

HERITAGE TOURISM: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OVER THREE DECADES (1994-2023)

Jaime José ORTS-CARDADOR* 

Department of Applied Economics, Faculty of Law, Economics and Business, University of Córdoba, Córdoba, Spain; Department of Marketing and Market Research, Faculty of Business and Tourism - University of Huelva Spain, Huelva, España, e-mail: d42orcaj@uco.es

Jesús Claudio PEREZ-GALVEZ 

Department of Applied Economics, Faculty of Law, Economics and Business, University of Córdoba, Córdoba, Spain; Ibero-American Network for Research in the Economics and Management of Tourism (REDEGETUR), La Plata, Argentina, e-mail: dt1pegaj@uco.es

Gema María Gómez-Casero FUENTES 

Department of Applied Economics,
Faculty of Law, Economics and Business, University of Córdoba, Córdoba, Spain, e-mail:d62gofug@uco.es

Carol Angélica Jara ALBA 

Department of Applied Economics, Faculty of Law, Economics and Business,
University of Córdoba, Córdoba, Spain, e-mail: jaalcarol@gmail.com

Citation: Orts-Cardador, J.J., Pérez-Gálvez, J.C., Fuentes, G.M.G.C., & Alba, C.A.J. (2024). HERITAGE TOURISM: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OVER THREE DECADES (1994-2023). *Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 55(3), 1164–1173. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.55317-1289>

Abstract: This qualitative study explores the relationship between tourism and places recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites, whether tangible (WHS) or intangible (ICH). In the last two decades there has been a growth in the number of resources with UNESCO recognition. It aims to fill the research gap in the analysis of heritage tourism using bibliometric techniques. Data were collected from 886 documents in the period 1994–2023 (December) from the Web of Science database. Using the VOSviewer software, scientific maps were created showing the current and future line of research in this scientific field. The results show evidence of related research on Tourism sustainability at UNESCO sites in China and Tourism sustainability of cultural heritage for the whole period. In addition, two new research topics from 2016 are identified: Motivation and satisfaction of heritage tourists and Authenticity of intangible heritage. The results help to visualise the structure and trends of heritage tourism research, which can help researchers, policy makers and destination marketing organisations (DMOs) to gain knowledge and understanding of existing studies and current research topics.

Keywords: Heritage tourism, World Heritage, Bibliometrics, UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage, VOSviewer

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to contribute to the academic literature on the relationship between tourism and places recognized as World Heritage Sites, whether tangible (WHS) or intangible (ICH), by UNESCO using bibliometric techniques.

Thus, the study complements the existing bibliometric analysis, allowing the identification of other reference research and useful lines of research. The research provides a complete summary of the progression of relationships between 1994 and 2023 (December), showing the main indicators of impact and visibility of authors, journals, institutions and countries; the scientific collaboration networks, through the analysis of co-authorship; and the most relevant research topics, through the analysis of keyword occurrence.

Heritage tourism is a complex term; there is no single definition in the academic literature (Fonseca and Ramos, 2012). From the supply side and its management, heritage tourism is an activity that takes place in places that have been inscribed as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO (Poria et al., 2003), while from the demand side it is linked to the motivations and cultural experiences of tourists in these places (Poria et al., 2001). Heritage tourism is a tourism typology within the scope of cultural tourism, whereby people travel motivated by the search for and participation in new and profound cultural experiences (Reisinger, 1994). In this respect, Table 1 shows different definitions of heritage tourism in the literature.

In the last two decades there has been a growth in the number of resources with UNESCO recognition. Initially, inscription as World Heritage was restricted to monuments, historic buildings, archaeological sites or a part of the natural heritage (UNESCO, 1972), extending to other cultural resources such as gardens, scenery, rural spaces (UNESCO, 1983) or underwater heritage (UNESCO, 2010). In addition, the "List of World Heritage in Danger" is included, composed of resources threatened by serious and specific dangers (UNESCO, 1972). To the increase of the resources that make up the Tangible Heritage (WHS) has been added the so-called Intangible Heritage (ICH), which includes the cultural legacy of peoples, such as oral traditions, folklore, forms of production or customs (UNESCO, 2003).

* Corresponding author

Table 1. Definitions of heritage tourism in the literature

Definitions	Source
"Heritage tourism is a movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs".	Richards (1996)
"Heritage tourism is a new trend in tourism where tourists seek authenticity, uniqueness, originality and quality in their destinations".	Fonseca and Ramos (2012)
"Heritage tourism has recently become the fastest growing segment of the tourism industry due to the fact that there is an increasing number of tourists seeking adventure, culture, history, archaeology and interaction with local people".	Correia et al. (2013)
"In heritage tourism, visitors seek to connect with their roots, culture and heritage".	Moreno et al. (2016)
"Heritage tourism allows the promotion of cultural exchanges leading to a more globalised community and the revival of local traditions and the preservation of cultural artefacts, events, customs and architecture".	Adongo et al. (2017)
"In heritage tourism, groups have a predisposition to interact with outsiders - a necessity created human settlement through diversity, pattern, and desire for exchange - and to want to control that interaction".	Chen and Rahman (2018)
"Heritage tourism concerns the motivation to experience various items, representative of past and present periods, at a tourist destination".	Park et al. (2019)
"Heritage tourism is made up of three dimensions: the scenic value, the knowledge value and the social value".	Luekveerawattana, (2024)

Recognition as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO implies a value of universal excellence (UNESCO, 1972) and the preservation and conservation (Breakey, 2012; Ryan and Silvanto, 2010) of cultural resources (Al-Tokhais and Thapa, 2020). Moreover, although it is not a UNESCO objective, this recognition implies an improvement of the tourist attractiveness, benefiting different stakeholders (Poria and Ashworth, 2009). Thus, it increases the number of visitors, both domestic (Patuelli et al., 2013) and, especially, international (Yang and Ling, 2014); improves sustainability, protection and prevents deterioration of the site (Al-Tokhais and Thapa, 2020); increases government aid to the area (Xiao, 2022) and/or donations received (Patuelli et al., 2013). However, it should be noted that UNESCO recognition can also generate negative effects: excessive increase in demand that causes the tourist destination to be structurally unprepared to receive more tourists (Cuccia et al., 2016), an increase in prices (Poria et al., 2013), spatial and temporal congestion that can cause conflicts with the local community (Caust and Vecco, 2017) or environmental damage (Yang et al., 2010).

