

Environmental innovation practices in the restaurant sector: Theoretical evidence

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ABSTRACT

Tourist activities involve mobility between the tourist's place of residence and the destination they decide to visit, in addition to this, during their stay they require lodging and food consumption. This last aspect integrates all those establishments that offer the food and beverage preparation service -cafeterias, markets, bars and restaurants, among others-.

Keywords: Tourist activities, Accommodation, World trends.

INTRODUCTION

Tourist activities involve mobility between the tourist's place of residence and the destination they decide to visit, in addition to this, during their stay they require lodging and food consumption. This last aspect integrates all those establishments that offer the food and beverage preparation service -cafeterias, markets, bars and restaurants, among others-.

Today, the offer of tourism and gastronomic experiences includes the design of innovative products and services based on global trends. Innovation is a key factor for competitiveness and business performance, which is why the restaurant sector is beginning to meet consumer demands based on new ways of providing service. These forms include sustainable strategies and practices that aim to minimize their environmental impact (Takacs & Borrión, 2020; Srivastava & Singh, 2021). The trend of sustainable destinations, strategies and practices is a challenge for authorities, tourism planners and companies since it is necessary to take as a basis the global proposals on sustainability in force, such as the 2030 Agenda.

As far as the restaurant sector is concerned, this is a service that involves the purchase (choice), preparation and management of inputs, making it an ideal candidate to include environmental innovation practices throughout the value chain (Shin & Mattila, 2019; *Milan Urban Food Policy Pact* [MUFPP], 2020).

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OBJECTIVE

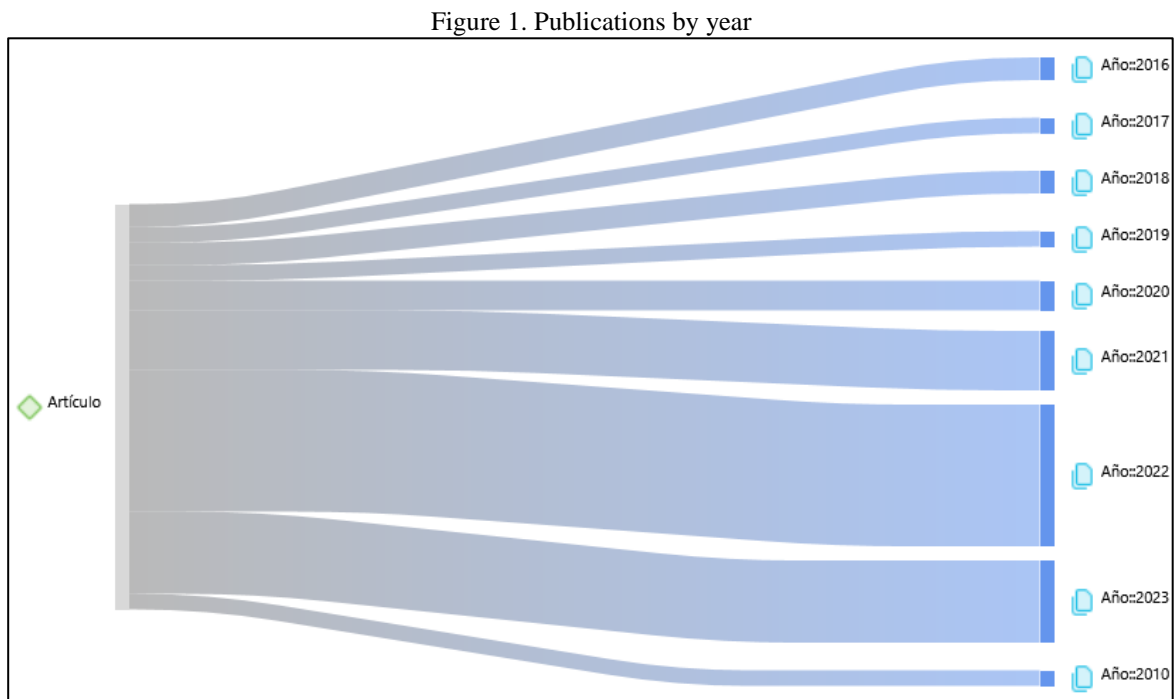
Identify the environmental innovation practices that restaurants implement to improve their business performance.

