

Sustainable gastronomy in the countryside and in the capital: lessons from two Hungarian Michelin Green Star restaurants

Tímea Veres

Ph.D. student, Lecturer, University of Pannonia, Hungary

veres.timea@phd.gtk.uni-pannon.hu

Abstract

Sustainability has become increasingly important in gastronomy and hospitality in recent decades, as reflected in the Green Star award introduced by the Michelin Guide in 2020. The award provides an opportunity for restaurants that combine culinary excellence with environmentally conscious operations. This study compares the sustainability practices of two Michelin Green Star restaurants in Hungary, with a particular focus on the specific characteristics of rural and urban contexts. The analysis highlights that sustainable gastronomy is not implemented according to a uniform model but can be successfully applied even under different environmental and economic conditions. Both restaurants pay special attention to supporting local producers, using seasonal ingredients and reducing waste and they achieve similar goals through different strategies. The rural restaurant's operation is characterised by its natural location, family-friendly approach, craftsmanship and minimalist solutions, while the restaurant in the capital city fits sustainability into the context of international haute cuisine, with a contemporary reinterpretation of traditions and the conscious, systematic integration of the zero-waste concept. Qualitative interviews revealed the main characteristics of their operation, the use of local ingredients, waste reduction, the application of environmentally friendly technologies and the seasonal menu. The personal narrative of the rural restaurant, the direct communication with guests and the active involvement of the local community reinforces the sense of shared value creation. In contrast, the restaurant in Budapest combines traditional ingredients with innovative technologies and its own garden, while rethinking the value of food and the dining experience through waste-free operations.

The research highlights that sustainable hospitality can be achieved in different contexts – rural and urban – and both restaurants set an example for Hungarian gastronomy players. The study confirms that sustainability in gastronomy is not just an ethical or marketing issue, but a strategic factor that creates a long-term competitive advantage. The examples of Michelin Green Star restaurants show that an environmentally conscious approach and the integration of ethical supply chains can transform hospitality into a process that creates value from both a cultural and environmental perspective. This approach to luxury gastronomy can help the hospitality industry rethink its operating model and place the principles of responsible consumption and production at the forefront, alongside economic efficiency.

Keywords: sustainability, gastronomy, restaurant sustainability, Michelin Green Star

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Introduction

Sustainability is becoming an increasingly central issue not only in the global political and macroeconomic context, but also in business, economic processes and consumer lifestyles. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted at the UN General Assembly in 2015 (Kozma, 2018), calling on all countries to take action to promote prosperity and protect the planet through 17 sustainable development goals. From a business perspective, social and environmental responsibility is increasingly being incorporated into strategies and management (Baumgartner et al., 2017).

Today, a large amount of research is being conducted on sustainability and ethical business practices in the hospitality industry, such as food ethics and environmentally friendly restaurant practices. Research to date shows that the hospitality industry has a direct economic and environmental impact on food waste and an indirect impact on the image of restaurants. For these reasons, studies focusing on the sustainability of restaurants have become a key area of research in the hospitality sector in recent years, with the question of whether luxury restaurant hospitality, such as fine dining, is compatible with sustainability coming to the fore (Batat, 2020). In this study, I examined how sustainable gastronomy is reflected in restaurants awarded the Michelin Green Star in Hungary. The study focuses on two Hungarian restaurants, one in the countryside and one in the capital. In 2022, four restaurants in Hungary received the Michelin Green Star award in recognition of their efforts to promote sustainable gastronomy. In addition to the four winners in 2022, a new restaurant, also located in the countryside, joined the green vanguard in 2023. Of the award-winning restaurants in 2023, four were in the countryside and two were in Budapest. In 2024, another rural restaurant joined the four previous winners. The Michelin Green Star rating therefore promotes and strengthens sustainable gastronomy. The practices of the award-winning restaurants include the use of locally grown and locally produced ingredients, renewable energy, reducing their carbon footprint, and the use of European textiles and locally made ceramics (Michelin, 2024).

Literature review

Restaurant sustainability

In his study, Batat (2020) examined luxury gastronomy from the perspective of 35 Michelin-starred chefs. In terms of restaurant sustainability, special attention must be paid to the sustainability of the food served in restaurants and gives three different perspectives on sustainability and corporate social responsibility:

- the motivations of restaurant owners to adopt and promote sustainable practices,
- consumers' choice between sustainable restaurants
- the sustainable offerings of restaurants (Jacobs et al., 2016).

