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THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL SECURITY MANAGEMENT IN CONSOLIDATING THE SAFETY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF PUBLIC FOOD AND AGROTURISM UNITS IN THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The article analyses the role of physical security management in public food and agritourism units in rural areas, focusing on the challenges and particularities of this context. In rural areas, where access to advanced technologies or resources is sometimes limited, the safety of employees and customers becomes essential for strengthening the local community's trust and for the success of businesses in this sector. Practical and adaptable solutions are presented, such as implementing simple surveillance systems or organizing activities in collaboration with local authorities. At the same time, the role of staff training is highlighted, which plays a decisive factor in reducing security incidents, especially in small communities, where relationships of trust are fundamental. The main goal is to identify accessible and efficient solutions, adapted to local specifics, that contribute to economic development and to strengthening community trust. The materials used include scientific articles selected from the Web of Science database, interpreted using the VOSviewer software for bibliometric analysis. The sources of information consist of specialized works, national strategies, official statistics and relevant documents in the field of tourism, security and sustainability. The applied research methods are bibliometric analysis and systematic theoretical analysis, assuming that effective physical security management is correlated with a high level of sustainability and sustainable local development. This complex approach allowed the formulation of relevant conclusionssuggesting that, through accessible strategies and security measures adapted to rural specifics, public food and agritourism units can contribute both to local economic development and to the creation of a safe and friendly environment for the community.

Key words**:** *physical security management, safety, public food units, agritourism units*

INTRODUCTION

Security in the tourism and hospitality industry is one of the determining factors in achieving and maintaining customer and employee satisfaction and business sustainability [4].

Rural food and agritourism units face specific challenges related to physical security, including accessibility, poor infrastructure and risk management [9].

Security in food and agritourism units includes a wide range of measures and practices designed to protect employees, customers, infrastructure and sensitive business information. In a sector where human interaction is intense, the risks associated with security incidents – whether physical or digital – can have devastating consequences on operations and reputation. Implementing effective security management contributes to sustainable development, reducing the negative impact on the community and the environment [12].

Physical security management involves the protection of premises and assets, including access control by implementing access verification systems in sensitive areas, such as food warehouses or processing areas, choosing video surveillance systems for continuous monitoring to prevent theft, vandalism or other incidents, taking fire prevention measures by equipping with fire extinguishers, smoke detectors and clearly defined evacuation plans [11].

Another key element is employee and customer security, and effective management forms a safe environment for employees and customers, being an essential component of the sustainability of a business and environmental development.

Among the basic features in employee and customer security, firstly, is compliance with

health and safety regulations to prevent accidents at work and, secondly, the urgent implementation of measures for managing emergencies, to which are added regular training, to be prepared for any situation that may arise.

Because the world has undergone a drastic change in recent decades, being in the full swing of the digital age, cybersecurity has become a priority [15], especially for units that use online ordering systems and payment applications. Proper management has its say in reducing risks that include unauthorized access to customer personal data and vulnerabilities in order and inventory management systems [20],[10].

Precisely for these reasons, physical security management is an essential element for the success of public food and agritourism units, including those in rural areas, because in these areas, limited infrastructure and reduced access to advanced technologies can amplify risks, endangering the safety of both customers and employees [6].

The purpose of this article is to highlight the role of physical security management in strengthening community trust and ensuring business sustainability and to find effective physical security strategies to contribute to the development of the rural environment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the analysis undertaken, to establish the role of physical security management in strengthening the safety and sustainability of public food and agritourism units in rural areas, theoretical research of specialized studies was used, which began with a bibliometric analysis in the first part of the article to identify the conceptual relationships between safety, risk management and sustainability of public food and agritourism units.

The research continued with a systematic analysis of the specialized literature, an analysis intended to respond to the following hypothesis: "The existence of an effective physical security management in public food and agritourism units in rural areas is correlated with a high level of sustainability and local economic development."

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research method, which in this article used the Web of Science database, from where the articles relevant to the field studied were sorted and centralized (selections are made according to several criteria such as subject, title, keywords, authors, years, countries, etc.), being used in many studies in the technical and economic fields. The aim was to find research trends in the field of physical security in public food and agritourism units. To find relevant studies in the field, the "Subject" field in the WoS platform was configured, where "Security" was added, along with two more keywords "Hospitality" and "Safety". The result of joining these keywords generated a sample of 215 publications, which was exported to a text file, which was interpreted using the VOSviewer 1.6.19 software, generating graphic representations and maps that were interpreted in the paper.

