

A Conceptual Model of Corporate Security in Spa Resorts

By

**Sebastjan Repnik, Janez Mekinc, Marko Perić
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Preface

In today's world, full of regional conflicts and tensions, security is a fundamental concern and priority for nations. Samuel Žbogar, Head of the Slovenian Mission to the United Nations Security Council, stated in an interview with Ervin Hladnik-Milharčič (Dnevnik, 23 August 2024): "We have the highest number of armed conflicts, the highest number of refugees, the highest number of civilian casualties and the highest number of casualties among humanitarian workers — which we marked this week on our initiative." Three major regional crises in Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan are still unresolved in August 2025, while many "smaller" conflicts receive little attention and millions of people are forcibly displaced. "At the end of 2024, an estimated 123.2 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events that seriously disrupt public order" (UNHCR Global Trends) The world could be described as "troubled" and managing regional and other conflicts is important for economies, especially for the tourism sector. Who has never been a tourist? Based on the definition that a tourist is travelling for leisure and personal interest, we might ask how many people in the Western world have never been tourists, and more generally, who is a tourist in the global context. Reportlinker notes: "Over the past six decades, tourism has grown exponentially worldwide, and by 2030, some 350 million new international tourist arrivals are expected worldwide, with total arrivals reaching 1.8 billion, according to the UNWTO." (Reportlinker, accessed 4 August 2025) These figures show that tourism needs to be considered in terms of its scale, environmental impact and economic impact. The COVID 19 pandemic has also highlighted the health-related

safety dimension and the associated perception of safety. Various types of tourism, such as heritage and culinary tourism, require respect for natural resources and protection of the environment, while others remain mass-orientated. A well-known and traditionally strong segment in Slovenia is spa tourism, which offers opportunities to improve health, promote well-being and connect with natural and cultural heritage, while generating economic benefits and broader social impact by strengthening local communities and supporting sustainable development goals. Slovenia's spa resorts offer a rich and diverse range of services that prioritise the safety of guests — both those in need of medical services and those who simply want to enjoy the beautiful nature and healing waters. Safety in spa resorts is of crucial importance, as emphasised in this monograph, which, through a complex analysis of safety factors, raises the most important safety issues and integrates them into a conceptual safety model for spa resorts. An interesting finding is that safety has two dimensions: a subjective and an objective one, which are inextricably linked to the guest as an individual. When deciding to visit a foreign country, choose accommodation or decide in favour of a spa resort, both dimensions are crucial: the objective one, which is based on verifiable data, and the subjective one, which reflects the feeling and perception at the destination. It is assumed that the objective dimension of safety cannot replace or “override” the subjective dimension, which may be stronger at a given time at the destination. Social media can provide some insight into the subjective dimension through the experiences of influencers or previous guests, but it cannot replace the authentic feeling. The monograph does not replace this feeling either, but leads the reader into an exciting reflection on safety and corporate security based on guest perceptions and the thoughts and practices of employees in seven Slovenian spa resorts. It is aimed at

researchers, doctoral students, decision-makers in tourism safety policy and the interested professional public, serving as a source of ideas and providing a conceptual model ready for further empirical research. Although it relates to a relatively narrow segment, spa tourism its findings can be compared with similar organisations abroad. In times of (in)security, a monograph on safety in spa resorts offers more than just a timely read. It encourages personal reflection and the evaluation of one's own practises.

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Introduction

Humans are believed to be travelers by genetic composition. This is thought to be embedded in our DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid). Researchers Murdock and White (1969, p. 333) studied cross-cultural comparisons among of human societies historically and culturally connected due to common ancestry. It is believed that humans carry within them the DRD4-7r travel gene, a variation of the DRD4 gene. This gene is more frequent in cultures inclined towards greater migration and is thought to have influenced the dispersal of humanity across the globe. It is a dopamine receptor that affects sensations of pleasure and reward, which make us feel good. In individuals with the DRD4-7r gene, more external stimulation is needed to feel well (Chen et al., 1999, p. 317), and such stimulation can be provided through tourist travel.

Perspective, we have progressed from nomadic hunters and gatherers to a higher quality of life in rural and urban areas. When we settle down or pause, we first seek food, shelter, and comfort. Modern tourists appear to act way. According to the authors (Brännare et al., 2005, p. 203), the environment or space is perceived as either friendly or hostile, which is a key factor in determining how long we choose to stay in a tourist destination. This was later confirmed by a study based on a sample of 31,122 respondents (European Commission, 2014), which reported that sun/beach (43%) and nature (30%) were the main reasons for travel in 2013. These findings are supported by more recent research (Carvache-Franco et al., 2022; Crompton, 2024) on tourist motivations for travel to coastal cities, which found that even after the COVID-19

pandemic, nature, sun, beach, and the desire for new experiences remain among the key motivations.”