He found that Michelin-starred chefs classify the foundations of luxury gastronomy in terms of sustainability under five main pillars (Table 1).

Table 1. Pillars of a sustainable luxury food experience

Motivation	Pillars	Dimensions
Internal	Pleasure	Enhancing food perception and experiences
		The joy of guests while offering them healthy food
		Increasing food socialization
		Food storytelling and credibility
	Plate	Pesticide-free food ingredients
		Respectful reservation techniques
		Reducing fat and sugar for healthy and creative cooking
		Offering natural foods
		Reducing portions to avoid overeating
		Meat-free menus
	Place	Environmentally friendly interior design
		Use of recycled materials
Ban on the use of plastic		
Increasing the use of environmentally friendly detergents and cleaning products		
External	People	Improving employee well-being and training
		Encouraging exchanges between food cultures and communities
		Connecting consumers, farmers, and food industry players
		Teaching children about nutrition and taste
		Supporting small family businesses: local farmers, suppliers, and producers
	Planet	Food waste management
		Use of short supply chains
		Respecting seasonality
		Taking animal welfare into account
		Recycling

Source: Own editing based on Batat (2020)

Batat (2020) findings confirm that it is important for restaurants to embrace and implement sustainability to offer unique experiences and support the idea that luxury gastronomy and sustainability are compatible. The criteria established by Batat (2020) are also evident in case of the restaurants examined.

Consumers in the restaurant sector are also becoming increasingly sensitive and cautious about issues such as the origin and quality of food and the sustainability of production. There is a growing focus on food waste, combating it, and processes throughout the supply chain, such as respect for labour (Cantele et al., 2020). However, the focus is on environmental impacts, as is the case with accommodation.

Catering establishments, like accommodation facilities, can have a significant environmental impact if they are not operated in a sustainable manner. As they are closely linked to the food industry, it is advisable to examine their activities from the production of raw materials onwards and treat them as a single entity. Accordingly, the responsibility of restaurants does not begin with the processing of raw materials, but with the careful selection of their sources of supply. When establishing a new unit, sustainability considerations must be considered from the outset, for example when selecting the location, choosing construction materials, planning energy use and ensuring environmentally friendly operation (Kovács, 2013).

The Green Restaurants Association helps restaurants to develop sustainable offerings and communicate them. Their activities cover all aspects of operations. Table 2 shows the areas of sustainability for green restaurants.

Table 2. Areas of sustainability for green restaurants

Environmental issues	Products used	Chemicals	Food and beverages	Energy consump.	Water consump.	Building design	Waste manag.
Overpopulation, Industrialization	Paper	Cleaning products	Organic, bio foods	High-consumption equipment	Food production	New buildings	Waste reduction
Air pollution	Plastics	Textiles	Local raw materials	Hygiene	Air conditioning equipment	Renovation	Recycling
Water pollution	Polystyrene products, foams	Insecticides	Vegetarian and vegan food	Lighting	Washing up, rinsing		Composting
Deforestation		Candles, chafing creams, pastes	Fish and seafood	Cooling, heating	Refrigerators		
Soil transformation, desertification			Genetically modified foods	Carbon dioxide emissions			
Decline in biodiversity							
Climate change							

Source: Own editing based on Kovács (2013)

In his study, KOVÁCS (2013) examined the sustainability of Hungarian restaurants and grouped "green practices" for creating sustainability into three categories.

1. Water and waste

The first criterion is the use and conservation of fresh water and the reduction and reuse of waste. Optimising water use in restaurants is a very important step in reducing environmental impact, and goods entering restaurants are often unnecessarily over-packaged. In the case of the two restaurants presented, great emphasis is placed on minimising waste. Nowadays, reducing kitchen waste is becoming increasingly common, either through composting or food donation.

2. Food

One of the keys to a green, sustainable restaurant is high-quality food. Nowadays, it is essential that the menu or menu options include vegan and vegetarian dishes as well as dishes that can be

consumed by people with food allergies. One of the main proofs of sustainability is growing your own produce and knowing and trusting the entire supply chain, showing your commitment to sustainability. Involving local producers boosts the economy of the entire region, and special dishes serve as an extra attraction. The smaller the supplier of the product, the more certain it is that it is not genetically modified, has not been treated with hormones or pesticides, and that the animals have been kept ethically.

