu consists of the Asian version dishes that adapted from the Finnish typical Vappu food. The idea could make the restaurant product differentiates from the competitors since the competitor's menus consist of mainly available items on their menu. However, to be more stand out in the competitive market, Mekong Restaurant needs to have a good marketing strategy for the Vappu menu because the competitors are already actively advertising their Vappu menu on social media. In

addition, along with three of the restaurants that the author had analyzed, there are also other popular restaurants that serve Vappu brunch menu in Helsinki that could be considered as the competitors such as Fazer Café, Sandro, Block by Dylan, Restaurant Oiva (Toptaste Delivery 2022).

5 Vappu Brunch Menu at Mekong Restaurant

This part of the thesis explained the planning process of the brunch menu along with the outcome and feedback. The presentation of the product was based on the theoretical framework and observations, communications with the commissioner, and personal working experiences of the author that support and assist in developing a successful menu that meets the commissioning party's requirements.

5.1 Starting point of the menu development

Personally, the author has been working in Mekong restaurant for almost two years, which provides an opportunity to have insights about the restaurant's operating procedures both front-of-house and back-of-house, including necessary information for a menu planning. The objective for the development of the new menu is mainly based on the requirements of the commissioning party. Firstly, as a Vietnamese restaurant in a Nordic country, the author desired to develop a menu related to Finnish culture and highlights Vietnamese cuisine. Thus, take advantage of the upcoming celebration holiday of the Finns – Vappu, a menu that consists of typical Finnish foods on Vappu day featuring in Asian version was created. The second objective of planning a menu was that it had been two years that the restaurant could not offer an appropriate Vappu menu for customers due to the restrictions from the government with the Covid-19 pandemic as they had takeaway options only on this celebration day. In Vappu 2022, the restaurant was able to spend this celebration day with the customers with no restrictions, therefore, the special Vappu menu played a role that marked the coming back of the restaurant after the pandemic. The third objective of creating a new menu was to keep the business on-trend, including the Finnish food in Asian version, to keep customers interested in the restaurant and appeal to more new customers. Lastly, the purpose of developing the Vappu menu was to allow the restaurant's employee to engage in ability and creativity. As an employee in the Mekong Restaurant, planning a menu provided an opportunity to understand more about the business and its customers and provided the author with more experience in the subsequent menu development for the restaurant.

The expectations from the commissioning organization regarding the form of the outcome were the list items on menu are required to relate to the restaurant's main food theme and the occasion (Vappu), the dishes must be well-balanced and matched for the taste of the Finns as the target customer for the menu is the Finns who are looking for a reasonable price menu and try a new taste on Vappu day. The author's mission was to propose the menu items, and the price of the menu was

decided by the commissioner. The meeting was scheduled once every week to resolve any questions and problems with the menu planning. The criteria of a successful outcome as the commissioner indicated were that the menu is helpful for the restaurant, it could be used as a foundation for the next Vappu menu, and the customers are satisfied with it. The limiting factors that might affect the outcome of the menu were the availability of ingredients and kitchen equipment, the limited opening hours since the restaurant is only opened from Monday to Saturday, and the Vappu is celebrated mainly on Sunday 1st May.

5.2 The development of the menu

The developing process was described by the author through two phases, theoretical part and practical part which was detail explained in the figure 4 created by the author. At the beginning of the project, the author studied and researched the theories related to the topic. The first theory that the necessity for a menu was the food culture background, the author studied the Vietnamese and Finnish culinary cultures to find out the similarities and the differences of the food ingredients and cooking techniques of the two countries, the theories supported the author to build the foundation of the menu and to know about how similarly with the taste of the Finns with Vietnamese. Especially, the Vappu day description part was included as an important role in this thesis, the author could study the meaning of Vappu and the typical food on this celebration day to integrate it into Asian version menu. Moreover, the theory of New Product Development and the theory of menu planning with specific steps and explanations were used as the basis of the process. The theoretical backgrounds helped the author gain knowledge about the topic to manipulate the theories in implementing the second practical phase.