Research on heritage tourism is broad and diverse. Thus, we find studies that analyse cultural visitation in cities with an important heritage legacy (Correia et al., 2013), in natural parks (Bayno and Jani, 2018), intangible cultural heritage (Kim et al., 2019) or local festivals (Nogueras et al., 2021). For example, Ramires et al. (2018) analyse the behaviour of tourists visiting Porto, a city designated World Heritage Site in 1996, and European Capital of Culture in 2001, due to its cultural centre, historical heritage and history. The study segments international tourists visiting Porto based on their travel motivations related to specific destination attributes and satisfaction. The results show the existence of three different types of tourists: conventional cultural tourist, spontaneous cultural tourist and absorbing cultural tourist.

The first segment is characterized by visiting in a group of family or friends, being older tourists, preferring the security of a trip organized through travel agencies and visiting the most famous monuments and museums. The second segment is made up of young tourists, with a low level of spending, high use of the Internet to obtain information before and during the trip, and with low cultural motivation when selecting the destination. Finally, the third segment are independent, eclectic and exploratory tourists who, despite visiting the usual places, move outside the "tourist bubble"; they are also those who show a higher level of satisfaction with their tourist experience. Another example, but in a natural heritage site, is the research by Giblin et al. (2017) that analyses the impact of the heritage tourism industry in Rwanda based on its archaeological resources. Through a descriptive analysis, the authors analyse the natural and heritage attractiveness of the Musanze Caves (Rwanda). The results show that the management of public authorities has focused on the preservation of natural resources, without taking into account the heritage of archaeological resources.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This work consists of a descriptive analysis, based on co-authorships, the main journals and academic institutions; and a content analysis based on the main keywords. The data was downloaded in txt format and processed in Excel (version 16.66) and it was analysed with VOSviewer (version 1.6.19). VOSviewer, software that allows the construction and visualization of scientific networks and the analysis of their temporal evolution (Van Eck and Waltman, 2022), was used for this purpose. Following the recommendations of Khanra et al. (2021), the applied procedure is divided into three sequential phases: planning the exploration of the data, performing the exploration and presenting the results. In addition, data inclusion and exclusion criteria have been applied (Agramunt et al., 2020; Khanra et al., 2021; Terán-Yépez et al., 2020).

The Web of Science (Clarivate Analytics), Scopus (Elsevier) and Google Scholar, are the most widely used sources of information for the purpose of bibliometric analysis (Agramunt et al., 2020). These databases are characterized by providing sufficient literary coverage in the field of Social Sciences (Martín-Martín, 2018). However, in this work we omit the Google Scholar database as it lacks due transparency, presents data quality problems, and the difficulty of being able to use it in large-scale analyses (Martín-Martín et al., 2018; Waltam and Noyons, 2018). The use of Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus allows access to articles published by major publishers: Elsevier, Emerald, Springer, Wiley, Taylor and Francis, among others (De Oliveira et al., 2019). However, the data exploration was planned exclusively from WoS as this database contains a larger number of articles and most of them are present in Scopus (Zhu and Liu, 2020). In addition, the selection of more than one database makes the integration of the information more complex as it presents different structures, to which must be added the limitations presented by the current tools available to integrate the information (De Oliveira et al., 2019).

The objective of this research is tourism studies related to sites that have been recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites. The search parameters applied on the Web of Science database were: (touris*) AND ("World Heritage" OR "World Heritage Site" OR "WHS" OR "Intangible Cultural Heritage" OR "Natural Heritage" OR "ICH" OR "UNESCO"). The search terms were applied to the *title*, *abstract*, *author keywords* and *keywords plus* of the documents (Lim et al., 2022). The search was limited to the category *Hospitality Leisure Sport and Tourism for the purpose* of further focus in our research. The data were downloaded in txt format, processed in Excel (version 16.62) and analysed with VOSviewer (version 1.6.18). The selection of VOSviewer as the analysis tool is justified because it is a software recommending among the scientific community for the visual representation of maps that help to understand and find out the collaboration between institutions, journals, researchers, countries and keywords (Castillo-Vergara et al., 2018). Prior to the analysis with VOSviewer, pre-processing and normalization tasks were performed on the downloaded documents in order to verify if all of them related in a clear way to the reference topic (Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2018). In this sense, a final sample of 886 articles was obtained.

In the descriptive analysis of the results, co-authorship of publications is applied in order to establish the collaborative network of the academic community. Following the recommendations of Koseoglu (2016), it is necessary to establish a criterion to establish the visual maps. In our case, to establish the scientific collaboration networks, the criterion established was to have 6 or more publications and a link strength greater than or equal to 2. Regarding the content analysis, and for the purpose of establishing the keyword networks (*keywords*), the criterion followed was to have a minimum of 10 co-occurrences (times that a keyword appears in the database) and a link strength greater than or equal to 10. Finally, we established *full counting* to establish the scientific networks due to its ease of interpretation and greater ease of interpretation compared to *fractional counting* (Perianes-Rodriguez et al., 2016).

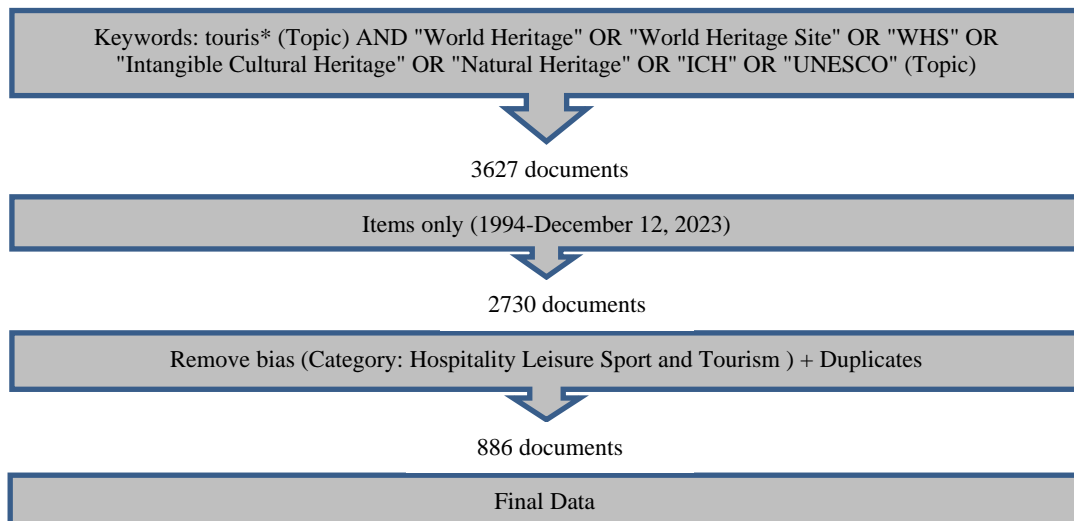


Figure 1. Data analysis process (Source: Own elaboration)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of the scientific field

Between 1994 and December 2023, tourism studies related to UNESCO World Heritage sites have been studied by 1787 authors in 886 articles published in 80 scientific journals and distributed among 879 academic institutions (Table 2). The first sixteen years under analysis (1994-2009) are characterized by a low number of publications (Figure 1). In terms of the number of citations, the most relevant article of this period is the research by Aas et al. (2005), which is also the most cited article. The authors examined the importance of a multi-stakeholder collaborative approach to tourism development in Luang Prabang (Laos), designated a World Heritage Site in 1995. The authors point out the need for collaboration between the local tourism industry and heritage managers in order to reconcile tourism development and conservation.