3. Other points of intervention

Kovács (2013) listed energy consumption, the use of chemicals and the organisational structure itself. The energy-efficient operation of machinery and equipment used for continuous operation and the use of renewable energy reduce costs and ecological footprint. By choosing the right cleaning and washing products, restaurants can also do a lot for the environment. Organisational measures, education and CSR programmes can motivate employees and guests to think and act in a more sustainable way.

One of the major recognitions of restaurant sustainability is the Michelin Green Star, which has been awarded since 2020 alongside the Michelin Star to restaurants that are considered role models in the field of sustainable gastronomy. The study presents two restaurants in Hungary that have been awarded the Michelin Green Star.

Michelin Guide

The history of the Michelin Guide dates to the early 20th century, and since then it has become one of the most important reference sources in gastronomy. As early as 1900, the motto of the Michelin Guide was that "the Michelin restaurant guide is entering the new century and will even see the new millennium" (Michelin, 2019). Today, it is known as a restaurant guide that covers the entire world and is a must-have for foodies. In 1889, André and Édouard Michelin founded the Michelin tyre factory in France after inventing the removable tyre. To promote their product, they began distributing free maps to their customers, showing the main roads around Paris and the excellent restaurants and hotels located along them (Karpik, 2000).

In 1900, the brothers published the first Michelin Guide, which was free at the time and aimed to help motorists easily find the best places to refuel, eat and stay in one publication. The first edition included road maps, service stations and other useful information for motorists. The original edition had a print run of 35,000 copies. From 1904, the guide became international, with separate volumes for Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In 1919, the red-covered books, which covered several countries at the same time, were published for the first time. From 1922, the publication became a paid service, and restaurants also appeared on the maps. For the sake of authenticity, travellers were asked to review the recommended restaurants when they visited them. Initially, this was done on an amateur level, but then the principles and criteria used to evaluate them were developed, which are still valid today: the quality of the food, the method of preparation, the originality and style of the cuisine, value for money and the level of popularity were the decisive factors. The information gathered from the reviews was used to expand later publications, which included

places recommended by the French Automobile Club and evaluated the quality and service of accommodation. In 1926, the Michelin Guide began introducing a one-star rating for restaurants. This period brought significant change, as the guide gradually transformed from into its current form, focusing on gastronomic evaluations. In 1931, the three-star system was introduced, which made it possible to distinguish between restaurants: one star means an excellent restaurant that is worth a pleasant detour; two stars indicate exceptional cuisine, which may be worth a longer detour; and three stars indicate an outstanding restaurant, which is worth a special trip or even a specific journey (Karpik, 2000).

The green Michelin books were first published before the Second World War. During the Second World War, publication of the Michelin Guide was suspended, but it was resumed after the war. In 1944, a special edition was produced for the Allied forces, containing detailed maps of the French road network. However, it is important to note that, contrary to popular belief, the star is awarded to the restaurant and not the chef. The term "Michelin-starred chef" is commonly used, but strictly speaking, this recognition belongs to the restaurant. When a chef changes restaurants, the "star" remains with the restaurant and does not follow the chef. After the war, the Michelin Guide continued to evaluate restaurants and hotels, placing great emphasis on quality and reliability. At the beginning of the 21st century, the Michelin Guide began to expand globally and made its publications global, for example in New York City (2005), Tokyo (2007), Hong Kong and Macau (2008) (Michelin Guide, 2021).

The Michelin Guide's international presence grew rapidly, and it is now present in more than 30 countries, evaluating the world's best restaurants and hotels. Digitalisation did not bypass the Guide, which moved towards online and digital formats to reach modern consumers. Online reviews, mobile apps and social media have become increasingly important for the guide. The Michelin Guide continues to maintain its high-quality rating system and constantly adapts to new gastronomic trends and changing consumer demands. Via Michelin, a subsidiary of Michelin, makes maps and recommendations available in digital form, while [guide.michelin.com](https://www.guide.michelin.com) presents restaurants.

