

EXPLORING SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION ON HERITAGE TOURISM IN IBERO-AMERICA: A BIBLIOMETRIC PERSPECTIVE (1995–2023)

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Abstract: This study evaluates the state of heritage tourism research in Ibero-American countries from 1995 to 2023. It aims to identify publication trends, leading authors and institutions, citation structures, thematic evolution, and the most influential journals in terms of productivity and impact. A bibliometric analysis was conducted on a dataset of 519 peer-reviewed articles retrieved from the Scopus database, authored by researchers affiliated with institutions in 16 Ibero-American countries. Performance analysis and science mapping techniques were employed to assess productivity, scholarly impact, collaboration patterns, and intellectual structures. Findings reveal a marked acceleration in research output after 2020, with 50% of publications produced in the last four years. English dominates as the language of publication (76%), while the articles span 21 subject areas, primarily Social Sciences, Business and Management, and Environmental Science. Research is highly concentrated, with Spain (59%) and Portugal (13%) as the leading contributors. Authorship patterns indicate that 86.4% of contributors published only one article, reflecting a field largely sustained by occasional authors. Nearly 92.7% of publications received fewer than 50 citations, underscoring limited impact. A key imbalance emerges between productivity and impact at both journal and author levels. Pedro M. García-Villaverde is the most prolific author (18 publications, 436 citations), yet the most cited work is by Richards and Wilson, (1 publication, 666 citations) similarly, Sustainability (59 articles, 1,005 citations) is the most productive journal, while Tourism Management is the most influential, with 1,795 citations from only 12 articles. Keyword analysis highlights the dominance of classical terms such as “cultural tourism,” “heritage,” and “World Heritage Cities,” alongside growing interest in sustainability, geotourism, and urban tourism. However, the wide dispersion of keywords reflects thematic fragmentation. Overall, heritage tourism research in Ibero-America has expanded rapidly but remains geographically concentrated, reliant on occasional contributors, and limited in international impact, with few highly cited articles.

Keywords: Urban tourism, heritage tourism, Ibero-America Tourism, world’s cultural heritage

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism and heritage are closely related, heritage tourism is among the oldest forms of tourism, with origins that can be traced back to the travels of ancient Egyptians, Romans, and European nobility (Bitušíková et al., 2021). It is an experiential activity in which tourists engage with heritage resources by experiencing local customs, traditions, and cultural practices, gaining a unique and immersive way to learn about a destination (Liu et al., 2022; Brooks et al., 2023; Darasa et al., 2024). As a consequence of the importance of this type of tourism, scientific literature in this field has increased in recent years (Menor et al., 2020; González & López, 2017). Adopted in 1972, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention sought to preserve humanity’s cultural and natural legacy for future generations. The convention defines which sites are eligible for inscription on the World Heritage List, which includes cultural, natural, and mixed sites of outstanding universal value (Falk & Hagsten, 2024). Being part of these lists alludes to the recognition of a universally worthy existence, marking the site as a must-visit destination for tourists (Menor et al., 2020).

World Heritage classification significantly contributes to establishing an urban and heritage brand for a city, this distinction confirms global validation, has a positive impact on the city's tourist image (Pinheiro & Paulino, 2022; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Gao & Su, 2019) and increases awareness among tourists (Dieck & Jung, 2018). Cultural committees of the UNESCO publishes annual updates to the World Heritage List. Currently, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention recognizes 1, 248 sites, categorized as 78% cultural, 19% natural, and 3% mixed (UNESCO, 2025). According to Article 1 of the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (revised in 2025), cultural heritage eligible for inclusion on the World Heritage List falls under three main categories: monuments, groups of buildings, and sites. Each of these categories is recognized for its universal value across historical, artistic, scientific, aesthetic, ethnological, and anthropological dimensions (UNESCO, 2025). Inscription on the List enhances protection,