In the following six years (2010-2015), a greater interest in the topic of reference is observed, although the number of publications is still not high, not exceeding 40 publications per year. The most cited article of the period is the research by Prayag et al. (2013) that develops and contrasts an empirical model with the objective of relating tourists' emotional experiences, satisfaction and behavioural intentions based on the perceptions of international tourists visiting Petra, designated a World Heritage Site in 1985. The results do not support the mediating effect of satisfaction on the relationship between emotions and behavioural intentions, but do support the relationship between emotions and satisfaction.

Table 2. Data of the field of study from WoS

Data	Number
Number of items	886
Number of citations	18.341
Number of journals	80
Number of authors	1787
Number of institutions	879
Number of countries	88

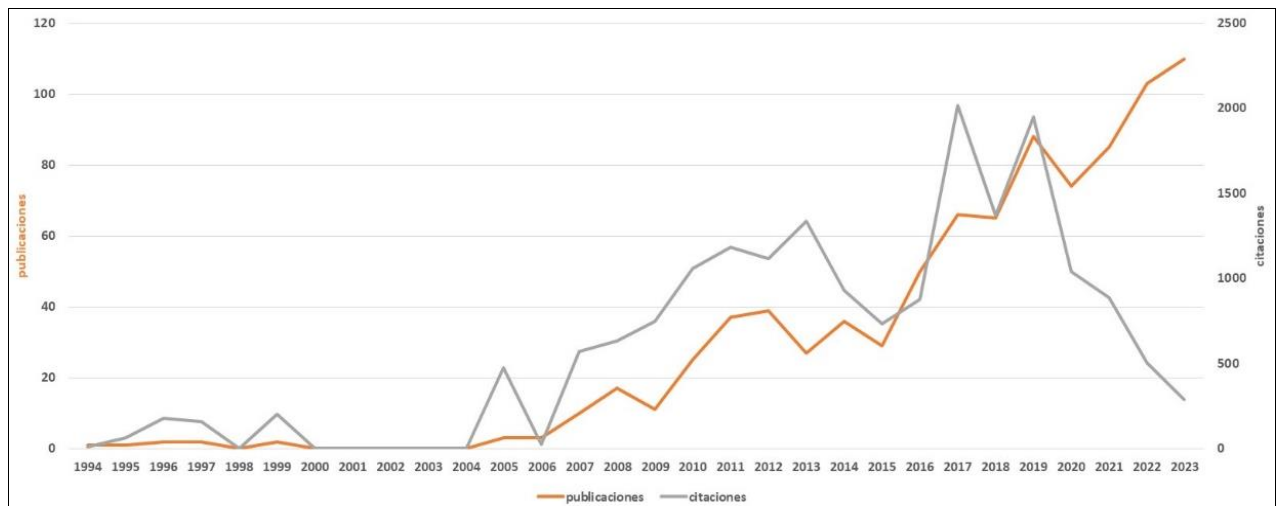


Figure 2. Number of publications and citations (Source: Own elaboration)

Since 2016, the relationship between tourism and World Heritage Sites has acquired greater academic relevance. Thus, scientific production triples in the last eight years (2016-2023), reaching 641 articles, which represents 72.4% of the articles published in the 29 years of analysis, registering a maximum annual production in 2023 with 110 publications (Figure 2). The most cited work in the period 2016-2023 is the research by Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017), a study that compares the relationship between the positive perception of tourism and community participation on the support of tourism development in two World Heritage sites, namely a rural destination (Lenggong Valley in Malaysia) and an urban one (George Town in Malaysia). The authors propose a structural model (PLS-SEM) from surveys of residents of both destinations that shows evidence for the positive effect of community participation and residents' positive perception of tourism on tourism development in George Town. However, the results do not support the effect of community participation on tourism development in Lenggong, but only confirm the importance of residents' perceptions; the authors recommend improving residents' perceptions by further developing the positive impacts of tourism and mitigating the negative impacts associated with tourism development. The analysis of co-authorship networks (only those authors with 6 or more published articles with a link strength ≥ 2) for the whole period (1994-2023) allows us to identify four scientific collaboration networks, one of international and inter-institutional character, another of national and inter-institutional character and two of national and intra-institutional character (Figure 3).

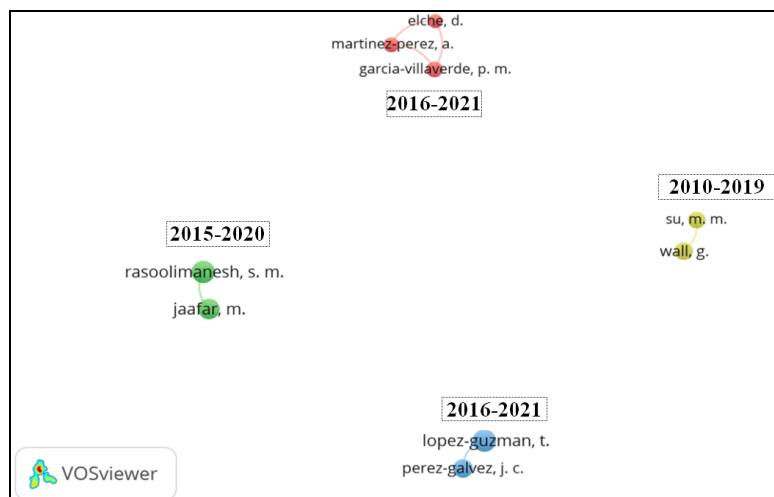


Figure 3. Scientific networks 1994-2023 (Source: Own elaboration based on Web of Science (2023) and VOSviewer software)

The first network (red colour) arises in 2016, of national and intra-institutional character, integrated by the researchers García-Villaverde, P. M.; Elche, D. and Martínez-Pérez, A. from the University of Castilla La Mancha (Spain), has been active until 2021. One of the main characteristics is its medium impact (249 citations and 31 in citation rate). Its most relevant article is "The mediating effect of ambidextrous knowledge strategy between social capital and innovation of cultural tourism clusters firms". This paper analyses the extent to which the social capital of tourism firms stimulates innovation in cultural tourism destinations, through the mediating role of the knowledge strategy (creativity, technological ideas, etc.). The cultural destinations chosen were World Heritage cities in Spain (Alcalá de Henares, Ávila, Cáceres, Córdoba, Cuenca, etc.). The authors propose and contrast a structural model (PLS-SEM) through surveys of managers of companies with three or more employees. The results show that the social capital of tourism companies fosters greater innovation when driven by the knowledge strategy in the context of cultural tourism destinations. The authors recommend

that the economic, social and cultural development of heritage destinations requires proactive support from public institutions for hospitality and tourism companies, generating synergies and contacts that allow for greater innovation.