Hypothesis-based analysis by exploring the specialized literature is called theoretical analysis. The following steps were followed: formulating the hypothesis (the idea of preliminary explanation was used), studying the literature by searching and analyzing existing scientific works that refer to the hypothesis, to see if there is evidence or arguments to support or contradict it, and evaluating and drawing conclusions (based on the literature, the validity of the hypothesis was evaluated and conclusions were drawn).

This method is frequently used in scientific research to identify gaps in knowledge, being at the same time also a step to substantiate a subsequent empirical approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Bibliometric analysis of key concepts

In this part of the paper, a systemic analysis of existing studies in the Web of Science (WoS) database regarding physical security in public food and agritourism units was carried out. The aim was to obtain an overview of the evolution and research directions in this field, and in the fields that converge with it.

Observing the data in Fig. 1, regarding the number of publications by year, it is observed that in 2000, the first publication on the

researched topic was recorded. Starting with 2007 (3 publications), the number of publications began to increase slightly, with significant oscillations over the years, reaching a maximum of 29 publications in 2023.

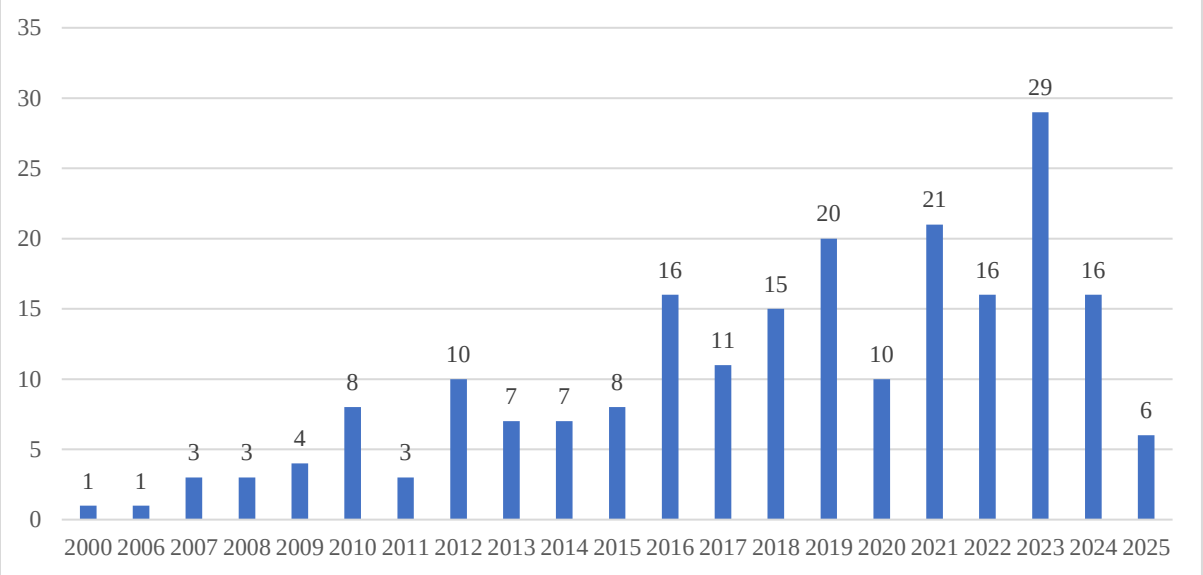

Fig. 1. Dynamics of WoS publications by keywords "security", "hospitality",& "safety" in the period 2000-2025 (number of documents/year)
Source: Own calculations based on data generated by the WoS platform [18].

In the current year, 2025, 6 publications have already been recorded, a fairly large number, considering that the year has just begun, demonstrating the growing interest in this topic.

The main correlations regarding the keywords "security", "hospitality" and "safety" were generated using the Vosviewer program, and can be seen in Figures 2 and 3, thus providing easy-to-follow maps showing the most debated topics and the correlations made by other authors using these keywords.

The maps emphasize the main terms, while the secondary terms remain in the background, forming clusters of word associations, and depending on the number of words and the strength of the association, these are larger or smaller, with the following standing out:

Cluster 1 (red) is the main cluster and is formed by 24 terms (attitudes, changing perceptions, competitive destination, crime, destination, destination risk, effect size, equity, familiarity, heritage brand equity dimensions, image, impact, international tourists, international visitors, model, perception, perceptions of safety, risk of crime, safety and security, service failure, service recovery, tourist, tourists perceptions, visitor) with a major relevance for the studied topic, as it includes fundamental concepts related to safety, security, risk perception and impact on tourism.

