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Evaluating children's menus in theme park restaurants

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Abstract: Children who travel with their families eat in restaurants that usually offer special kid's menus. The quality of those menus is often questioned and in the present context where children's obesity and overweight are increasing, it is relevant to pay attention to the different environments where children eat. The present paper wants to analyse if specific restaurants menus in one of the most relevant theme park are healthy or unhealthy. Using a validated instrument to evaluate kids' menu, restaurants in Disney Village (Disneyland Paris) are analysed. Results show that half of them are unhealthy and none of them are completely healthy. Future research can examine kid's menus in other theme parks and inform how changes can be implemented on those menus to make them healthier and contribute to the children's dietary habits development.

Keywords: childhood, family tourism, food habits, kid's menus, theme parks.

1. Introduction

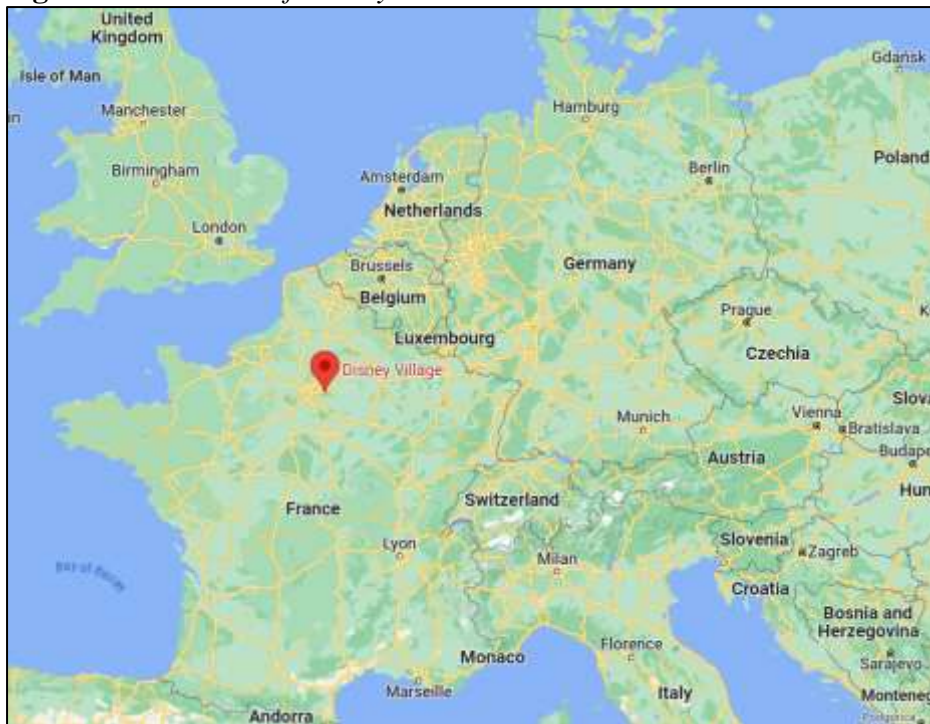
Food habits are one of the most relevant issues in different areas such as tourism, education, and family life. In this sense, those ambits are interconnected when families travel with children under 6. The behaviour of eating out has increased in the three last decades in countries such as the US, accounting for almost one-third of children's daily energy intake (Drewnowski and Rehm, 2013; Lin et al., 1999). In the European context, family outings in bars or restaurants are also becoming more widespread (Karsten et al., 2012). The food offered in restaurants focused on children is usually promoted as "kid's menus" and since the last decade different investigations have been analysing how is the food that restaurants prepare for children, highlighting the poor quality and high calories or sugar in the children's menus (Anzman-Frasca et al., 2017) or the excessive presence of pasta and fried food (Barboza Duarte et al.,

2022). Kid's menus usually lack healthy options (Trapp et al., 2022) and the World Health Organization (WHO) underlines the importance of healthy diets starting at an early age (WHO, 2020) and how the promotion of healthy food habits can be aborbed by local food services, improving the nutritional quality of foods, together with other agents such as family and school, ensuring healthy choices and considering portion sizes (WHO, 2020). The relationship between obesity and eating in some types of restaurants that offer fast food has been debated (Jeffery et al., 2006). Children's menus are one of the issues of concern because food habits are developed during childhood. The menus designed for kids are frequently unhealthy and countries such as the USA have developed policies to require healthy beverages, like water, on children's menus (Rummo et al., 2020). It is a fact that there are relevant elements to think about in this issue, like the origin of the products and their sustainability, the promotion of healthy or unhealthy food

habits on the kid’s menus, or the link between fast food and obesity. However, there is a few research focused on how is eating at theme parks, understood as “star players of the leisure and tourism industry” (Başarangil, 2018, p.316). Theme parks began to become popular all over the world in the second half of the 20th century (Ortiz López, 2021) attracting millions of visitors around the world. The present paper has the objective to analyse kids’ menus in the context of one of the most visited family destinations: Disneyland Paris, the biggest theme park in Europe (De Groote, 2011).