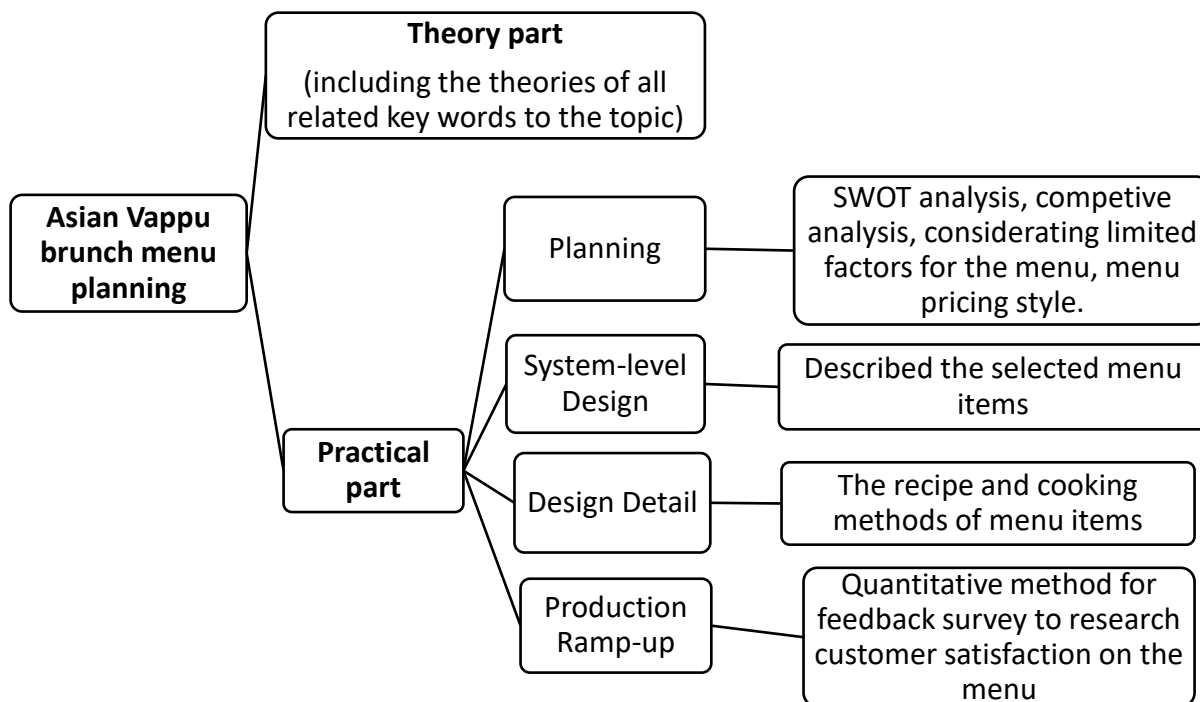


Figure 4. Roadmap of the Asian Vappu brunch menu planning for Mekong Restaurant

In the practical part, the process of planning the brunch menu for Mekong Restaurant, the author applied the model of the New Product Development process that consists of six phases: planning, concept development, system-level design, detail design, testing and refinement, and production ramp-up (Ulrich & Eppinger 2012, 14 – 16). Nevertheless, the model was adapted for menu planning, so it was shortened into four phases: planning, system-level design, detail design, and production ramp-up. This reduction was because there was no customer demands research and concept evaluation, and product prototype as the menu development based on specific requirements from the commissioning organization.

In the first phase of the product development process is Planning. Based on the studies of food culture background part, the author identified that the idea of combining Vietnamese and Finnish culinary cultures was promising. In this phase, the commissioner and the author discussed the menu's requirements and criteria to decide the customer target and the menu concept, which was the Vappu menu, then set up the meeting schedule to support the author in the process. The SWOT analysis was implemented, it was used to determine the position of Mekong restaurant among its potential marketplace peers, and the SWOT framework defines the company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to identify challenges affecting the company's business and opportunities that can enhance it. Following that was the competitive analysis to research the restaurant's competitors and know their Vappu menu items and prices to support the commissioner to pricing of the menu.