Historical perspective of tourist travel

“The issue of safety has been present everywhere since the beginning of humankind” (Kurež et al., 2009, p. 170). Tourism is a complex field that is historically interesting because people have been traveling since ancient times, initially for different purposes, such as warfare. The origins of travel for warfare date back to the Crusades, which lasted nearly 200 years, from the late 11th to the late 13th century. The first organized and advertised tourist trip was arranged by Thomas Cook in 1841, when he organized travel for 500 people from Leicester to Loughborough, England, as part of his temperance society. With the advent of passenger rail transport in 1825 and the growth of urban populations and retail in London, hotels began to emerge near railway stations and city centers (Gyr, 2010, p. 4).

In the 19th century, the rare commodity known as security for hotel guests was ensured solely by a metal key granting access to the hotel room. Even today, some hotels still use keys despite modern technologies such as the hotel room key card. With such cards, hoteliers reduce personal contact with guests, increasing security risks. Only in the 20th century that hotels began implementing more advanced safety technologies, such as fire protection systems, luggage storage areas, and safes. A doorman was present in the first city hotels—the person who would be the first to greet a guest upon arrival and the last to see them off upon departure. Alongside train travel, air travel developed as well. Melton (2002, p. 154) states that the first passenger flight occurred in 1908, contributed

to the faster expansion of hotels worldwide. Today, tourism is part of the global security space and represents the world's largest economic sector, with the highest annual growth rates. The years 2020 and 2021 were exceptional for tourism, as global tourist arrivals dropped by more than 70 % compared to 2019, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2019. The number of international tourist arrivals fell below the level recorded in 1990, when there were 458 million arrivals (UNWTO, 2022). The pandemic revealed the deep interconnection between security and tourism, a point already emphasized by Kurež (2011, p. 333). According to the World Tourism Organization (hereinafter UNWTO), in 2024, 1.4 billion tourists traveled (thus reaching the pre-COVID-19 levels of 2019 (UNWTO, 2020), which represents an increase of 140 million international tourist arrivals compared to 2023. According to UNWTO, this marks an 11% growth in 2024 compared to 2023, when approximately 1.3 billion arrivals were recorded (UNWTO, 2025).

The role of international organizations in tourism security

We live in an age of revolution in travel, transportation, and communication, driven by their strong interconnectedness. As barriers to travel decrease, tourism as an industry can develop and bring numerous economic and social benefits (Chakraborty et al., 2020, p. 9). A key factor influencing its development is the issue of security (Reddy et al., 2020, p. 10). The recommendation of the World Economic Forum in 2019 (World Economic Forum, 2019) was to seek a balance between modern information technology and investment in human capital, as modern information technology can improve access to basic services, working conditions,

health, and the safety of citizens. Later, the World Bank stated in its report (2021, p. 11) that while modern information technology significantly improves access to essential services, its effectiveness remains limited without investment in human capital. The World Economic Forum (2023, p. 35) also warns that excessive digitalization without developing skills increases social inequalities, as nearly 40 % of the world's population still lacks access to the internet.

Skočajič (2006, p. 53), Biden and Carpenter (2017), and later also Maddow (2019, p. 89), state that Europe has continuously reshaped its security system over the past centuries, developing its dynamic in the 20th century. The bipolarity marked by the rivalry between the Eastern bloc (the Soviet Union – hereinafter USSR – as initiator of the Warsaw Pact) and the Western bloc (the United States, which established the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – hereinafter NATO) was later replaced by the leading role of five powers: the USA, Russia, China, a united Europe, and Japan. After the Cold War, Europe once again began searching for a new model of security structure, with a system based on regional organizations (the European Union – hereinafter EU, NATO, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – hereinafter OSCE), as well as on collective and corporate security systems. In the military domain, NATO was established in 1949 to respond to new security threats and provide safety for its member states (Šinkovec, 2016, p. 87). Besides its primary mission of ensuring collective defense, the alliance also plays a preventive role in maintaining a balance of power and managing crises.