Over its more than 100-year history, the Michelin Guide has become the benchmark for excellence in the world of gastronomy. Originally created for motorists, the guide now ranks the world's best restaurants and hotels and strives to maintain its commitment to quality and innovation. The guide, also known as the "Red Book", has maintained its evaluation practices for decades. "We take five universal criteria into account: the quality of the ingredients, the harmony of flavours, the mastery of techniques, the personality expressed through the chef's cuisine, and, just as importantly, consistency across the entire menu and over time," said a Michelin inspector in the online edition of the Michelin Guide in 2022 (Michelin Guide, 2022).

The restaurant itself is not important in terms of awarding stars; the famously anonymous Michelin Inspectors, who are all full-time employees – restaurant and hospitality professionals – only consider the food itself. Usually, several inspectors examine a restaurant, either alone or in pairs, and sometimes in groups, and then discuss their experiences as a team to make the final decision. This trend applies to all countries with a Michelin Guide. In the case of the Michelin

Green Star, several criteria are examined, which go beyond focusing solely on the food. "A Michelin star must mean the same thing and have the same value, regardless of where in the world it is located" (Michelin Guide, 2021). Consistency is of paramount importance when awarding Michelin stars, as restaurant guests are expected to receive the same high-quality gastronomic experience every time they visit the restaurant in question. Different inspectors test restaurants at different times: at lunchtime, dinnertime, on weekends and on weekdays.

Nowadays, the meaning of stars has changed somewhat. "A Michelin star is awarded to restaurants that use high-quality ingredients and consistently prepare dishes with exceptional flavours to a high standard. Two Michelin stars are awarded when the chef's personality and talent are evident in their expertly prepared dishes; their dishes are refined and inspired. Three Michelin stars are our highest distinction, awarded to chefs at the peak of their profession for their outstanding cooking; elevating their cooking to an art form, with some of their dishes becoming classics" (Michelin Guide, 2022). The Michelin Green Star, or Green Star, is the newest award, introduced in 2020 in the Michelin Guide France and now found in every country covered by the Michelin Guide. It is awarded to restaurants that are role models in the field of sustainable gastronomy. At the annual award galas, quality hospitality and service are also recognised with the Welcome and Service Award.

Michelin Green Star

The Michelin Guide aims to encourage and support environmentally conscious gastronomic practices with the Michelin Green Star award. They examine both ethical and environmental standards, monitoring their cooperation with manufacturers and suppliers who focus on sustainability to avoid waste and reduce or even eliminate the use of plastic and other non-recyclable materials from their supply chain. It applies to restaurants that offer dining experiences that combine culinary excellence with outstanding environmental commitments and serve as an inspiration to the entire hospitality industry. There are currently 623 Michelin Green Star restaurants around the world. The complete list of Michelin Green Star restaurants is available at.

The aim of the award is to draw attention to chefs and restaurants that apply innovative solutions in the areas of environmental protection, use of local products, waste reduction and energy efficiency. This award appears alongside the Michelin Guide's traditional star ratings, but places special emphasis on environmental awareness and sustainability. It does not automatically accompany a star, nor does a star accompany a Green Star rating; they are independent awards. The Michelin Green Star considers the sustainability practices employed by restaurants, including the use of local and seasonal ingredients, reducing their ecological footprint, waste management and environmentally conscious energy use. The first Green Stars were awarded in 2020, and since then, numerous restaurants around the world have received this recognition. The award-winning restaurants include both urban restaurants and rural locations, all of which set an example in the field of sustainable gastronomy. The introduction of the Green Star has had a positive impact on the gastronomic community, as more restaurants are striving to introduce and maintain

sustainable practices to earn this prestigious recognition. It is important to mention a few international examples related to the Green Star. Yoshihiro Narisawa, chef at Narisawa restaurant in Tokyo (Japan), focuses on local and organic ingredients and sustainable fishing and farming practices. At L'Enclume restaurant in Cartmel, UK, chef Simon Rogan uses produce from the restaurant's own biodynamic farm and places great emphasis on sustainability and innovation. Silo in London is known for its zero-waste philosophy and is one of the first restaurants to implement fully sustainable practices (chef Douglas McMaster) (Michelin Guide, n.d.).