In addition, the author applied knowledge from the book *Foundation of Menu Planning*, second edition of Daniel Traster (2018) to create a menu. According to Traster (2018), at the first step of creating a menu, the author must analyze the market environment and identify the menu concept which supports the business's brand, however, the analysis was implemented in the Planning phase of product development process, so the author continued to the next step of creating a menu. The next step is to identify the factors that would limit the menu's feasibility, including employees' skills, the physical space, and supplier product availability. (Traster 2018, 8–10.)

As an employee working in Mekong Restaurant, the author could know the employee's skills in the kitchen, including the chef and kitchen staff, as well as the availability of kitchen equipment. With the supplier product availability, the author would discuss with the commissioner after the menu was proposed to determine whether the needed ingredients are available or modified to replace the unavailable ingredients with substitutes. After all the limit factors were defined, the following step was selecting the menu style and pricing it. As the requirements of the commissioning organization, the author needed to create a brunch menu with *prix fixe* pricing style, which is a complete set of courses at one price. As the author mentioned in the Menu planning chapter, the *prix fixe* style would be suitable for a special occasion in that the customer accepts the price for an inclusive set of the menu, and they can focus only on the food choices rather than the additional cost for each added dish (Traster 2018). In this case, the special occasion is Vappu day and customer order the menu for one price to enjoy the inclusive set of Asian Vappu brunch. The menu price was decided by the commissioning organization.

The next phase of the menu development process was System-level design, that the author described the selected menu items for the Asian Vappu brunch menu in Mekong Restaurant. It was a three-course brunch menu consisting of starter, main, and dessert. The menu was available in both meat and vegan options because the restaurant targets the vegetarian. As mentioned in the Vappu chapter in this thesis, there are typical Finnish Vappu dishes, such as 'nakit' sausages, 'lihapullat' meatballs, fresh salad, especially 'perunasalaatti' potato salad, and savory pie with minced meat, ham, chicken, smoked fish, vegetables, mushroom or cream, and cheese filling. After studying typical Vappu food, the author researched the most suitable Vietnamese dishes that could be substituted to make an Asian version of the Vappu menu.

As a results, the starters in menu including Asian Potato Salad, Vegan Asian Spices Shakshuka with Crispy Rice Paper, Pâté Chaud or Vegan Pâté Chaud as in Appendix 2. The Asian Potato Salad as

a substitute for Finnish perunasalaatti was selected because the ingredients are simple and easy to find in any market, and time for preparing the dish is quick. Pâté Chaud or Vegan Pâté Chaud is a Vietnamese hot meat pie that has the minced pork and beef filling, and the vegan version has the mushroom filling, it was a perfect substitute for savory pie, and the reason for choosing was the ingredients are available and easy to prepare. The Asian Spices Shakshuka with Crispy Rice Paper was added by the commissioner, Shakshuka is a Maghrebi dish of eggs poached in tomato sauce and bell pepper sauce, the vegan option replaced the egg with tofu. It was added because the commissioner believed that the dish was suitable for the menu and the recipe was modified and adjusted with Asian seasoning such as fish sauce to match the menu concept.

For the main course, the hotpot was selected to highlight the Vietnamese food-sharing culture, and it is suitable for the Vappu celebration day since people usually eat out with family and friends, and hotpot would be the best choice to enjoy together. Hotpot is a simmering pot of soup at the center of the table with the various raw ingredients such as meat, seafood, tofu, noodles, and vegetables which are cut into thin species for quick cooking, to eat the hotpot meal, individual can add and dip any ingredient into the boiling soup (Sarah 2020). The main course is Chili Saté Beef Meatball Hotpot or Spicy & Sour Mushroom Hotpot as in Appendix 3, it was served as a one-person hotpot with the individual soup and the hotpot ingredients. Mekong Restaurant sometimes offers a special menu on Saturday, and different types of hotpot are also one of the special dishes that the restaurant introduced to foreign customers. Thus, choosing a hotpot is a proper choice as the restaurant has experience preparing and serving this meal.