Analyzing the relevant key terms (safety and security, destination risk, crime, risk of crime, perceptions of safety, tourists' perceptions, service failure, service recovery) and the connections formed reflect the importance of safety measures in food and tourism locations to reduce the risks to which agritourism units and restaurants in rural areas are exposed, reflect the customer perception of the level of safety in a tourist unit and the impact of incidents on reputation and the necessary corrective measures.

The following can be deduced from the connections drawn up: a high level of safety is essential for attracting tourists and in rural areas, the perception of insecurity can affect the flow of visitors; safety incidents must be managed quickly to avoid damaging the image of the food or agritourism unit; crime and risk prevention through modern security systems and staff training is vital.

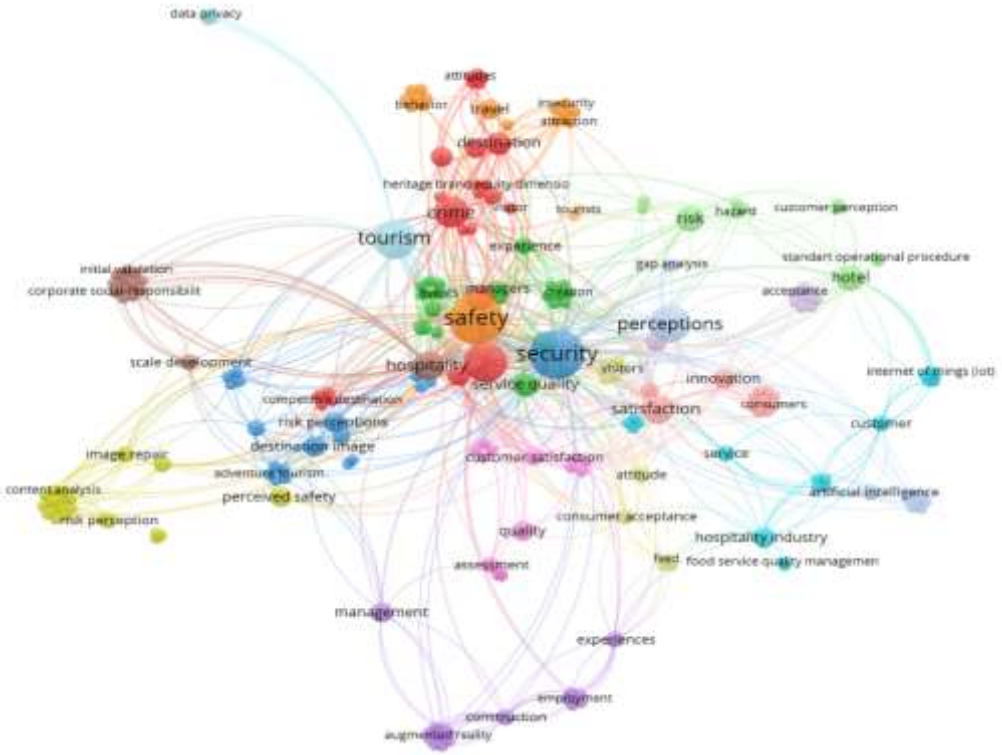

Fig. 2. Correlation map of the terms "*security", "hospitality" & "safety*"
Source: Own calculations based on data generated by the WoS platform and generated by VOSViewer[18].

Cluster 2 (green) with a focus on the hospitality industry and employee experience, consists of 21 terms (creation, economic-crisis, employees, events, experience, hospitableness, hotel management, hotels, human-resources, industry, lessons, loyalty, managers, service quality, space-to-face hospitality, spaces and places, spatial research, sport, sports mega events, tourism disaster, visual research methods) being very important for the topic studied.

This cluster is essential for human resource management and the impact of safety on personnel in the hospitality industry.

The terms that attract attention are hotel management, human-resources, managers, service quality, tourism disaster, employees, loyalty, all of which emphasize the management of personnel in the tourism and food industry, the correlation of safety with service quality and the relationship between workplace safety and employee loyalty.