In the case of the Green Star, it is characteristic that the award-winning restaurants work directly with producers, farmers and fishermen, grow the plants they use in their own gardens or on their own land, keep animals, or even use regenerative methods such as no-dig vegetable gardens. Their activities often go beyond environmental protection and contribute to the promotion of local producers and businesses and promote social cohesion. The Green Star award differs from the Michelin Star in that there is no specific definition as in the case of the "Star", as each restaurant and the surrounding region have its own unique set of criteria.

The "Inspectors" simply look for those who excel in their sustainable operations and related practices and set an example in this regard. During the inspection, they consider, for example, the sourcing and origin of ingredients and seasonal products, if they are not processed from their own production, the restaurant's environmental footprint, general waste management and recycling, and how this is communicated to guests. Global partners should also be mentioned here, such as the sponsor of the Michelin Green Star, Rémy Martin, who's sustainably produced spirit can be found in many Green Star restaurants. "Our inspectors are only looking for a strong commitment to sustainable gastronomy" (MICHELIN GUIDE, undated). The Green Star award not only recognises the work of the restaurants concerned but also sets an example for others in the field of sustainability.

Data and methods

The aim of this study was to examine and compare the sustainability practices of two Michelin Green Star restaurants in Hungary, with a particular focus on the differences between rural and urban contexts. The methodological framework of the research was based on a qualitative approach, which allowed for the exploration of deeper connections, motivations, and interpretative frameworks (Mason, 2005). Sustainable gastronomy is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that combines numerous cultural, economic, and social aspects. Therefore, methods were selected for the study that could present the processes and experiences of the participants in a nuanced way.

The primary goal of the research was not to draw general conclusions from quantitative data, but to explore and compare the characteristics of the two case studies in detail. To this end, qualitative methodology provided the most suitable framework. The flexibility of qualitative research allowed us to directly learn about the subjective experiences of the managers, chefs, and staff of the restaurants under study and to link these to the theoretical frameworks formulated in literature, such as Batat's (2020) concept of the luxury food experience.

The interview transcripts were processed using qualitative content analysis. I used an open coding procedure for the content analysis: first, I identified relevant units from the interview texts (e.g., "cooperation with local producers," "zero waste," "guest information"), and then created higher-level categories from these (e.g., "procurement practices," "environmental impacts," "communication and narrative"). The coding process was iterative, meaning that the categories were continuously refined as new text segments were analyzed.

In the second step of the analysis, I used a comparative method to compare the appearance and emphasis of each category in the two restaurants. This revealed the common elements that are decisive in both contexts, as well as the differences that arise from the specific characteristics of the rural and urban environments. For example, the use of seasonal ingredients played a key role in both restaurants, but while the rural restaurant achieved this through the direct involvement of local producers, the restaurant in the capital combined it with the creation of its own garden and alignment with international trends.

The aim of the comparative analysis was to explore how sustainability manifests itself in different contexts and how local conditions shape practices. To this end, an analytical matrix was created in which the main research categories (e.g., procurement, waste management, energy use, narratives) were recorded in rows and the restaurants in columns. The matrix made it possible to see the similarities and differences immediately.

The analysis showed that both restaurants emphasize sustainability, but in different ways: the rural restaurant focuses more on community involvement and a artisanal approach, while the restaurant in the capital fits its own operations into the international gastronomic discourse. These differences highlight the fact that sustainable gastronomy is not based on a uniform recipe, but rather that strategies are shaped by local conditions and opportunities.

Ethical issues received special attention during the research. I informed the interviewees in detail about the purpose of the research, the method of data processing, and the fact that they could withdraw their consent to participate at any time. The data was processed in anonymized form, and the names of specific restaurants were not disclosed, but referred to as "rural" and "capital city" categories. This ensured that the scientific value of the results was preserved, while the interests of the participants and institutions were also protected.

Although the qualitative methodology allows deeper insight, it also has its limitations. Due to their nature, the case studies cannot be generalized to the entire Hungarian gastronomy. The number of interviews was limited, and the researcher's interpretation also played a role in the processing of the data. However, these limitations do not diminish the validity of the research, as the goal was not statistical representativeness but detailed understanding. The study can serve as a basis for further, more extensive research, which can confirm the conclusions of this study using quantitative methods.