As mentioned above, the traditional Finnish dessert on Vappu is 'Munkki,' and drink is 'Sima' as shown in Appendix 4. For the Asian Vappu brunch menu dessert, the author chose a Vietnamese dessert that is similar to Munkki, it is Deep-fried Glutinous Rice Ball or "Vietnamese Munkki". The cake was served in Vietnamese Northern version with two types of the cake, the first type has no filling, and the shape is similar to a doughnut with melted-sugar coated, and the second type has green bean filling, and the shape is a rice ball, it has melted-sugar coated on the top as well. The drink for the menu, the author chose Pikasima, which consists of traditional sima with brown sugar and lemon. Pikasima was easy to prepare, and the author wanted to keep the traditional drink in the Asian Vappu menu.

In the menu development process, the next phase was Detail Design which the author explained and proposed the menu recipes, cooking method to the commissioner. The commissioner adapted the original recipes to create the most suitable dishes taste for the restaurant's customers. As the

author mentioned in the Planning phase, the price was decided by the commissioning organization. After discussing about the menu items and ingredients, the most profitable for the business and reasonable price for the customers was 29.50 euros per set, tea and coffee are included in the price. After the menu was approved by the commissioner, in the last phase of menu development process – Production Ramp-up, the author conducted customer feedback survey to analyze customer's satisfaction with the menu performance.

5.3 Customer feedback survey

The author applied the quantitative method to collect and analyze customer satisfaction. Quantitative method is the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data and applying mathematical models and statistical techniques for data analysis. The purpose is to produce generalized findings in the form of theories and formulas. Quantitative research methods include experiments, surveys, structured observations, and structured interviews (Bhandari 2020.). The survey was conducted on Saturday 31st April 2022, when the Vappu menu was served, the questions from the survey were attached in Appendix 6. The objective was to help the author and commissioner find out customers' dining experience on that day with the Asian Vappu brunch menu and ask for suggestions from customers to improve and develop the next menu for the restaurant. To attract more customers to complete the survey, the author added the optional choice for the customer to join and get a chance to win a Mekong restaurant gift card from the lucky draw with one condition completing the short survey. The survey flyer with a QR code directly to the survey link, as shown in Appendix 5, was placed on each table to get customers' attention. Participants' contact information and survey data will be stored separately, and personally identifiable information will not be published or presented publicly.

The survey obtained 10 responses with positive results, and it helped the restaurant to understand about customer expectations. The author analyzed the collected data with illustrative diagrams to identify customer satisfaction with the new menu. The first questions were asking about customer age group, the menu they ordered (vegan or meat), and question to identify whether they are new customer. Figure 4 shown that the majority of customers visited Mekong Restaurant on that day were mainly belonged to 18 to 30 age group. Along with the question "Was this your first time visit the restaurant?", 80% of the respondents answered "yes" which demonstrated that mainly customer of the restaurant are loyal customers. In addition, 9 out of 10 respondents selected meat option on the Vappu menu.

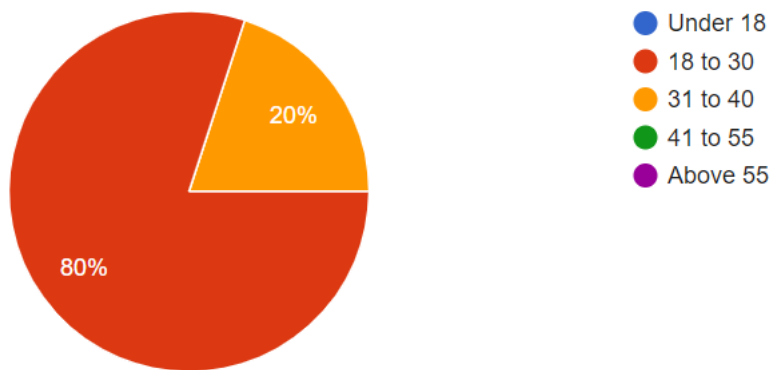


Figure 5. Age of customer in Mekong Restaurant

The author used linear range question to ask about customer satisfaction, from 1 to 7 in which 1 is very dissatisfied and 7 is very satisfied. As a result, the customers were happy with their overall experience, as shown in figure 5, 70% rated 7. Besides, the customers were also satisfied with the food presentation as 9 out of 10 rated 7.