In the field of economic and social relations, several institutions were established, including the International Monetary Fund (hereinafter IMF), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

(hereinafter GATT), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (hereinafter OECD), and the G7 – a group of the seven most developed countries in the world (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States), as well as the G8 – a group of the eight most developed countries in the world (the United States, Russia, Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy). The G8 functioned as an intergovernmental political forum from 1997 to 2014. It was formed to include the Russian Federation in the G7, which reverted to its original name when Russia left the group in 2014 (hereinafter G7/G8) (Šinkovec, 2016, p. 25). In relation to global and European security, it is essential to highlight that some international organizations (G7/G8, OSCE, OECD, UN, NATO), though primarily based on economic relations, adopt resolutions, laws, and regulations that contribute to greater security stability in some parts of the world, while simultaneously causing security instability in others. For example, in 2018, the United States withdrew from the United Nations (hereinafter UN) Human Rights Council and the nuclear arms agreement (K. T. & K. S., 2018; Mulligan, 2018, p. 26).

Nevertheless, over the past 30 years (1995–2025), significant progress has been made in improving the security system with the support and encouragement of international organizations such as the EU, the United Nations (hereinafter UN), and NATO, as well as individual countries including the United States and EU member states (Skočajič and Grizold, 2017, p. 261). International organizations—particularly the European Union, the United Nations, and NATO—and key allied countries, including the United States and EU member states, have played a decisive role in this progress. The EU, through its Strategic Compass (Council of the EU, 2022) and its

implementation report (Council of the EU, 2024), has strengthened missions, investments, and resilience; NATO adopted a new force model and additional defense plans at the 2023 Vilnius Summit (NATO, 2023); while the UN Secretary-General outlined a reform of collective security through the 'New Agenda for Peace' (United Nations, 2023, pp. 2–4). Joint actions—from increased defense spending to cyber and hybrid resilience and continuous support for Ukraine—confirm that, even in 2025, the international security architecture remains in a phase of intense consolidation.

On the other hand, due to the unequal conventional military capabilities of various actors in the international security environment, this has become a significant form of military security threat (e.g., hybrid warfare, which includes not only conventional methods but also the use of terrorist, criminal, and other illicit activities, such as informational warfare). Disruptions in the supply of essential resources or shortages of global reserves, terrorist attacks, environmental degradation, and other forms of violence will, in the future, negatively impact the development and operations of tourism worldwide (Resolucija o strategiji nacionalne varnosti v Republiki Sloveniji, 2019, p. 6990).

Meško and Dobovšek (1999, p. 262) argue that security, as a public good, is gaining increasing importance, making the future of the tourism industry ever more dependent on the security factor—a point later emphasized by Hyndman (2015, p. 1) and Saha and Yap (2014, p. 509). It is a fact that tourists generally choose safe travel destinations. Chew and Jahari (2014, p. 383) state that today, tourists have a wide range of options for spending their holidays and traveling, which allows them to relatively easily replace a conditionally unsafe destination (Çakar et al., 2024) with a similar or entirely different, safer one. These assertions are further confirmed

and expanded by findings that security remains a central factor in travel decision-making, especially in uncertain (post-pandemic) environments (Liu-Lastres et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2025). Security has become a crucial element in the decision-making process regarding whether or not tourists will visit a particular country. Their perception of safety at a travel destination may stem from personal experience (Zou & Yu, 2022, pp. 15–30) or information obtained through various media types.

Rifai (2016, p. 5) argues that human connection through social media, easier access to information, and better services will benefit tourism development. Social media and the development of information and communication technologies (hereinafter ICT) have accelerated economic growth in various sectors over recent decades, and it can be hypothetically assumed that the same applies to tourism (Dimitrios Buhalis & Deimezi, 2004, pp. 103–104; Ying et al., 2014, pp. 19, 30). Much later, Rifai's (2016) claims were confirmed by a study (Acharjee & Ahmed, 2024) conducted among 388 travelers, which showed that posts and recommendations on social networks statistically impact destination choice, booking intent, and brand loyalty.

Ivanuša et al. (2012, p. 437) argue that the public attributes the media's role as a primary agent in fostering fear of crime. For example, the highlighting of violent and dramatic content in television programming during peak viewing hours intensifies fear of crime. Research conducted by Romer et al. (2003, p. 91) confirms this, and it was later reaffirmed by Ting and Thien (2015, p. 31).