The main pillars of the methodology were therefore qualitative interviews and comparative analysis. The combination of these two made it possible to explore the practice of sustainable gastronomy in detail in two different contexts and to identify both common and different

characteristics. The methodology contributed to the research being more than merely descriptive but also provided an analytical framework for understanding sustainable hospitality practices.

Results

Rural restaurant

Located in western Hungary, approximately 175 km far from the capital, the restaurant received a Michelin recommendation in 2022 following numerous domestic successes and accolades. In 2023 and 2024, they not only retained this recognition, but also won the Michelin Green Star for sustainability and the "Special Service of the Year" award. The owners moved from Budapest to the countryside and started a new life. The restaurant itself is in an old villa not far from Lake Balaton, on a hillside in one of the most beautiful parts of the village, accessible after climbing 100 steps. It was in this magnificent building that the success story began almost a decade ago.

The interviewees were the owner and the chef. They are building and shaping the concept together – the chef joined the team in 2018 – with the greatest emphasis on local ingredients alongside modern technology. The fact that the focus is on being "green and sustainable" did not require any compromises, as the owners also lived and continue to live their lives according to these principles, paying attention to leaving as small an ecological footprint as possible. They were more conscious of communicating their attitude and spirit to the outside world, which made them even more aware of the issue. The chef emphasised that working with local producers has always been part of his philosophy. They agree that this approach has greatly contributed to the Michelin Green Star award, which they have earned for two consecutive years. Another added value that may have played a huge role in winning the award is the importance of communication. Specifically, the type of communication that takes place between the waiter (or possibly the owners) and the guests before the service. They explain what the dish will be, where it comes from, and what is on the plate, as not everything is visible due to the way it is served. The dishes here do not have "names"; the ingredients are listed item by item on the menu. They use homemade plates for serving, which are a testament to the owner's craftsmanship. The coffee is also roasted on site, and they make their own tonic water.

Waste collection is selective, the use of plastics is minimised, and plastic jugs are used on a replacement system. For example, the floor is disinfected, and grease is removed from the kitchen without the use of chemicals. Fermentation is a strong feature of the restaurant's drink selection, with fermented drinks such as kombucha, kefir water and spiced vinegars. Their wine selection features products from smaller, local wineries.

The menu changes weekly. Initially, there was a daily menu, but they switched to a weekly menu. Opening hours are also seasonal, but generally a maximum of four days a week, from Thursday to Sunday, with advance booking for lunch or dinner, which start and end at fixed times. Lunch is served on Saturdays and Sundays, with a three-course menu to choose from the daily specials, while dinner is a fixed six-course set menu. Their plans include creating an even larger garden, which can serve the restaurant even in winter.

The pillars of the Batat (2020) experience are also reflected in the restaurant chef's approach. The pillars of joy, enhancing experiences, storytelling through food and authenticity are prominent in the restaurant's life, and it has also received the Welcome and Service Award from the Michelin Guide for its excellent service.

Overall, the interview showcased the restaurant's commitment to sustainability and innovation, as well as how they work with local producers to create a high-quality, unique gastronomic experience. The restaurant's success lies not only in its gastronomic quality, but also in the philosophy behind it. Sustainability, community ties and sincere hospitality are values that permeate the restaurant's daily operations. The owners' and chef's approach are not a marketing ploy, but a way of life that makes the place authentic and lovable. Guests don't just come for dinner, but for an experience in which every detail – the origin of the food, the story behind the presentation, the personal attention – contributes to an intimate, memorable evening.

Looking to the future, their goal is to further strengthen their local ties and become even more self-sufficient – one of the keys to this is the planned larger garden, which will not only provide fresh ingredients but also create opportunities for hospitality during the winter months. The example of this rural restaurant shows that sustainable operation and excellent quality are not mutually exclusive; in fact, together they can shape a new, value-based approach to gastronomy in Hungary and beyond. It proves that sustainable, high-quality gastronomy is just as viable in the countryside as it is in the capital.

Restaurant in the capital of Hungary

The manager and co-owner of the restaurant, located in the heart of the capital, gave an interview about the Michelin Green Star award. The restaurant received its first Michelin star in September 2021, and in 2022, our ethical and sustainable gastronomic efforts were rewarded with a Michelin Green Star in addition to the star. Also in 2022, they were included in the Discovery selection of "The World's 50 Best Restaurants" list, and the chef is listed among the world's 100 best chefs on The Best Chef list.