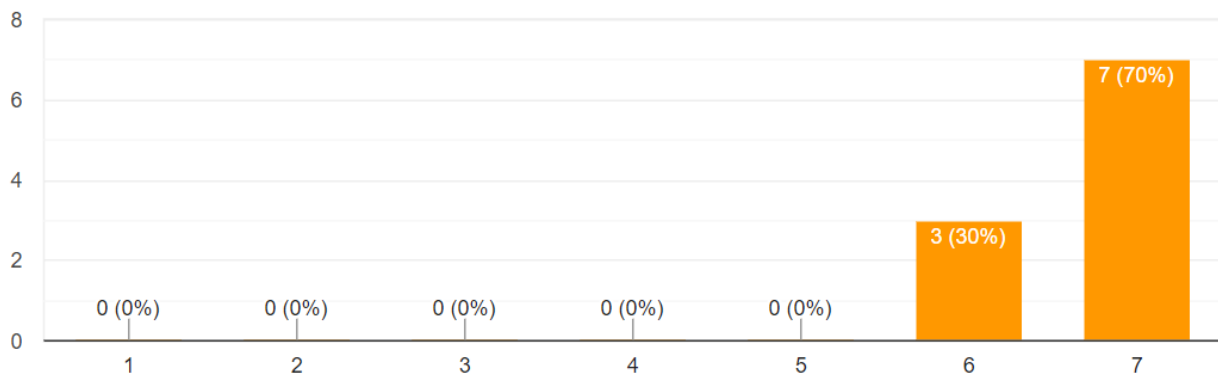


Figure 6. Customers' satisfaction with their overall experience in Mekong Restaurant (1 = very dissatisfied and 7 = very satisfied)

Next questions were asking about customer opinion whether the items on the menu are relevant to the Vappu day. As illustrated in Figure 6, the results were positive that 7 out of 10 respondents rated 7 which demonstrated that the Asian Vappu menu is suitable for Vappu day. Similarly, the author asked the customer's opinion about whether the items on the brunch menu go well together, 20% of customer rated 4 which they think the menu was moderate go well together and 70% think that each of the item on menu were relevant.

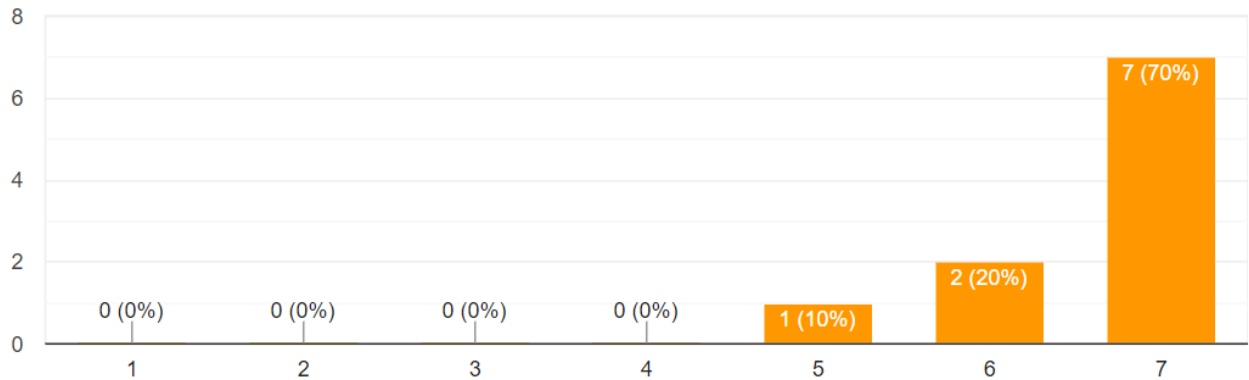


Figure 7. Customers' perspective about the relevancy of the Asian brunch menu on Vappu day (1 = very unlikely and 7 = very likely)