It can thus be said that personnel safety directly influences productivity and service quality; staff training is crucial for preventing incidents in food and tourism units; work accidents or lack of protective measures can lead to a decrease in employee satisfaction and loyalty.

The third cluster (blue) consists of 19 terms (adventure tourism, challenges, cleanliness, crisis, critical review, destination image, everyday practice, hazard analysis, high street, information, line, man-machine-media-management (4m), personality, risk perceptions, safe places, safety system theory, security, social media, system) from the area of risk, safety and systems analysis, having a high relevance for the topic studied.

This cluster offers perspectives on risk analysis and safety systems, the most important terms being safety system theory, hazard analysis, security, risk perceptions, adventure tourism, crisis, critical review, referring to methods of risk analysis in the food and tourism industry, the relationship between risk perception and real security and the impact of risks in adventure tourism and crisis management.

Cluster 4 (yellow) also has 19 terms (bibliometric analysis, content analysis, crisis impacts, disaster management, financial crisis, global economic-crisis, globalization, image

repair, perceived hospitality, perceived risk, perceived safety, reception, regional distribution, risk perception, safety culture, security forces, synergistic factors, tourism crisis, world recession) focuses on the impact of crises on the food and tourism industry and on their management strategies with great importance for the subject of the article.

The most important terms (crisis impacts, disaster management, financial crisis, risk perception, perceived safety, safety culture) form links of crisis management in food and tourism units, the economic impact of the perception of insecurity on business and the creation of an organizational culture based on safety.

Thus, it can be argued that safety incidents can have a significant economic impact (financial losses, decrease in the number of customers); a clear crisis management strategy is essential to protect tourism and public foodunits; safety must be an integral part of the organizational culture to prevent incidents and minimize risks.

Cluster 5 (purple) consisting of 18 terms (agricultural-workers, augmented reality, conceptual-framework, construction, cyber-physical systems, employment, experiences, extent analysis method, industry 4.0, internet of things, management, meat, negative social interactions, occupational health and safety, occupational safety and health training, regulation, service innovation, virtual-reality) is very important because it focuses on modern technological solutions for physical and food security, the links between the main terms (augmented reality, internet of things (IoT), cyber-physical systems, occupational safety and health training, virtual reality, service innovation) refer to the use of advanced technologies in security, training personnel to reduce risks and finding digital solutions for security management.

These 5 clusters form a solid basis for the analysis of physical security management in public food and agritourism, with a focus on safety, risk perception, crisis management and the use of technology for protection.

After analyzing the main relevant clusters, it is important to analyze the other clusters, in order to understand how they can fit into the topic of physical security in public food and agritourism units.

Cluster 6 (light blue) consisting of 18 terms (accommodation, construct, customer, customer delight, customer value, delight grounded theory, food service quality management, HACCP principles, hospitality industry, internet of things (iot), logic, microcontroller, qualitative content analysis, sensor, service, value creation, web application, wi-fi module) has a direct link to food safety in public foodunits, an essential aspect of overall security.

The links between the main terms reflect the following: the implementation of HACCP standards is vital to prevent food contamination; IoT and smart sensors can be used to monitor the temperature and quality of ingredients; customer satisfaction is influenced by the perception of food safety, affecting the reputation of food units.

Cluster 7 (orange) includes 16 terms (attraction, behavior, event, incidents, insecurity, intention to experience, media, narratives, need-driven, pollution, predictors, preference, safety, tourism industry, transportation, travel) focuses on aspects related to tourist safety and risk factors in travel experiences.

From the analysis of the main terms and the formed links, the following can be stated: tourist behavior can influence the perceived level of safety in a destination; security incidents and lack of infrastructure can affect the attractiveness of an agritourism location; factors such as pollution and transport infrastructure are important for travel safety in rural areas.

Cluster 8 (brown) consisting of 14 terms (corporate social-responsibility, decent work, diversity management, employment quality, hospitality, hotel employees, human resource management, initial validation, job quality, micro social responsibility, performance, scale development, self-efficacy, sustainable tourism) has an indirect link with physical security, emphasizing social responsibility and work quality.

Cluster 9 (lilac) also including 14 terms (assessment, blockchain mobile payment service, consequences, corporate image,

criteria, customer, satisfaction, future, indicators, loyalty intention, physical environment, physical-environment, privacy and security, quality, rural tourism) focuses on customer experience and the impact of security on satisfaction.