"Salt is the basis of every dish, it is indispensable. We would also like to have such an indispensable place in Hungarian gastronomy," begins the restaurant manager and co-owner. Salt and spices are essential ingredients in their dishes, and they collect most of their spices themselves or source them from local producers. Since 2023, they have also had access to an abundance of vegetables from their own garden. As a result, they are using more of their own produce in their dishes, such as tomatoes, peppers, courgettes, fat borage, lemon balm, lettuce, cumin seeds and cumin sprouts, spring onions, parsley, lovage, radishes and Swiss chard. They take great care to communicate their sustainability efforts in a way that remains authentic and is not overemphasised, proving their commitment to sustainability through their actions, which is one of their main priorities. They also have charity projects and participate in campaigns in this area, for example, during Covid, they collected donations for a family in Mátészalka. Regarding the Michelin Green Star, they agree with the owners of rural restaurants that they do not know exactly what the Michelin inspectors are looking for, but thanks to the strict and anonymous inspection, they were able to retain the green star in 2023 and 2024.

The restaurant is open from Wednesday to Saturday. They work with two dinner starting times, so you can start your 14-course tasting menu at 6 p.m. or 8 p.m. The menu changes twice a year, and we can divide the year into autumn-winter and spring-summer menus. They have brought back forgotten Hungarian peasant cooking techniques, such as pickling and fermentation, which have propelled Scandinavian cuisine to the pinnacle of gastronomy, and incorporated them into the restaurant's offerings. They believe it is important to go back to their roots and serve dishes to guests that are reminiscent of their grandmother's homemade pasta. In addition to traditional ingredients, the restaurant team is always on the lookout for innovative solutions that they can incorporate into their recipes, such as snails, whose eggs and meat have already been incorporated into a dish, or ants, which may also be an important element of the cuisine of the future. The ham and bacon, for example, come from the chef's family's meat producer in Szatmár. An important staple of Hungarian food culture, bread is made on site and served fresh at the tables. The restaurant manager also focuses on sustainability when planning the wine list, and as he says, this does not mean that guests can only taste natural wines, but they are given serious attention, as these are wineries that operate in harmony with nature. In addition to wines, guests can also request non-alcoholic drinks to accompany their meals. The drinks menu includes locally made juices made from seasonal ingredients (fruit, vegetables, herbs), as well as homemade water kefir and kombuchas.

Finding a booking system was also a challenge, as they were the second restaurant in Hungary to introduce credit card details for reservations. Based on their waste policy, they strive for zero waste, preparing only as much food as there are reservations. As a result, their operations are much more predictable and therefore easier to sustain. They try to incorporate as many "leftovers" and "unnecessary" ingredients as possible into other recipes to produce as little waste as possible. During joint research with the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, a new, environmentally friendly plate was created from a mixture of mushroom mycelium and hemp, which allows guests to enjoy the finest dishes or desserts in a sustainable way. "For us, it was somehow an instinctive urge to make our concept sustainable. Although fine dining is not necessarily about this, it is the direction in which the world must move. All it takes is love for one's home and dedication to make a restaurant sustainable and authentic," said the restaurant manager. The dimensions of the Batat (2020) experience pillar are also evident in the restaurant and reflect its commitment to sustainability. A prominent dimension is the commitment to offering natural foods and respecting seasonality.

The example of the restaurant clearly shows that sustainability can be represented authentically and consistently in the world of fine dining. Their vision, which is based on both Hungarian gastronomic traditions and modern, innovative solutions, has resulted in a restaurant that is special not only because of its international recognition, but also because it conveys a truly thoughtful, value-based approach. The restaurant does not want to appear to be anything more than it is: a place where every decision is based on genuine conviction and commitment, whether it concerns the seasonal composition of the menu, the origin of the ingredients, the pursuit of zero waste, or social responsibility. The restaurant's philosophy reminds us that sustainability is

not a trendy label, but an approach that only becomes truly valuable when it is integrated into everyday operations. The restaurant is not only at the forefront of Hungarian gastronomy but also serves as an inspiring example of how to reinterpret traditions and still provide authentic and responsible hospitality in the 21st century.