Customers are likely to recommend the menu to other people such as their friends or their family, as figure 7 illustrates. For the following questions, the author used short answer question form to ask for customer suggestion item for the next Vappu menu and there were three results. The customers suggested the items that they would like to see in the next Vappu menu are Vietnamese Hollow Donut, champagne, and cocktail. Hollow Donut is a Vietnamese dessert cake that have an airy and soft hollow interior and fragrant sesame seed crust. In additions, four commented on the menu were collected. One customer commented about the caramel on the top of the Rice Ball was hard to bite, other customer commented that the restaurant should cut a bigger species of the lemongrass in the hotpot soup, and two customers commented that they love the food and it was good to find a new dishes every Saturday in Mekong Restaurant.

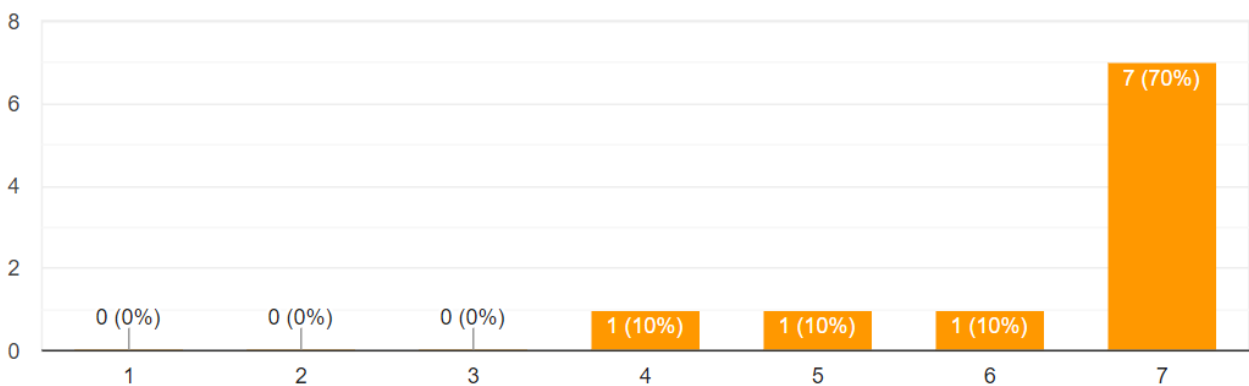


Figure 8. Customers' Vappu menu recommendation to others (1 = very unlikely and 7 = very likely)

In summary, the results were positive that the customers' dining experience were satisfied, and they were happy with the food. The author and the restaurant's staff would considerate customer suggestions in the next menu development.

5.4 The outcome

By applying the theories from theoretical background, especially, four stages of New Product Development process, the author was able to develop an appropriate Asian Vappu brunch menu that qualified the requirements of commissioning organization and received good feedback from the customers. The author designed a poster of the menu that was used on the Vappu day, as illustrated in appendix 1. The picture from the Mekong Restaurant's dishes was used as the poster background. Yellow and brown were used as a main color for the poster because it matched the restaurant themed. Specifically, the poster was described about the date of Vappu dishes will be served, the price of the menu, and the restaurant's contact information. The Asian Vappu brunch menu 2022 will be served on 30 April 2022, that the price for the menu which consists of 3 course is 29.50 euros. The items were listed on the Vappu menu, the starter consists of three dishes including Asian Potato Salad, Vegan Asian Spices Shakshuka with Crispy Rice Paper, Pâté Chaud or Vegan Pâté Chaud. There are two options for the main course, which are Chili Saté Beef Meatball Hotpot and Spicy & Sour Mushroom Hotpot. Lastly, the dessert includes Deep-fried Glutinous Rice Ball – "Vietnamese Munkki" and Pikasima.