METHODOLOGY

First, a systemic review of the literature was conducted. The search was carried out in the Scopus and Scindirect databases. The period evaluated was from 2000 to 2023. A total of 67 articles met the inclusion criteria. The information was then analyzed using the Atlas *ti* v.23 software. The articles were coded and grouped into 6 subareas proposed by Takacs & Borrion (2020): 1) food production; 2) transportation and distribution; 3) food storage and preparation; 4) food service and consumption; 5) elimination and recovery of waste; and 6) demand for sustainable products.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

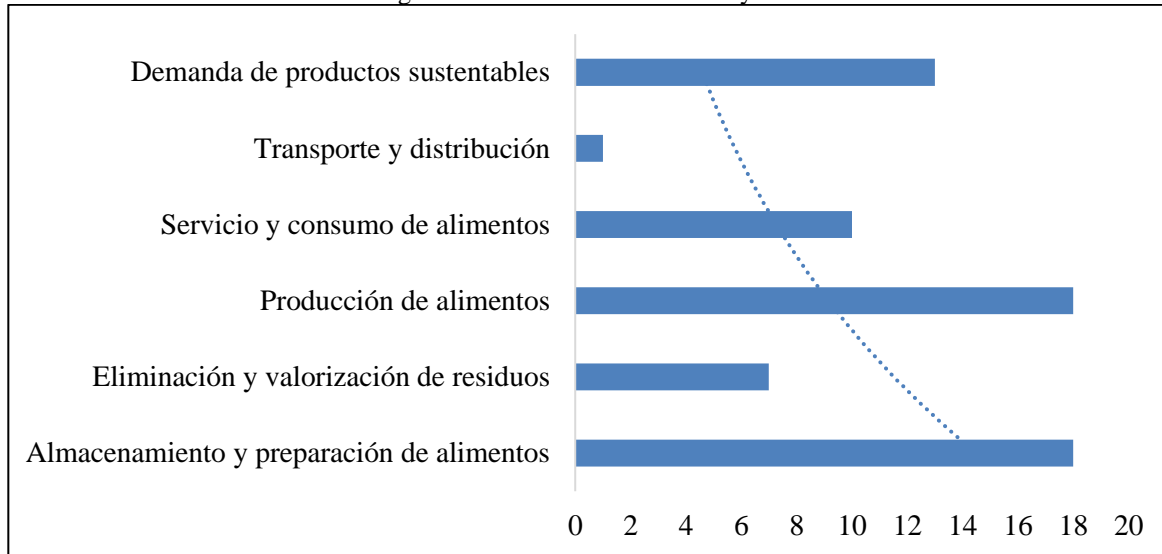
According to the number of articles published per year, as of 2020 the number of investigations related to the analyzed topic begins to increase (see figure 1).



Source: Authors.

In addition, there is a trend in the publication of articles related to (see Figure 2): food production and food storage and preparation.

Figure 2. Distribution of articles by area



Source: Authors.

Next, only the two areas with the highest number of articles are analyzed:

1. Food production. These articles show the purchase of inputs with certifications or labels of sustainable origin (Maynard *et al.*, 2020; Di Pierro *et al.*, 2023). Restaurants have also increased their consumption of seasonal products from local suppliers (Ginés-Ariza *et al.*, 2022; Kim *et al.*, 2022). Using locally sourced food is now among the top culinary trends in the restaurant industry. Due to their growing popularity, offering local food in restaurants will likely be an experience rather than a differentiation.
2. Food storage and preparation. The articles exemplify the adoption of new business models for sustainable and responsible tourism (Cooke *et al.*, 2022; Chou *et al.*, 2022). Good practices include the use of technological innovations for the sustainable consumption of energy, water and material resources.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Environmental or green innovation can contribute to the reduction of pollution levels generated by the tourism industry, this, through the application of new or improved technologies, products or management models according to the needs or characteristics of each company. This type of innovation promotes the sustainable use of the host community and of tourism and natural resources.

With respect to the restaurant sector, it recognizes and assumes its responsibility to efficiently manage the inputs it needs for the preparation and sale of food. These practices lead restaurants to enhance the use of their resources by modifying and adapting environmental innovation practices (Ginani *et al.*, 2020; Kim & Hall, 2020; Shafieizadeh & Tao, 2020; Di Pierro *et al.*, 2023).



The review of the articles shows that the restaurant sector has a responsible attitude towards environmental care, supported by innovative practices that involve producers, suppliers and employees, as well as tourists (diners) and government organizations. An orientation and commitment to implement sustainable corporate strategies is observed. Starting by consuming local inputs, which can be considered as a sustainable and green behavior; therefore, offering this type of food can be among the ecological demands made by restaurants. Another example of these practices is waste, energy, and water management (Goffi *et al.*, 2018). At the same time, the studies analysed also include good practices for collaboration with competitors to manage projects with environmental, social and/or economic impact (Mestre *et al.*, 2022).



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