Disneyland Paris (see ubication in Figure 1) opened in 1992 to the public and it is one of the largest leisure and tourism projects in France (Handschuh, 1998). It has become Europe’s top tourist destination with more than 375 million visits since its opening (Disneyland Paris News, 2022), receiving more than 10 million visits each year. According to the same source, there is a specific area called Disney Village (see Figure 2) that has more than doubled in size since 1992 and continues to be redesigned to offer new experiences to visitors.

Figure 1. Ubication of Disneyland Paris.



Source: Google Maps.

Figure 2. Disneyland map and Disney Village map.



Source: Disneyland Paris (2023).

Few previous studies have studied Walt Disney World in Orlando promoting different changes and actions such as including and increasing healthy sides and beverages in kid's meals. In this sense, Peters et al. (2016) underlined the importance of examining kids' meals at the world's largest theme park, a previously unstudied area, suggesting "that healthy defaults can shift food and beverage selection patterns toward healthier options" (Peters et al., 2016, p.92). The present paper has the aim to apport in this area of study.

2. Methods

Disneyland Paris has different zones including Disney Village with 20000 m² where families can attend music events, go to the cinema, buy in theme shops, and eat in different restaurants or cafeterias. The present paper focused on this zone, which is the first one to open in the morning and the latest to close every day in Disneyland

Paris. Disney Village has a service of 14 restaurants, and some include carta and menus on its official websites. Specifically, from those 14 restaurants, 6 have an available menu and offer a kid's menu. To analyse the kid's menus, a validated instrument has been used: "Kids' Menu Healthy Score (KIMEHS)" (Rocha and Viegas, 2020). It was created to study the nutritional quality of kid's menus considering the Mediterranean food pattern. KIMEHS was generated due to the lack of scales that evaluate children's menus and it was developed by nutritionists. The scale's construct validity and reliability were analysed and positive values (Rocha and Viegas, 2020). It is based on a series of points depending on healthy options (positive points) or non-healthy options (negative points), and according to 7 groups of items (see Figure 3) related to a protein source, side dishes, vegetables, desserts, beverage, allergens, and nutritional information (Rocha and Viegas, 2020).

Figure 3. Kids' Menu Healthy Score (KIMEHS).

Item	Standard for Positive Score	Score	Standard for Negative Score	Score
Protein source	Red meat	0.5	No red meat	0
	Lean meat	1	No lean meat	0
	Fried red meat	-1	No fried red meat	0
	Processed red meat	-2	No processed red meat	0
	Fried and/or processed lean meat	-1	No fried and/or processed lean meat	0
	Fish	2	No fish	-1
	Fried fish	-1	No fried fish	0
Side dishes	Pulses	1.5	No pulses	0
	Fried potatoes	-2	No fried potatoes	1
Vegetables	Other (rice, pasta, bread...)	1	No other side dishes	0
	Vegetables	2	No vegetables	-2
Dessert	Soup	2	No soup	-2
	Fruit	2	No fruit	-2
Beverages	Sweet dessert	-1	No sweet dessert	1
	Water	2	No water	-2
Allergens information	Sugary drinks	-1	No sugary drinks	1
	Provides	0.25	Does not provide	0
Nutritional information	Provides	0.25	Does not provide	0

Source: Rocha and Viegas (2020).

KIMEHS has advantages concerning other scales that do not offer quantitative grades but only a general or qualitative perspective of healthy children's menus, such as NEMS-R (Saelens et al., 2007) or Menu Checklist (Cassady et al., 2004). Previous studies have used KIMEHS to investigate the nutritional quality of kid's menus, for example in cafes and restaurants in metropolitan Perth, Western Australia (Trapp et al., 2022) or in a mall situated in Lisbon, Portugal (Santos Baptista, 2021).