6 Discussion

The thesis came to an end, in this chapter, the author summarized the final outcome and analyzed the usability of the menu, as well as indicated the success and unsuccessful factors during the menu planning process. After that, the author explained about the knowledge was gained and how it is applied in the future career.

6.1 Conclusion

The aims of this was to develop a menu that integrating Vietnamese culinary culture with Finnish food culture that qualified the requests from the commissioner and attracted more customers for the Mekong Restaurant. The menu planning results brought some success as expected. As the author stated in the previous chapter, the roadmap of the brunch menu planning process was comprehended with two main parts theoretical and practical. By following the process steps by step and considering the factors that might affect the menu planning along with the requirements from the commissioning party, the author had created an Asian Vappu brunch menu for the Mekong Restaurant, which was used as a special menu in Vappu event of the restaurant on 31st April 2022. The author had chosen the most suitable dishes for the needs of the commissioning party and customer with available ingredients and possible in preparation. The menu was developed based on the expectations from the commissioning organization regarding the form of the outcome, that the list items on the menu are required to relate to the restaurant's main food theme and the occasion (Vappu), the dishes must be well-balanced and matched for the taste of the Finns because the concept of the menu was integrating Vietnamese culinary culture into Finnish culinary culture. The final outcome of the work, particularly, the necessity, usability and product performance, were evaluated by the commissioner and customers who were served the Vappu menu in the event.

The evaluation from customers was reflected in the customer feedback survey which was conducted by the author. In general, the survey has answered the inquiries about customer dining experience with the new menu from Mekong Restaurant, and it helped the author understand customer opinion and expectations for the new product. The results from the survey showed that the customers were satisfied with every item on the menu, and they assumed the Asian Vappu brunch menu was appropriate to utilize on Vappu occasion, which qualified the main purpose of the menu development.

The commissioner had reviewed and evaluated the menu in the process and the result when the menu was used. In the commissioning party feedback form, the commissioner mentioned that she had a chance to review the feedback results to get an impression of the customers about the new menu restaurant offered. The commissioner had evaluated the usability and necessity of the product, which both for the restaurant and for the field of business was 4/5, as the dishes chosen for the menu were related to the main food theme of the restaurant and the occasion (Vappu). The thesis will be utilized to introduce other Brunch menus with modifications based on the feedback received from the thesis's menu.

In the menu planning process, the potential problem that affected the final outcome of the product was the planning took place from the end of March 2022 to April 30th, 2022, and the implementation process was short due to the author's availability. Consequently, the implementation was in precipitation that building the theoretical framework for the product was complicated and took more time than the author expected, the result could be better if the menu planning took place earlier. As mentioned by the commissioning party in the feedback form, the result could have been better if the project had more time to advertise. In addition, another factor that affected the outcome of the project was that the Brunch event was on Sunday on May 1st, however, the restaurant is open from Monday to Friday, the outcome could have been better if the restaurant opened on Sunday, but unfortunately could not happen due to limited resources of the restaurant.

From the author's perspective, the strengths of this thesis are it can be used as a menu planning framework to help people who are confused about the stages of the menu planning process, and the thesis had clearly defined planning stages with a detailed explanation of the results. Nevertheless, the weaknesses of the thesis are the lack of deep theory for the topic, and the competitive analysis is not well-analyzed. At the end of the thesis, the author obtained more knowledge about Vietnamese and Finnish culinary culture, especially understanding the Finnish food culture would support a lot for the personal future career because the author works in restaurants in Finland. Moreover, the author gained more experience developing the menu and will apply the theories from the thesis for the next menu planning project.