The second network (green colour) emerged in 2015, of national and inter-institutional character, integrated by the researchers Rasoolimanesh, S.M. from Taylor's University (Malaysia) and Jaafar, M. from University Sains (Malaysia), has been active until 2020. This scientific network is led by the most productive and cited author, being the one with the highest academic impact (1,190 citations and 74 in citation rate) and with the highest scientific production (16 articles). Its most relevant article is "Urban vs. rural destinations: Residents' perceptions, community participation and support for tourism development", which coincides with the most cited article in the period 2016-2023, already described above.

The third network (blue colour) appeared in 2016, of national and intra-institutional character, is integrated by the researchers López-Guzmán T. and Pérez-Gálvez J.C. from the University of Córdoba, and will be in force until 2021. This network has a low academic impact (145 citations and 10 in citation rate), its most relevant article being "Segmentation and motivation of foreign tourists in world heritage sites. A case study, Quito (Ecuador)". The authors analyse the motivations of foreign tourists visiting a World Heritage site, the city of Quito in Ecuador, and how the nature of their motivations condition satisfaction and loyalty to the destination. The results show the existence of three motivational dimensions - *cultural*, *circumstantial* and *hedonic-gastronomic* - and of four types of foreign tourists according to the identified dimensions; the hedonic-gastronomic motivational dimension being the one that contributes the most to the degree of satisfaction and loyalty to the destination.

The fourth network (yellow colour) appeared in 2010 and has been active until 2019, being the longest-lived network with the longest duration. Because of this, it has a high academic impact (478 citations and 43.4 in citation rate). It has an international and inter-institutional character, integrated by researchers Su, M.M. from Renmin University (China) and Wall, G. from the University of Waterloo (Canada). Its most relevant article is "Livelihood sustainability in a rural tourism destination - Hetu Town, Anhui Province, China". The authors analysed the impact of tourism development on sustainable livelihoods in Hetu Town (China). The paper evaluates the impact of tourism on the local economy and its relationship with the traditional economic sector, such as agriculture, based on the perception of residents and government authorities. The results show broad support for tourism development by making tourism and agriculture compatible, creating positive synergies. However, tourism development contributes to inequality among residents, as some residents with limited resources are unable to participate in tourism activities. This is compounded by the fact that the local government does not introduce social policies, which increases social risks. The authors recommend a series of policies aimed at ensuring an adequate distribution of benefits in order to improve the participation of the most vulnerable sectors.

2. Content analysis

The keywords of the papers provide useful information about the main content of the papers and allow the identification of the main research topics and future lines of study. Following Zhang et al. (2016), the content analysis is applied on the basis of the author keywords provided by the authors. The greater or lesser academic relevance of the keywords is analysed by taking as reference number of occurrences, total link strength and link strength with other keywords. Web of Science provides two types of keywords: the "author keywords", which are the keywords provided by the authors and, on the other hand, the "keywords plus", which are the keywords indexed by Web of Science and are produced automatically from the titles of the cited references of the documents analysed (Zhang et al., 2019). Following the recommendations of Zhang et al. (2016) in our analysis we will only use the "author keywords", since the "plus keywords" are less complete in representing the content of an article

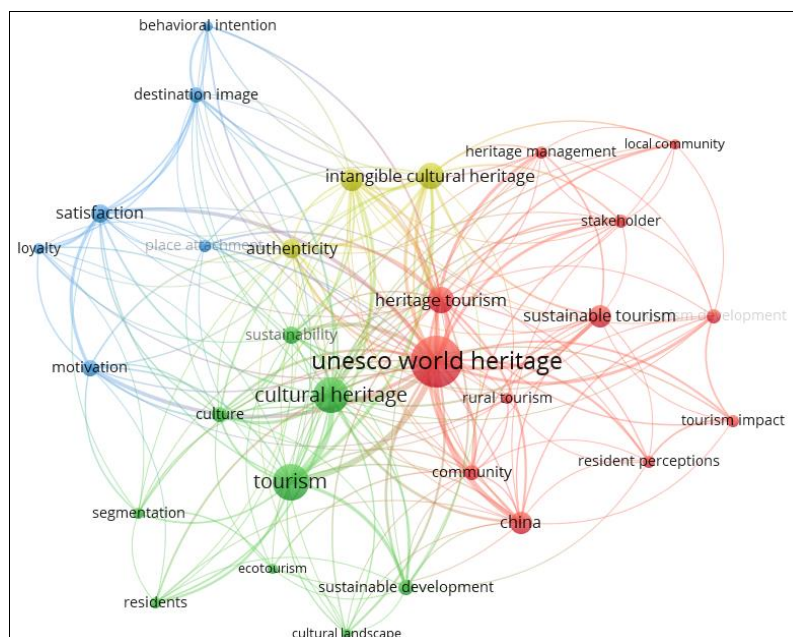


Figure 4. Keyword Occurrence Networks 1994-2023

(Source: Own elaboration based on Web of Science (2023) and VOSviewer software)

2.1. Keyword occurrence analysis

The number of articles with heritage tourism and places with UNESCO recognition as the thematic axis has grown remarkably since 2016 (Figure 2), showing a close link with the key concepts: "tourism" "UNESCO world heritage" and "cultural heritage" (Table 3). The cluster analysis in Figure 4 shows four heterogeneous keyword clusters. The content analysis shows the relevance of two lines of research for the entire period 1994-2023: *Tourism sustainability in UNESCO sites in China* (red cluster), and *Tourism sustainability of cultural heritage* (green cluster) The analysis by sub-periods shows that between the years 2016-2023 two new lines of research emerge: *Motivation and satisfaction of heritage tourists* (blue cluster) and *Authenticity of intangible heritage* (yellow cluster).