Studies are exploring the link between media and crime, particularly given that media has changed significantly over the past 15 years, especially with the emergence of social networks. Prislan

(2012, p. 11) highlights recent mass protests around the world, triggered by questions concerning the extent to which social media influence anti-political movements and activist organizations, as well as the responses and measures of various international and national policies (Christensen, 2011, pp. 155–157; Krasner, 1983, pp. 2–3). In media and political discourse, ideas emerged suggesting that social media may provoke more violent protests, aggressive riots, and deviant behavior among participants, thus, criminal acts. When analyzing their impact and managing collective actions, security agencies must understand the reasons behind mobilization, the dynamics and rules governing crowd behavior, and the advantages of social networks and the internet that are actually in use (Prislan, 2012, pp. 16–17). We can conclude that in the past decade, social media has become an even more influential factor in the dynamics of crime and mass protests. Recent studies emphasize that online platforms not only shape the perception of crime—where sensationalist and often misleading reports increase public fear (Anand & Taneja, 2024)—but that disinformation can directly trigger outbreaks of violence, as demonstrated by the analysis of the ‘Southport Incident’ (Digital Information Security Agency [DISA], 2024).

Potokar (2018, p. 202) discusses the global interconnectedness of networks and information systems, which has had a significant impact on the field of security and the privacy of information systems. With every step taken on the World Wide Web, a digital footprint is left behind. Each time we use internet services—such as Google search, credit card transactions, or sending emails—there is a risk of misuse of the information transmitted via the internet. The possibilities for collecting and using information to control,

manage, and organize people and places are thus unimaginable. Surveillance has become hidden, invisible, and nearly untraceable.

Security stability of tourist destinations

The global significance and scale of tourism as an economic sector have led to the realization that security issues and concerns do not only affect individuals and their decisions to travel, but also impact the economic and political stability of entire regions or even the world as a whole, as argued by Hall et al. (2004, p. 7). This was later confirmed in a study by Chung et al. (2020, p. 3). When security threats arise in or near tourist destinations, this is typically reflected in a decline in the number of tourist arrivals both in the broader surrounding area and in local communities. Authors Wilks and Page (2013, p. 6), followed by Cornwell and Roberts (2010, p. 1) and Korstanje (2014, p. 97), agree that the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, permanently changed our understanding of security in international tourism. Consequences include various controls in tourism-related travel, such as the ban on carrying liquid containers over 100 ml at airports and the introduction of biometric passports.

In 2025, Slovenia remains classified among the countries with zero impact from terrorism according to the Global Terrorism Index (the same was reported for 2024) (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024b; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025). On the Global Peace Index, Slovenia ranked ninth out of 163 countries in 2024, representing a one-place decline compared to its ranking in 2023. Altogether, these indicators place Slovenia among the world's very safe countries (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024a).

Key to achieving and maintaining safety in the country are, among other factors, the safety culture of tourism organizations, businesses, and accommodation facilities, as well as a functioning corporate security system. As Čaleta et al. (2019, pp. 16–17) state, companies with an effective corporate security system are more efficient, competitive, and better equipped to address the daily business and security challenges in an ever-changing business environment. Employees in such companies exhibit higher organizational and safety culture, which is of critical importance. They can be the strongest asset on the one hand, and the most significant source of risk on the other. Companies that have integrated corporate security as a core part of their management system hypothetically possess a competitive advantage in the tourism industry. This is also supported by later research emphasizing competitiveness (Liu-Lastres et al., 2024, pp. 6–10), safety culture as a condition for guest loyalty (Park & Kim, 2024), and the importance of safety culture for all employees (Hospitality Net, 2023), which contributes to greater business resilience (Liu et al., 2024, pp. 12–21).

An appropriate safety culture, ensured by a corporate security system, is particularly important in the service sector, of which tourism is a part. Within tourism, a high level of safety culture is especially expected in the hospitality and catering industries, which are most exposed to personal contact between employees and guests. Due to this direct interaction with clients or guests, the level of safety culture is reflected in each employee's behavior. However, the safety culture within an organization is evident in the relationship with guests, in interactions with colleagues, other stakeholders in the work process—such as suppliers—and, ultimately, in the attitude toward personal safety. This is emphasized by Huhtala (1997, p. 39), who identifies four fundamental elements

of hotel security in addition to corporate security; these include personal safety, guest safety, and collective safety. These findings were much later confirmed in the research of Valle et al. (2020, p. 338). A hotel must comply with laws, regulations, and standards, and act cautiously. The guest may be put at risk if these obligations are not fulfilled. The hotel is always held liable and must provide compensation in the event of negligence. For this reason, it is in the hotel management's interest to ensure that employees receive proper safety training. The hotel must protect guests from external threats that could endanger their health or property (Brännare et al., 2005, p. 206; Chan & Lam, 2013, p. 203).