6.2 Personal development

The most difficult challenge that the author had to face at the first stage of menu planning for the Mekong Restaurant was to identify the appropriate theories as a foundation for the development of the menu. It was difficult because of the lack of necessary sources on the internet and the author's

lack of knowledge because of no experience and theory research on the menu planning. To solve the problem, the author studied the previous thesis from the students on the Theseus webpage, which have related topic such as menu planning and brunch menu. Taking the reference from the other thesis, the author was able to create a big picture of the desired theoretical framework and started to do the research based on that. The second challenge in the menu planning process due to the lack of implementation time was that the author could not do proper research on the restaurant's competitors to understand more about their operation. Nevertheless, in the next menu planning project in the future, the author will apply this thesis, and learn from the success and unsuccessful factors to develop the most appropriate menu. Particularly, the author would conduct the research on the customer at the beginning of the project to know about customer's expectations of the new product and research the competitors to have a better understanding of their business. Overall, the author gained much knowledge related to the menu planning topic, and the thesis will be used as a clear framework for developing a menu in the future as a personal career. Besides, thanks to the support and feedback from the commissioning party, the author had a remarkable experience both during and after the project implementation, and the author was encouraged and felt motivated in the process of menu planning.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Asian Vappu Bruch 2022 menu poster



ASIAN VAPPU BRUNCH 2022

VEGAN OPTION IS ALSO AVAILABLE

STARTER

- *Asian Potato Salad*
- *Vegan Asian Spices Shakshuka with Crispy Rice Paper*
- *Pâté Chaud/ Vegan Pâté Chaud*

MAIN

- *Chilli Saté Beef Meatball Hotpot*
OR *Spicy & Sour Mushroom Hotpot*

DESSERT

- *Vietnamse Munkki - Deep-fried Glutinous Rice Ball (vegan)*
- *Pikasima*

ON 30.4

To make a reservation, please visit our website
<https://mekong.restaurant/reservations>
Or call us at 0452543797

29.5€/SET
Tea & Coffee are included

Appendix 2. Menu Menu performance on Vappu event – Starter



Appendix 3. Menu performance on Vappu event – Main Chilli Saté Beef Meatball Hotpot



Appendix 4. Menu performance on Vappu event – Dessert including Vietnamese “munkki” and Pikasima



Appendix 5. Vappu feedback survey flyer at the table



Appendix 6. Feedback survey questions

Mekong Vappu Brunch Menu Feedback Survey

Hi! Thank you for visiting Mekong Restaurant. We are conducting a short survey to find out about your dining experience today with the Asian Vappu brunch menu and what we might do to improve. Please help us by completing this short survey. Customers who participate in completing the survey will have a chance to get a 20€ Mekong Restaurant gift card.

We will randomly choose a person among the survey participants the winner. Customers are given the option to enter their email address at the end of the survey if they would like to join the draw. We will send the announcement and the gift card to the winner's email after 3 days. Participants' contact information and survey data will be stored separately and their personally identifiable information will not be published or presented publicly.

What age group do you belong to? *

- Under 18
- 18 to 30
- 31 to 40
- 41 to 55
- Above 55

Was this your first time visit the restaurant? *

- Yes
- No

What type of food did you order?

- Vegan
- Meat

How would you rate your overall experience today? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not satisfied Very satisfied

How satisfied were you with the food today? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not satisfied Very satisfied

How satisfied were you with the presentation of your meal? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not satisfied Very satisfied

How likely is it that you think the selections of our Asian Vappu brunch menu are well suited for the Vappu day?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not likely Very likely

How likely is it that you think the food list from the Vappu menu go well together?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not likely Very likely

How likely is it that you will recommend our special menu to others? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not likely Very likely

Is there anything you'd want to see on the Vappu menu that's missing? *

Yes

No

If yes, then what would you like to see in our next Vappu menu?

.....
.....

Do you have more comments and suggestions for the menu today?

.....
.....

Would you like to join the draw to have a chance to receive Mekong Gift card? * (if no, the survey will stop at this question. If yes, continue to the next part of the survey)

Yes

No

This survey part is for participants who joining the draw

First name

.....

Last name

.....

Your email

.....

Thank you for completing the survey. It would help us a lot to improve our service in the future. Have a nice weekend! ;)