Table 3. Top 20 keywords (Note: C, occurrences)

Ranking	Key words	1994-2015		2016-2023		1994-2023	
		C	%	C	%	C	%
1	UNESCO World Heritage	78	6.6%	173	5.0%	251	5.3%
2	Tourism	39	3.3%	89	2.6%	128	2.7%
3	Cultural heritage	42	3.6%	82	2.4%	124	2.6%
4	Intangible Cultural Heritage	7	0.6%	60	1.7%	67	1.4%
5	Heritage tourism	21	1.8%	45	1.3%	66	1.4%
6	Cultural tourism	12	1.0%	37	1.1%	49	1.0%
7	Sustainable tourism	12	1.0%	35	1.0%	47	1.0%
8	China	18	1.5%	29	0.8%	47	1.0%
9	Authenticity	8	0.7%	27	0.8%	35	0.7%
10	Satisfaction	6	0.5%	28	0.8%	34	0.7%
11	Sustainability	8	0.7%	21	0.6%	29	0.6%
12	Motivation	3	0.3%	22	0.6%	25	0.5%
13	Community	6	0.5%	18	0.5%	24	0.5%
14	Sustainable development	7	0.6%	16	0.5%	23	0.5%
15	Destination image	4	0.3%	18	0.5%	22	0.5%
16	Culture	6	0.5%	16	0.5%	22	0.5%
17	Tourism development	5	0.4%	14	0.4%	19	0.4%
18	Stakeholder	7	0.6%	11	0.3%	18	0.4%
19	Resident perceptions	4	0.3%	11	0.3%	15	0.3%
20	Tourism impact	3	0.3%	11	0.3%	14	0.3%
	Total Occurrences	1174		3488		4662	
	Total Keywords	752		2024		2776	

2.2. Analysis of lines of research

The research line *Tourism sustainability in UNESCO sites in China* (red cluster) explores tourism development in UNESCO sites in China. This line of research is the most relevant in terms of number of articles (49) and citation rate (32). One of the most relevant research is the work of Yang et al. (2010), which analyses the determinants of international tourist arrivals to China, especially to World Heritage Sites. The results show that geographical distance has a significant and negative impact on international tourist arrivals, which translates into the majority of foreign tourists visiting China coming from neighbouring Asian countries. Other important factors for international tourism are the tourism infrastructure in terms of roads, railroads and star hotels. Last but not least, the importance of UNESCO inscribed sites is one of the main driving forces behind international tourist arrivals and the development of the tourism industry in the country. Within UNESCO destinations, cultural heritage sites have a greater impact on tourist arrivals than natural heritage sites, indicating that the most influential tourism resources in China are historical sites, cultural traditions and colourful folk customs, which are unique and difficult for other countries to copy.

Another reference study in this line of research is the work of Li et al. (2008), the authors analyse the main threats that compromise the sustainability of World Heritage Sites in China based on relations with the market of origin, in terms of accessibility, and a series of external factors that affect tourism development. These authors point out as the main threats: the high demand derived from China's demographic pressure, the absence of local government policies regulating the management of heritage sites, and the lack of financial support for the rehabilitation and maintenance of cultural heritage.

The research line *Tourism sustainability of cultural heritage* (green cluster) analyses the impacts of the excessive increase of tourists in places with UNESCO recognition. This line is the second most relevant, with 39 articles and 21 in citation rate. One of the most relevant papers is the research by Parga-Dans and Alonso-González (2019) that relates sustainable tourism and heritage management taking into account the dimension of the social value of cultural heritage. In the context of the cave complex of Altamira (Spain), the authors identify the factors that determine the social value of heritage, distinguishing between existential, aesthetic, economic and legacy values, and the risks associated with the undervaluation of these values. Similarly, the authors point out that increasing the social value and tourism sustainability of the Altamira Cave involves guaranteeing the conservation of its paintings and increasing visitor satisfaction levels and propose initiatives that aim to avoid saturation of visiting periods and attract a more diverse visitor profile.

Another research of importance in this line is the study by Olya et al. (2018). Taking social exchange theory as a reference, this work analyses the factors conditioning support for sustainable tourism development in Bisotun (Iran). The

research provides insight into the perceptions held by resident communities regarding sustainable tourism development in heritage destinations. In this regard, the findings indicate that the positive effects of perceived benefits, participation and attachment of all local community groups drive sustainable tourism development in Bisotun.

The next most relevant line with 15 articles and a 22 in citation rate is the research on *Motivation and satisfaction of heritage tourists* (blue cluster). This line examines the relationship between motivation and satisfaction of tourists in heritage destinations. One of the referent research is the work of Antón et al. (2017) that examines the effects of experiences in a World Heritage tourist destination (Segovia) on the intention to visit again and the positive recommendation to other people. Similarly, the paper analyses *pull factors* and *push factors* as moderating factors in the visit intensity-loyalty and satisfaction-loyalty relationships. The results show that satisfaction contributes to generating loyalty to the destination, both directly and as a function of the reason for the visit. Thus, time- and cost-intensive visits have a positive effect on the intention to return when the trip motivation is due to push factors, while the effect is attenuated when the tourist motivation is due to pull factors. The authors point out that when the reason for the visit is linked to the destination itself (cultural and gastronomic offerings, etc.), an intense experience in terms of duration and expenditure reduces the intention to return. In this case, the tourist's needs are specific and are satisfied, so that the destination can no longer offer anything else on future visits. Based on the findings, the authors recommend that marketing and promotion strategies for heritage destinations should focus on the experiences that tourists wish to enjoy in their leisure time (relaxation, adventure, social relations, etc.), trying to persuade them to do so, even in an already familiar environment.

Another relevant research in this line is already commented work by López-Guzmán et al. (2019) on how the nature of motivations condition the satisfaction and loyalty of foreign tourists visiting the city of Quito (Ecuador).

The last of the lines detected with 9 articles and a 19 in citation rate is the research on the *Authenticity of intangible heritage* (yellow cluster), which is characterized by the analysis of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as a tourism resource that guarantees the safeguarding of the cultural and socioeconomic values linked to this intangible heritage. ICH has had a rapid expansion due to an increased demand by tourists for learning about the culture of a tourist destination. This is because ICH represents oral traditions, performing arts, rituals and festive events passed down from generation to generation and recognized by communities as part of their cultural heritage. One of the most relevant research is the work of Kim et al. (2019) that explores the priorities for development as a sustainable tourism resource of different regional festivals with UNESCO recognition in South Korea. The study reveals that the authenticity of ICH is a key component for its development as a sustainable tourism resource, and that this requires a positive and constructive symbiotic relationship between safeguarding the authenticity of ICH and enhancing the socioeconomic value of ICH.