Conclusions

Sustainability considerations have become a defining factor in 21st-century gastronomic practices, especially in high-prestige segments such as fine dining. The Green Star award, introduced by the Michelin Guide in 2020, provides an opportunity for restaurants to be recognised not only for their culinary achievements but also for their environmentally conscious operations. In this study, the authors compared the sustainability efforts of two Michelin Green Star-awarded restaurants in Hungary. The findings of the research show that both restaurants are committed to the practical implementation of sustainability but achieve their goals in different environmental and economic contexts. Table 3 shows the transition to sustainability and the goals achieved.

Table 3. Summary of the sustainability efforts and achievements of the two restaurants under examination

Viewpoint	Rural	Budapest
Location	Rural, natural environment	Urban environment in downtown Budapest
Choice of name	Name linked to a personal, friendly story	A conscious concept: salt as an essential gastronomic ingredient
Focus on sustainability	Local producers, reduced ecological footprint, chemical-free operation	Own garden, zero waste, seasonal ingredients, recycling
Kitchen philosophy	Seasonal weekly menu, local ingredients	A modern reinterpretation of Hungarian traditions, a 14-course tasting menu
Fermentation, preservation	Home fermentation, tonic preparation	Pickling, fermentation, innovative ingredients
Drinks	Homemade tonic	Sustainable wineries, kombucha, water kefir, non-alcoholic juices
Serving	Handmade ceramics	Innovative experimental substrate material (e.g., mushroom mycelium, hemp)
Waste management	Selective collection, chemical-free cleaning	Portion preparation tailored to reservations, reuse of leftovers
Communication	Personal interaction with guests, experiential information transfer	Conscious media and brand building, press presence
Booking system	Advance booking required, seasonal opening hours	Online booking with credit card – among the first in the country

Social responsibility	Community relations, education through guest experience	Charity campaigns, research and development collaborations
Retention of the Green Star	Awarded in two consecutive years	Awarded in two consecutive years

Source: Own editing

The restaurants implement the principles of sustainable gastronomy in two different environments – in the countryside and in the city – yet their approaches converge in many respects. The central elements of both restaurants are supporting local producers, using seasonal ingredients and minimising waste. The rural restaurant's operation is based on the involvement of local producers, craftsmanship and the use of minimalist, environmentally friendly solutions, thanks to its location close to nature and its family-oriented approach that emphasises personal relationships. In contrast, the internationally renowned restaurant in the capital integrates sustainability into the context of haute cuisine by reinterpreting traditional Hungarian ingredients and technologies in a contemporary way and systematically applying the zero-waste concept.

The case studies of the two restaurants examined confirm that sustainable gastronomy does not require an exclusive approach but can be successfully implemented in a variety of ways. Both restaurants serve as examples of how an environmentally conscious approach, ethical supply chains and the integration of innovative gastronomic solutions can provide a long-term competitive advantage in the hospitality industry. The two Michelin Green Star restaurants therefore not only offer a culinary experience but also set an example of how sustainability can be filled with real content – in a way that is not a compromise, but an added value.

Batat (2020) The theoretical pillars of the "luxury food experience" are clear in the approach of both restaurants. The personal story of the rural restaurant – from the choice of name to the homemade plates – reinforces the dimension of food storytelling and authenticity. Actively informing guests about the dishes, their origins, and involving local producers enhances social connection and a sense of shared value creation. The weekly changing menu, seasonal ingredients, and waste reduction measures (such as the exchange-based jug system) are examples of responsible restaurant operation. In comparison, the Budapest restaurant takes a more refined and innovative approach to gastronomy, in which the reinterpretation of traditions also plays an important role. The restaurant's own garden, zero waste practices, and use of special ingredients all contribute to enhancing the sensory experience and rethinking the value of food. Here, too, sustainability is not a marketing tool, but an operating principle stemming from internal conviction. Both restaurants authentically represent the values of sustainable gastronomy and set an example of how dining can be transformed into a complex experience and a process that creates value from a cultural and environmental perspective.

It can be said that studying luxury gastronomic restaurants is an appropriate way to explore the ethical principles that promote healthy, responsible and sustainable food production and consumption and which the hospitality and restaurant industry can implement in its daily

operations, and also challenges the current hospitality and restaurant business model, which primarily aims to increase the economic productivity and efficiency of the business.

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