From the analysis of the terms and the links between them, the following can be stated: a high level of security increases customer satisfaction and improves the company's image; rural tourism needs personalized security measures, adapted to the specifics of the region; data protection and cybersecurity are increasingly important in the hospitality industry.

Cluster 10 (pink) contains 12 specialized terms (behavioural perspective model, consumers, consumption, context, innovation, intention, liquid consumption, motivations, p2p hospitality, reasons for use, satisfaction, sharing economy) and addresses how consumers perceive safety and innovation in hospitality.

The result is that: safety influences the intention to visit a tourist destination or to return to a restaurant; business models in the collaborative economy must integrate security measures (e.g. agritourism farms).

Cluster 11 (light green) also contains 12 terms (customer perception, decision-making process, disease, emergency, employee perception, equipments of individual protection, framework, hazard, hotel, risk, standard operational procedures, tourist destinations) is closely related to emergency safety and risk management in tourism and hospitality, with high relevance for the analyzed topic.

Correlated with the first clusters, it forms links that support the following: emergency procedures are essential for the safety of customers and staff; protective equipment must be available and used properly in kitchens and serving areas; perception of safety influences tourists' decisions in choosing a destination.

Cluster 12 (blue-grey) consisting of 11 terms (adventure, artificial intelligence, comparative analysis, crisis management, disaster, gap analysis, hotel industry, information asymmetry, perceptions, risk-management, tourism safety) also has a medium relevance for the studied topic, focusing on the use of artificial intelligence for crisis management in tourism and hospitality.

Cluster 13 (light yellow) also contains 11 terms (attitude, consumer acceptance, country image, feed, food design, perspective, processed products, safety and security perception, tourists' perceptions, uncertainty, visitors) contributing to the understanding of how consumer perceptions and food safety influence the sustainability of public foodunits. Terms such as food design and processed products can be correlated with food safety standards applied in restaurants and agritourism units, and safety and security perception is an essential concept for establishing trust in public foodunits.

Cluster 14 (light purple) consisting of 9 terms (acceptance, electronic locking systems, innovations adoption, leader influence, organizational-change planners, radio frequency identification (rfid), rfid technology, technology) focuses on innovative technologies applied in security, such as RFID and electronic locking systems, which can be used for food facility security. The cluster highlights the impact of technology and innovation in physical security management, including measures such as access monitoring and theft prevention.

Cluster 15 (bleu), the penultimate in size, consisting of 5 terms (data privacy, data safety, data security, destination patronage, tourism) is more technological, referring to data protection and digital safety. Although this cluster is closer to digital security, data protection issues can influence customer trust in electronic reservation and payment systems in restaurants and guesthouses.

The last cluster 16 (light orange) consisting of only 2 terms (tourists, vulnerability) although very small, is important because it highlights the vulnerability of tourists in the context of safety. The link between safety and the perception of vulnerability is crucial in rural hospitality, where infrastructure may be less developed. The cluster highlights the fact that tourists perceive different levels of safety depending on the location, which can influence the flow of visitors and the success of public food and agritourism units.

Thus, the analysis can be summarized as follows:

- The main clusters (Cluster 1 - red and Cluster 2 - green) highlight the fact that the perception of safety is a determining factor in the choice of tourist destinations and in customer satisfaction. In rural areas, where infrastructure may be less developed, a solid risk prevention and management strategy contributes significantly to the attractiveness of public food and agritourism units.
- Cluster 5 (purple) and Cluster 14 (light purple) highlight the role of emerging technologies, such as IoT, RFID and cyber-physical systems, in strengthening safety in tourist units. The digitalization and automation of security processes not only increase protection, but also contribute to increasing consumer confidence in the services offered.
- Cluster 4 (yellow) and Cluster 8 (brown) highlight the fact that employee and customer safety must become an integral part of the organizational culture in the hospitality industry. Protective measures, continuous training of personnel and the creation of clear crisis management procedures can prevent incidents and minimize their impact on businesses.

The graphical representation of the density made with the help of VOSviewer highlights the terms or keywords that appear most frequently in the bibliographic analysis or in the specialized literature in the studied field. Through the frequency of these words, the density map shows the areas of interest or research topics considered more significant and relevant. In the context of the analyzed subject, the following representative keywords were identified: security, safety, hospitality, managers, satisfaction, tourism, satisfaction (Figure 3).