Another reference study in this line is the research by Su et al. (2019) that performs a bibliometric analysis on intangible cultural heritage using CiteSpace as an analysis tool. The results show that ICH research has been increasing substantially since 2011, with studies focusing on issues related to heritage itself, such as heritage space or landscape heritage, etc., with research on heritage use and sustainable development being relatively scarce, and China, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Spain playing a propulsive role in ICH research.

CONCLUSION

1. Theoretical implications

Heritage tourism is characterized by taking place in sites that have been inscribed as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. This type of tourism has grown exponentially in the last decade due to the opportunities it offers travellers, such as learning about the artistic and cultural heritage of an area or immersion in living cultures and their habitats, and the increase in the cultural and educational level of the population (Poria et al., 2003). To this must be added the relevant fact that it has produced an increase in the number of sites with UNESCO recognition (Del Barrio et al., 2012), including Intangible Heritage, Underwater Heritage or Natural Heritage.

The main objective of this article is to visualize the structure and trends of heritage tourism research in UNESCO World Heritage Sites between 1994 and December 2023, which will help researchers, policy makers and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to be aware of, and gain a better understanding of, existing studies and current research topics. The growing number of heritage destinations and cultural interest of tourists has caused a growing academic interest in heritage tourism, scientific output has almost tripled between 2016 and 2023 (Figure 2). The co-authorship analysis shows that the University of Castilla La Mancha (Spain), Taylor's University (Malaysia), University Sains (Malaysia), University of Cordoba (Spain), Renmin University (China) and the University of Waterloo (Canada) are the most productive institutions (Figure 3).

This research investigated the trends opportunities in heritage tourism. The results show that scientific field is a complex, dynamic and diverse topic. The keyword analysis shows the relevance of research related to *Tourism Sustainability in UNESCO Sites in China* and, to a lesser extent, to *Tourism Sustainability of Cultural Heritage* for the whole period 1996-2023. However, since 2016, two new research themes emerge: *Heritage Tourist Motivation and Satisfaction*, and *Intangible Heritage Authenticity* (Table 3 and Figure 4).

2. Practical implications

From a practical perspective, more efforts are needed to raise awareness of the WHS brand and historical and cultural attributes among potential visitors (Lee et al., 2018). Promoting high quality heritage resources would appeal to value and quality conscious consumers (Ryan and Silvanto, 2010). For instance, managers could develop promotional videos, interactive websites or social networks to give potential visitors a glimpse of the cultural experience. In the second place, to increase satisfaction and loyalty in WHS, managers should increase their creativity in creating experiences. In consequence,

they should offer visitors a wider range of engaging and unique activities and attractions. Additionally, they should establish strategies to encourage and guide their tourists to actively share their travel experience through websites with high quality which can enable tourists spread positive e-WOM and enhance tourism loyalty.

3. Future heritage tourism research

As for future research directions, the growing demand for sustainability on the part of society calls for more studies on the degree of involvement of stakeholders in the protection of World Heritage sites, in recent years some places have become so saturated that it is impossible for tourists to enjoy them, and to care for and manage them sustainably - Machu Picchu (Peru), the Old City of Jerusalem (Israel), Venice (Italy) are clear examples -. The results of the study of Li et al. (2020) show that future studies analyse how different stakeholders would be integrated into the decision-making process to establish an impartial distribution of tourism revenues. This will be useful to avoid the negative consequences for the inscription of a WHS into local community. On the other hand, there is a significant deficit of tourism research in countries with a significant wealth of heritage. In this sense, tourism studies on Germany, France, Italy or India are scarce if we consider that these countries are among the six countries with the highest number of World Heritage Sites. Specifically, Italy ranks first with 58 inscriptions and only 2 studies; Germany is third with 52 inscriptions and 1 study; France ranks fourth with 51 inscriptions and also only 1 study, and India is sixth with 42 inscriptions and 5 studies. Together, this research represents only 1% of WoS publications, and contrasts with tourism publications from China (57 entries) and Spain (50 entries) which represent 5.5% and 1.2% of publications.

Third, it is necessary to continue developing and deepening tourism studies linked to intangible heritage. Studies based on oral traditions, performing arts, rituals or festive events transmitted from generation to generation are still low and inconsistent, as publications are concentrated in a small group of countries including China, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Spain. Tan et al. (2020) argue that there are intangible cultural heritage resources in risk due to a lack of initiative from the stakeholders and the public sector. Authors recommend that future studies analyse how effective conservation and management policies can be implemented to protect these cultural resources.

In addition, they propose the identification of possible barriers and solutions to address the challenges associated with the protection of this type of heritage. Fourth, future research could use comparisons to understand how different visitors and sites may affect visits to World Heritage. For example, it would be beneficial to contrast variations in the type of World Heritage sites, such as those in high and low demand as well as old and newly created sites.

It would also be relevant to segment tourists according to country of origin, their level of past travel experience, motivations, educational level, generational segment, among other factors.

Finally, from a methodological point of view, it would be interesting to apply meta-analysis tools to enrich the bibliometric study on heritage tourism. Meta-analysis is a powerful literature review tool that uses criteria other than the number of citations and the impact index of the publication to determine the relevance of the information.

4. Limitations

Finally, as with any study, the present work has its limitations. First, the number of publications and their citations have been used as indicators of the academic impact of authors, journals and institutions. However, these indicators do not show an exact correspondence between the quality of publications and their academic interest. Following Aksnes et al. (2019), it is necessary to put more emphasis on other dimensions of research quality for its evaluation, case of novelty or social relevance. Secondly, the exclusive use of WoS implies a positive bias towards English academic literature (Agramunt et al., 2020). Consequently, it would be interesting to conduct new research using alternative databases such as ScieLO with the aim of contrasting the results, expanding the lines of research and emerging topics associated with heritage tourism (Terán-Yépez et al., 2020). Finally, the exclusive use of VOSviewer as an analytical tool does not allow strategic diagrams of the content analysis, as other software, such as SciMAT, does (Cobo et al., 2011).

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, O.J. and P.J.; methodology, O.J. and P.J.; software, O.J. and F.G.; validation, A.C. and P.J.; formal analysis, O.J. and P.J.; investigation, O.J.; data curation, O.J. and P.J.; writing - original draft preparation, O.J. and P.J.; writing - review and editing, A.C. and P.J.; visualization, F.G. and A.C.; supervision, O.J., P.J., F.G.; A.C.; project administration, O.J., P.J., F.G.; A.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Not applicable.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study may be obtained on request from the corresponding author.