The 2023 Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023) indicates that safety culture is always contextual and dependent on the country, geographic region, and other factors. In the Slovenian context, there is a lack of research that connects three key areas—tourism, management, and criminology—and examines corporate safety culture and corporate security within the specific field of tourism, namely natural spa resorts.

Chapter 1

Security

Chapter One presents the theoretical foundations of the research, including defining several key concepts related to security. These refer to security as a state and security as a risk, human security, corporate security, and hotel and spa resort security as intersections of corporate security. The chapter further explores the global security discourse and security in tourism, followed by a discussion on security in Slovenian tourism and Slovenian Natural spa Resorts. The chapter concludes with an overview of models of security and corporate security. Many authors (Aksu et al., 2017, p. 3; Grizold & Bučar, 2011, p. 845; Kim et al., 2013, p. 287; Mikuš, 1999, p. 273; Yan & Zhang, 2022, p. 302; Žnidarič, 2004, p. 537) discuss the concept of security, which refers to the state of being safe; passenger security; having a sense of safety; national security; protection from attackers and fire; state security; personal safety; seismic and fire safety of buildings; property security; social security; and workplace safety.

People encounter various forms of security in everyday life, such as human, sociological, psychological, military, food, road, workplace, and fire safety. Throughout history, and as a response to the development of modern technology, new aspects of security have emerged—for example, information security, cyber security, corporate security, hybrid security, hotel security, spa resort security, and security policy.

Definitions of security are generally based on the conceptual distinction between accidental and intentional threats (Nas, 2015), as also defined in ISO 22300:2021, which differentiates between protection against physical harm or damage resulting from unintentional actions or natural disasters, and protection against intentional harmful acts, such as cyberattacks, sabotage, or terrorism (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2021). Depending on the source of the threat, security can be understood as a state of protection from dangers arising from natural forces or unintentional human errors, as well as a state of protection against threats resulting from deliberate human actions intended to cause harm (Cooke & Rohleder, 2024; Nas, 2015). When defined from the perspective of personal security, security represents protection from accidents, illnesses, fires, natural disasters, and threats of criminal acts (Johnson, 2024). The most recent definitions of security focus on functional and informational protection, which includes measures aimed at protecting the environment from system failures, emphasizing functional safety, and is directed towards protecting systems and data from unauthorized access or environmental damage (Davis & Simmons, 2023). Emerging definitions also consider security in the context of artificial intelligence threats, encompassing measures to prevent unintended harmful outcomes caused by AI systems, such as misinformation, dangerous recommendations, cyberattacks, and data manipulation (Fried, 2025).

Gostič (2008, p. 2) defines security as: “Security is a state that is suitable for preserving the function and purpose of a company, as well as the safety of individuals, property, and data within the company from destruction, damage, theft, and other harmful effects.” Much later, Cavelty and Balzacq (2022, p. 3) define secu-

rity more systemically as: “A process and state in which an individual or system is protected from probable harm or threat, taking into account subjective perceptions, technological structures, and institutional responses.”

Rožič (2006, pp. 10–11) states that security is not something external to tourism, but rather an integral part of it, since modern tourism development cannot be expected in an unsafe environment. From this perspective, security is both an economic and developmental category, embedded in entrepreneurial and local development programs, and a responsibility of management and owners in tourism and related industries. This means that the success or failure of tourism depends on ensuring a safe environment for tourists (McKercher & Hui, 2003, p. 100; Samitas et al., 2018, p. 23; UNWTO, 1996). Furthermore, tourism is a sector that must protect and support the tourist visiting any destination (Batra, 2008, p. 3; Law, 2006, p. 289; Poon & Adams, 2002, p. 280). Yan and Zhang (2022, p. 300) state that perceived travel safety refers to tourists’ subjective evaluation that they are protected from physical, health-related, environmental, or political threats at all stages of their travel experience. This definition highlights that security in tourism is not merely an objective condition, but a psychologically perceived experience that significantly influences tourists’ travel decisions and behavior.

1.1 Security risks and crisis management in tourism

Risk is assessing the likelihood that a particular event will occur. Risk management is the skill of minimizing potential consequences, as confirmed by Tarlow (2002, p. 24), Kovacich and Hali-bozek (2003, pp. 38–39), Podbregar (2008, p. 247), Klančnik (2009,