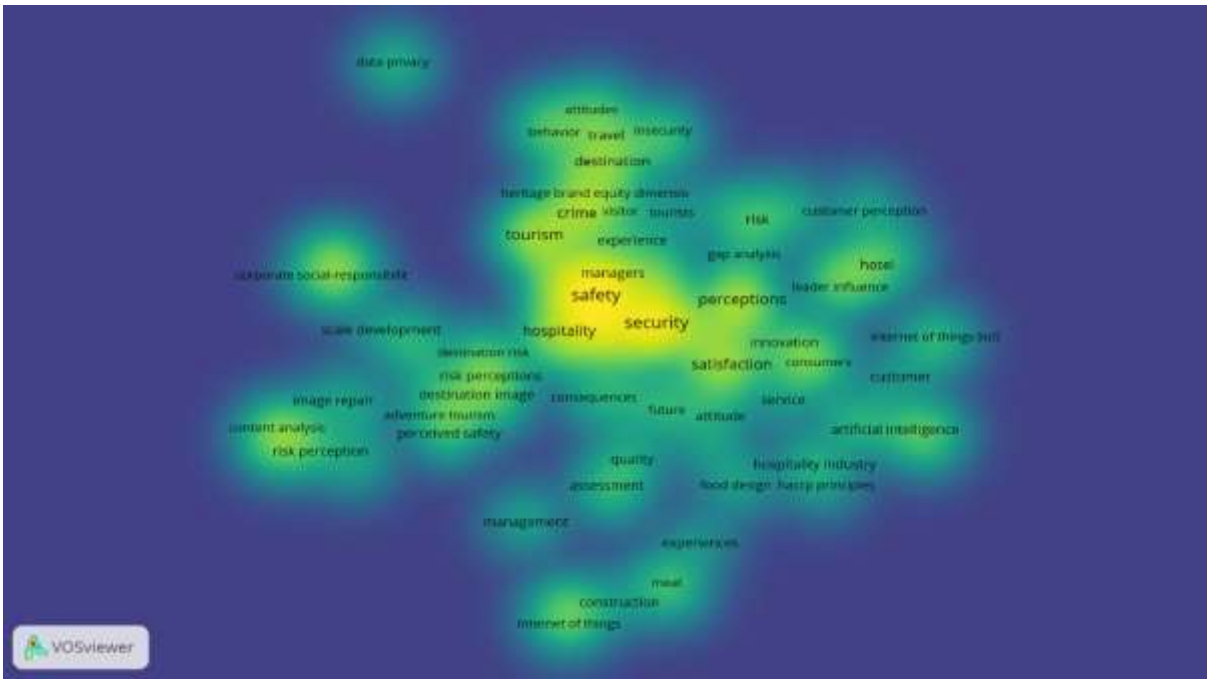

Fig. 3. Density map analysis – Physical security management in the safety and sustainability of public food and agritourism units

Source: Own calculations based on data generated by the WoS platform and generated by VOSViewer[18].

"Security and Safety" (the intense yellow area) is the most important conceptual core of the map, where the terms: security, safety, service quality, perceptions are found. This area is the densest, which suggests that the specialized literature focuses strongly on the relationship between security, safety perceptions and service quality in the hospitality and agritourism industries.

"Hospitality Industry and Risk Perception" - medium density area – this area includes terms such as hospitality industry, satisfaction, risk perceptions, customer perception. Although less dense than the central area, it

suggests that the perception of safety influences both customer decisions and the competitiveness of tourism units. Units that invest in safety measures can have a competitive advantage in the market.

"Technology, Innovation and Management" - low density areas - includes terms such as artificial intelligence, internet of things (IoT), augmented reality, management, construction and It indicates an emerging interest in the impact of technology on security management in the hospitality industry. That is, automation and digitalization contribute to improving safety and optimizing operations in public food units and rural tourism.

The bibliometric analysis highlights that physical security management is a fundamental pillar in the sustainable development of public food units and rural agritourism. Integrating safety measures, using modern technologies, and creating an organizational culture based on prevention contribute to increasing customer trust, loyalty, and competitiveness in the hospitality industry.

Analysis of the role of physical security management in public food and agritourism units for the development of the rural environment

In order to establish whether there is a correlation between effective physical security management in public food and agritourism units and rural development, the following hypothesis was formulated: **"The existence of effective physical security management in public food and agritourism units in rural areas is correlated with a high level of sustainability and local economic development."**

Physical security in rural areas, main challenges and particularities. The rural environment differs quite a lot from the urban one, having a substantial growth potential and playing a vital social role in the social and economic life of each country, but with regard to security in hospitality industry units and the services offered, the biggest challenges they face are related in particular to:

-Reduced accessibility to technology – compared to urban areas, public food and agritourism units in rural areas have more limited financial resources for investments in advanced security systems [2], [14].