Acknowledgements: The research undertaken was made possible by the equal scientific involvement of all the authors concerned.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

Aas, C., Ladkin, A., & Fletcher, J. (2005). Stakeholder collaboration and heritage management. *Annals of tourism research*, 32(1), 28-48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2004.04.005>

- Adongo, R., Choe, J. Y., & Han, H. (2017). Tourism in Hoi An, Vietnam: Impacts, perceived benefits, community attachment and support for tourism development. *International Journal of Tourism Sciences*, 17(2), 86-106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15980634.2017.1294344>
- Agramunt, L. F., Berbel-Pineda, J. M., Capobianco-Urriarte, M. M., & Casado-Belmonte, M. P. (2020). Review on the relationship of absorptive capacity with interorganizational networks and the internationalization process. *Complexity*, 2020, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2020/7604579>. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2020/7604579>
- Aksnes, D. W., Langfeldt, L., & Wouters, P. (2019). Citations, citation indicators, and research quality: An overview of basic concepts and theories. *Sage Open*, 9(1), 2158244019829575. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019829575>
- Al-Tokhais, A., & Thapa, B. (2020). Management issues and challenges of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 15(1), 103-110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2019.1594836>
- Antón, C., Camarero, C., & Laguna-García, M. (2017). Towards a new approach of destination loyalty drivers: Satisfaction, visit intensity and tourist motivations. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 20(3), 238-260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2014.936834>
- Bayno, P. M., & Jani, D. (2018). Residents' attitudes on the contribution of cultural tourism in Tanzania. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 16(1), 41-56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2016.1211663>
- Breakey, N. M. (2012). Study in of World Heritage visitors: The case of the remote Riversleigh Fossil Site. *Visitor Studies*, 15(1), 82-97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10.645578.2012.660845>
- Castillo-Vergara, M., Álvarez-Marín, A., & Placencio-Hidalgo, D. (2018). A bibliometric analysis of creativity in the field of business economics. *Journal of business research*, 85, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.12.011>
- Caust, J., & Vecco, M. (2017). Is UNESCO World Heritage recognition a blessing or burden? Evidence from developing Asian countries. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 27, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2017.02.004>
- Cobo, M. J., López-Herrera, A. G., Herrera-Viedma, E., & Herrera, F. (2011). Science mapping software tools: Review, analysis, and cooperative study among tools. *Journal of the American Society for information Science and Technology*, 62(7), 1382-1402. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.21525>
- Chen, H., & Rahman, I. (2018). Cultural tourism: An analysis of engagement, cultural contact, memorable tourism experience and destination loyalty. *Tourism management perspectives*, 26, 153-163 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.10.006>
- Correia, A., Kozak, M., & Ferradeira, J. (2013). From tourist motivations to tourist satisfaction. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 7(4), 411-424. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCTHR-05-2012-0022>
- Cuccia, T., Guccio, C., & Rizzo, I. (2016). The effects of UNESCO World Heritage List inscription on tourism destinations performance in Italian regions. *Economic Modelling*, 53, 494-508. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econmod.2015.10.049>
- De Oliveira, O. J., da Silva, F. F., Juliani, F., Barbosa, L. C. F. M., & Nunhes, T. V. (2019). Bibliometric method for mapping the state-of-the-art and identifying research gaps and trends in literature: An essential instrument to support the development of scientific projects. In S. Kunosic and E. Zerem (Eds.), *Scientometrics recent advances* (pp. 47-64). IntechOpen, den University, Leiden, Netherlands.
- Del Barrio, M. J., Devesa, M., & Herrero, L. C. (2012). Evaluating intangible cultural heritage: the case of cultural festivals. *City, Culture and Society*, 3(4), 235-244. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2012.09.002>
- Fonseca, F. P., & Ramos, R. A. (2012). Heritage tourism in peripheral areas: Development strategies and constraints. *Tourism Geographies*, 14(3), 467-493. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2011.610147>
- Giblin, J. D., Mugabowagahunde, M., & Ntagwabira, A. (2017). International heritage tourism in Rwanda: Paving over the past at the Musanze Caves. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*, 19(2), 126-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13505033.2017.1321363>
- Khanra, S., Dhir, A., Kaur, P., & Mäntymäki, M. (2021). Bibliometric analysis and literature review of ecotourism: Toward sustainable development. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 37, 100777. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100777>. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100777>
- Kim, S., Whitford, M., & Arcodia, C. (2019). Development of intangible cultural heritage as a sustainable tourism resource: The intangible cultural heritage practitioners' perspectives. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 14(5-6), 422-435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2018.1561703>
- Koseoglu, M. A. (2016). Growth and structure of authorship and co-authorship network in the strategic management realm: Evidence from the Strategic Management Journal. *BRQ Business Research Quarterly*, 19(3), 153-170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brq.2016.02.001>
- Li, Y., Lau, C., & Su, P. (2020). Heritage tourism stakeholder conflict: a case of a World Heritage Site in China. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 18(3), 267-287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2020.1722141>
- Luekveerawattana, R. (2024). Enhancing innovation in cultural heritage tourism: navigating external factors. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 2301813. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2301813>
- Lee, S., Phau, I., & Quintal, V. (2018). Exploring the effects of a 'new' listing of a UNESCO World Heritage Site: The case of Singapore Botanic Gardens. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 13(4), 339-355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2017.1354005>
- Li, M., Wu, B., & Cai, L. (2008). Tourism development of World Heritage Sites in China: A geographic perspective. *Tourism Management*, 29(2), 308-319. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.03.013>
- Lim, W. M., Rasul, T., Kumar, S., & Ala, M. (2022). Past, present, and future of customer engagement. *Journal of Business Research*, 140, 439-458. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.11.014>
- López-Guzmán, T., Torres Naranjo, M., Pérez Gálvez, J. C., & Carvache Franco, W. (2019). Segmentation and motivation of foreign tourists in world heritage sites. A case study, Quito (Ecuador). *Current Issues in Tourism*, 22(10), 1170-1189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2017.1344625>
- Martín-Martín, A., Orduna-Malea, E., Thelwall, M., & López-Cózar, E. D. (2018). Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus: A systematic comparison of citations in 252 subject categories. *Journal of Informetrics*, 12(4), 1160-1177. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2018.09.002>
- Martínez-Pérez, Á., García-Villaverde, P. M., & Elche, D. (2016). The mediating effect of ambidextrous knowledge strategy between social capital and innovation of cultural tourism clusters firms. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(7), 1484-1507. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-08-2014-0405>
- Moreno, R., Gálvez, J. C. P., Ortuya, F. O., & López-Guzmán, T. (2016). Factores de interés de un destino patrimonio de la humanidad: el caso de Valparaíso--Chile. *Estudios y Perspectivas en Turismo*, 25(3), 360-375.
- Nogueras, J. D. R., Gómez-Casero, G., Pérez Gálvez, J. C., & González Santa Cruz, F. (2021). Segmentation of Tourists That Participate in a Cultural Event: The Fiesta of the Patios in Córdoba (Spain). *SAGE Open*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244021994813>
- Olya, H. G., Alipour, H., & Gavilyan, Y. (2018). Different voices from community groups to support sustainable tourism development at Iranian World Heritage Sites: evidence from Bisotun. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 26(10), 1728-1748. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2018.1511718>