3. Results

Kid's menus in Disney Village's restaurants have been analyzed using KIMEHS. Rocha and Viegas (2020) established a range of points from -17 to 17, according to the next categories: unhealthy (-17 points to 0.49), moderately unhealthy (0.50 to 5.49), going healthy (5.50 to 11.49), moderate healthy (11.50 to 13.49) and healthy (13.50 to 17). The six restaurants analyzed in Disney Village offered kid's menus, and specifically, two of them have a submenu offered for kids separately from the kid's general menu (see Figure 4). So, eight menus have been analyzed and results according to the instrument can be observed in Table 1.

Figure 4. An example of two kid's menus offered in a restaurant.



Source: Disneyland Paris (2023).

Table 1. Kid's Menu healthy score in Disney Village (own source).

	<i>Points in KIMEHS</i>	<i>Category</i>
<i>Menu 1</i>	3	moderately unhealthy
<i>Menu 2</i>	9.75	going healthy
<i>Menu 3</i>	5.5	going healthy
<i>Menu 4</i>	10.25	going healthy
<i>Menu 5</i>	0	unhealthy
<i>Menu 6</i>	-1.25	unhealthy
<i>Menu 7</i>	-2.5	unhealthy
<i>Menu 8</i>	0.25	unhealthy

Half of the menus are unhealthy with a punctuation between -2.5 and 0.25, largely due to the presence of processed red meat and fried potatoes, sweet deserts and sugary drinks or the absence of fish. One of the restaurant's kid's menus has obtained the category of moderately unhealthy (3 points) and only three restaurants are considered as going healthy, with a significant difference between one that has 5.5 points (in the border with the unhealthiest category) and the other two that have 8.75 and 10.25. Those two kid's menus are the submenu offered for kids separately from the kid's general menu mentioned before. So, it is a special "healthy" offer that is promoted mentioning that it includes fruit and vegetable portions and that it is low in saturated fats. On those menus, there are no processed red meat, fried potatoes, or sugary drinks, and they include vegetables, fruits, and fish and one of them also includes pulses. It is relevant that pulses appear only on two menus and soup is offered only on one of the menus. Finally, only half of the menus have allergens or nutritional information.

4. Discussion and conclusion

It is worrying that any of the menus analysed have the category of healthy or moderate healthy, although only eight menus have been studied, which is the main limitation of the present paper, and future research can expand to the whole restaurants in Disneyland Paris to have a complete perspective of the situation. However, the present results agree with previous studies highlighting that children's menus are frequently unhealthy, for example, kids' menus in shopping centre restaurants obtained average negative results in KIMEHS around the five continents (see Viegas et al., 2022). Other studies underline the lack of vegetables and fruits in children's menus and the incorporation of sweet desserts (Barboza Duarte et al., 2022), like in the present

sample. In regions that are considered developed countries "eating out in restaurants is a common family behaviour, but it has been persistently associated with unbalanced nutrient intakes, contributing to create and reinforce unhealthy food habits among children" (Pinto et al., 2021, p.1). So, eating out in the family emerges as a relevant behaviour to consider in the prevention of childhood obesity (Ayala et al., 2016) because in high-income countries almost one-third of children are obese or overweight (Wang and Lobstein, 2006). The prevalence of obesity affects all socioeconomic groups (Kosti and Panagiotakos, 2006), and obesity and overweight among children are rising worldwide (Rüsing et al., 2020), impacting children's physical and psychological health (Dehghan, et al., 2005).

Although in recent years the interest in kids' menus and how they are or not are healthy has increased, it is necessary to investigate specific spaces like theme parks that every year receive families that travel (and in one way or another contribute to the food habits of children). If different studies focus on this issue, it will be possible to determine measures such as the measures implemented in another theme park of the Disney group, in Orlando (Peters et al., 2016). It would be interesting to analyse kid's restaurants in theme parks in other countries to compare and determine differences or similitudes in how children's menus are offered around the world. It is also important that restaurants consider the presence of the menus on the websites because not even half of the sample have children's menus available on their websites. Families want to access in advance to this information to choose healthy options at restaurants (Ehrlich, 2012). Finally, it is relevant to go deeper into the role of the families, which can select healthy options in the kid's menus or even choose what their children eat regardless of the kid's menus since if restaurants offer healthy meals for adults,

kids can also eat those meals instead of unhealthy menus designed specifically and contradictorily for them.

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