-Lack of trained personnel – in many rural communities, personnel do not have access to specialized security training, which can increase associated risks [1], [16].

-Reliance on interpersonal relationships – in rural areas, social relationships are fundamental, and mutual trust plays an essential role in ensuring safety [13], [8].

-Exposure to specific risks – risks include fires, theft, vandalism, but also emergencies caused by natural factors [19].

The link between security and sustainability. Security in the hospitality industry is an essential element of sustainable development, impacting customer trust, cost optimization and corporate social responsibility.

Increasing customer trust and loyalty. Guests prefer units that offer a safe environment, which helps strengthen the brand image and attract a greater number of visitors [13].

Optimizing costs and reducing losses. Implementing preventive measures, such as video surveillance and cybersecurity, helps to reduce the risks associated with theft and incidents, thus reducing unforeseen expenses [19].

Supporting corporate social responsibility (CSR). Prioritizing safety reflects the commitment of units to employees and the community, contributing to balanced development and compliance with the principles of sustainability [17].

Research shows that safety is a key criterion in choosing tourist destinations, and emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and automation, are improving the security of hospitality units [2].

Effective strategies for ensuring a safe environment include:

-Implementing monitoring systems and using advanced technologies to prevent incidents [14].

-Training employees in emergency management and safety compliance [1].

-Adopting international standards, such as ISO 22000 for food safety and ISO 45001 for occupational safety [17].

By integrating these measures, hospitality units not only improve their security but also contribute to the sustainable development of the industry.

In our country, statistical data shows a clear link between security and the development of rural businesses, influencing both the increase in the number of tourists and the attraction of investments.

Increasing the number of tourists in counties with developed tourism infrastructure. According to the National Institute of Statistics (2021), counties with a well-secured tourism infrastructure, such as Sibiu, Brașov and Maramureș, have recorded a significant increase in the number of tourists in recent years [7].

Attracting investments in rural areas with low crime rates. Rural areas with a low crime rate are more attractive for investments in agritourism, thus contributing to local economic development [3]. Reports on rural tourism indicate that regions with more effective security measures benefit from more funds and development projects.

Guesthouses that have implemented security measures, such as video surveillance systems and partnerships with local authorities, have reported an increase in bookings by 15-30% [5]. Accommodation units that have invested in improving security and infrastructure have been able to attract European funds, thus facilitating the economic development of local communities [3].

Analysis of data and specialized literature confirms the hypothesis that "**The existence of effective physical security management in public food and agritourism units contributes to increasing sustainability and local economic development.**"Businesses that prioritize security have a competitive advantage, attract more tourists and ensure stable economic growth.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the specialized literature confirms the importance of physical security management in the sustainable development of public food and agritourism units in rural areas. The main findings highlight:

1. Physical security plays an essential role in the perception of the quality of the services provided and in customer loyalty. Units that implement effective security measures benefit from a better reputation and attract a greater number of tourists.
2. The use of modern technologies, such as artificial intelligence and video monitoring systems, significantly contributes to preventing risks and increasing the attractiveness of rural tourist destinations. The digitalization of security measures offers effective solutions for incident management and reducing vulnerabilities.
3. The adoption of international security standards improves the sustainability and competitiveness of hospitality units. The integration of clear security protocols supports both the protection of tourists and the long-term development of businesses in the rural sector.
4. The bibliometric analysis highlights the direct correlation between physical security and the perception of service quality, demonstrating that safe and well-managed public foodunits attract more customers and ensure their loyalty. Also, the integration of modern technologies (AI, video monitoring) improves safety and reduces the risks perceived by customers. In rural areas, the adoption of clear security policies increases competitiveness and contributes to the sustainability of tourist destinations.
5. The evaluation of the hypothesis confirms that effective physical security management has a positive impact on local sustainability and economic development. Businesses that prioritize safety benefit from a competitive advantage, attract more tourists and contribute to the stable economic growth of the region.

These conclusions emphasize the need for a strategic approach to physical security management, adapted to the rural specifics, and highlight the positive impact of technologies and regulations in this area.

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