- Parga-Dans, E., González, P. A., & Enríquez, R. O. (2020). The social value of heritage: Balancing the promotion-preservation relationship in the Altamira World Heritage Site, Spain. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 18, 100499. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2020.100499>
- Patuelli, R., Mussoni, M., & Candela, G. (2013). The effects of World Heritage Sites on domestic tourism: a spatial interaction model for Italy. *Journal of Geographical Systems*, 15, 369-402. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10109-013-0184-5>
- Perianes-Rodríguez, A., Waltman, L., & Van Eck, N. J. (2016). Constructing bibliometric networks: A comparison between full and fractional counting. *Journal of informetrics*, 10(4), 1178-1195. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2016.10.006>
- Poria, Y., Airey, D., & Butler, R. (2001). Challenging the present approach to heritage tourism: Is tourism to heritage places heritage tourism?. *Tourism Review*, 56(1/2), 51-53. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb058358>
- Poria, Y., Butler, R., & Airey, D. (2003). The core of heritage tourism. *Annals of tourism research*, 30(1), 238-254. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(02\)00064-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(02)00064-6)
- Poria, Y., Reichel, A., & Cohen, R. (2013). Tourists perceptions of World Heritage Site and its designation. *Tourism management*, 35, 272-274. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.02.011>
- Poria, Y., & Ashworth G.. (2009). Heritage Attractions-A Resource for Conflicts. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 36(3), 522-25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2009.03.003>
- Prayag, G., Hosany, S., & Odeh, K. (2013). The role of tourists' emotional experiences and satisfaction in understanding behavioral intentions. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 2(2), 118-127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2013.05.001>
- Ramires, A., Brandao, F., & Sousa, A. C. (2018). Motivation-based cluster analysis of international tourists visiting a World Heritage City: The case of Porto, Portugal. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Development*, 8, 49-60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2016.12.001>
- Rasoolimanesh, S. M., Ringle, C. M., Jaafar, M., & Ramayah, T. (2017). Urban vs. rural destinations: Residents' perceptions, community participation and support for tourism development. *Tourism management*, 60, 147-158. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.11.019>
- Reisinger, Y. (1994). Tourist-host contact as a part of cultural tourism. *World Leisure & Recreation*, 36(2), 24-28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10261133.1994.9673910>
- Richards, G. (Ed.). (1996). *Cultural tourism in Europe*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Ryan, J., & Silvano, S. (2010). World heritage sites: The purposes and politics of destination branding. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 27(5), 533-545. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2010.499064>
- Sánchez-Cañizares, S. M., Castillo-Canalejo, A. M., & Cabeza-Ramírez, L. J. (2018). Sustainable tourism in sensitive areas: Bibliometric characterisation and content analysis of specialised literature. *Sustainability*, 10(5), 1525. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10051525>
- Su, M. M., Wall, G., Wang, Y., & Jin, M. (2019). Livelihood sustainability in a rural tourism destination-Hetu Town, Anhui Province, China. *Tourism Management*, 71, 272-281. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.10.019>
- Su, X., Li, X., & Kang, Y. (2019). A bibliometric analysis of research on intangible cultural heritage using CiteSpace. *Sage Open*, 9(2), 2158244019840119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019840119>
- Tan, S. K., Lim, H. H., Tan, S. H., & Kok, Y. S. (2020). A cultural creativity framework for the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 44(3), 439-471. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348019886929>
- Terán-Yépez, E., Marín-Carrillo, G. M., del Pilar Casado-Belmonte, M., & de las Mercedes Capobianco-Uriarte, M. (2020). Sustainable entrepreneurship: Review of its evolution and new trends. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 252, 119742. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.119742>
- UNESCO (1972). Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage. <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/convention-en.pdf>
- UNESCO (1983). *7th session of the World Heritage Committee* <https://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/07COM/documents/>
- UNESCO (2003). *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/15164-EN.pdf>
- UNESCO (2010). *Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage...* <https://www.unesco.org/es/legal-affairs/convention-protection-underwater-cultural-heritage>
- Van Eck, N.J., & Waltman, L., (2022). *VOSviewer Manual. Manual for VOSviewer Version 1.6.v8*. https://www.vosviewer.com/documentation/Manual_VOSviewer_1.6.18.pdf.
- Waltman, L., & Noyons, E. (2018). *Bibliometrics for Research Management and Research Evaluation A Brief Introduction*. Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) at Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands.
- Xiao, L. (2022). Intangible Cultural Heritage Reproduction and Revitalization: Value Feedback, Practice, and Exploration Based on the IPA Model. *Computational Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/8411999>
- Yang, C. H., Lin, H. L., & Han, C. C. (2010). Analysis of international tourist arrivals in China: The role of World Heritage Sites. *Tourism management*, 31(6), 827-837. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2009.08.008>
- Yang, C. H., & Lin, H. Y. (2014). Revisiting the relationship between World Heritage Sites and tourism. *Tourism Economics*, 20(1), 73-86. <https://doi.org/10.5367/te.2013.0359>
- Zhang, D., Zhang, Z., & Managi, S. (2019). A bibliometric analysis on green finance: Current status, development, and future directions. *Finance Research Letters*, 29, 425-430. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.frl.2019.02.003>
- Zhang, J., Yu, Q., Zheng, F., Long, C., Lu, Z., & Duan, Z. (2016). Comparing keywords plus of WOS and author keywords: A case study of patient adherence research. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 67(4), 967-972. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.23437>
- Zhu, J., & Liu, W. (2020). A tale of two databases: The use of Web of Science and Scopus in academic papers. *Scientometrics*, 123(1), 321-335. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-020-03387-8>