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visibility, and international support, enabling cities and regions to position themselves as attractive tourist destinations (Bertacchini et al., 2024). By conducting an examination of the regional distribution of cultural heritage sites, it is found that the Ibero-American region accounts the 16% of the global total cultural sites (data as of 15 July 2025). The Ibero-American space consists of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) together with 19 Latin American countries, which exhibit diverse physical, social, and economic characteristics. Despite this diversity, they are unified by a shared history of colonial subjugation under Spain and Portugal, which has led to use Spanish and Portuguese as the dominant means of communication (Rodríguez & Zamorano, 2018). The principal objective of this study is to evaluate the state of heritage tourism research across Ibero-American countries from 1995 to 2023 by performing a bibliometric analysis of the scientific literature produced by authors affiliated with institutions in the region. This research aims to systematically map the field's evolution, quantify the productivity and impact of its contributors, delineate its intellectual structure, and synthesize its central research themes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fundamentally, heritage constitutes the assemblage of tangible and intangible assets that a society elects to preserve and bequeath to future generations (Tahiri et al., 2025). Heritage sites transcend the notion of being static relics of the past; rather, they are dynamic cultural landscapes that continuously evolve and exert a profound influence on contemporary societies (Knapp, 2024; Ghosh et al., 2025). At the apex of these sites are those designated as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO, those rare and irreplaceable cultural and natural treasures recognized for their outstanding universal value to humankind (Nian et al., 2023). These sites function as vital cultural resources, encapsulating historical depth, architectural ingenuity, and enduring socio-cultural traditions (Ghosh et al., 2025). Consequently, tourism associated with cultural heritage is predominantly oriented toward the exploration and appreciation of such sites, offering visitors immersive opportunities to engage with the histories, traditions, and ways of life that define local and global identities (Kadyrbekova et al., 2024). In this capacity, cultural heritage has emerged as a strategic driver of tourism competitiveness, providing destinations with a unique means to distinguish themselves through their historical narratives, living traditions, and distinctive artistic expressions (Mammadova & Abdullayev, 2025). Tourism, which relies on its cultural and heritage dimensions as core attractions for destinations, has become an essential force in advancing economic development while simultaneously facilitating the global circulation of cultural values (Ghosh et al., 2025). Historical significance occupies a central position within this form of tourism, functioning as a bridge that links past and present while sustaining long-term interest among diverse groups of travelers motivated by cultural experiences (Kadyrbekova et al., 2024).

The value of heritage is inherently complex, as the combination of historical, aesthetic, and socio-cultural attributes contributes to enhancing both a site's significance and its attractiveness to visitors (Ghosh et al., 2025; Zhu et al., 2023). Within this framework, heritage tourism emerges as a distinct typology of cultural tourism, in which individuals are motivated by the search for and engagement in profound cultural experiences (Orts-Cardador et al., 2024; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). As a tourism segment, heritage tourism has demonstrated steady growth, driven by travelers' increasing demand for authentic and meaningful encounters (Mammadova & Abdullayev, 2025). In this context, tourism experiences grounded in cultural authenticity act as positive emotional regulators, shaping favorable perceptions and reinforcing visitors' attitudes toward destinations (Phat et al., 2025). Recent bibliometric studies collectively demonstrate the rapid consolidation of heritage tourism as a distinct scientific domain, particularly following 2015 (Zhang et al., 2023; Darasa et al., 2024; Geçikli et al., 2024; Orts-Cardador et al., 2024). An examination of trends within the relevant literature reveals that while earlier research often emphasized concepts such as diversity, tourist preferences, and economic impact, a notable shift has occurred in the 2020s towards themes like staged authenticity, World Heritage Sites, and place attachment. These emerging trends suggest a growing scholarly inclination to highlight the intrinsic value of heritage itself (Geçikli et al., 2024). This evolution is further evidenced by the relationship between tourism and World Heritage Sites gaining significant academic relevance since 2016, a period during which scientific production on the topic has tripled (Orts-Cardador et al., 2024).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Research Design and Data Source

The objective is operationalized through five specific and interrelated goals: (1) To examine the evolution of scholarly. (2) To profile the most productive authors in the field. (3) To identify the most highly cited research publications produced in Ibero-American. (4) To analyze the knowledge structure based on authors' keywords. (5) To determine the most productive journals and those with the highest citation impact.

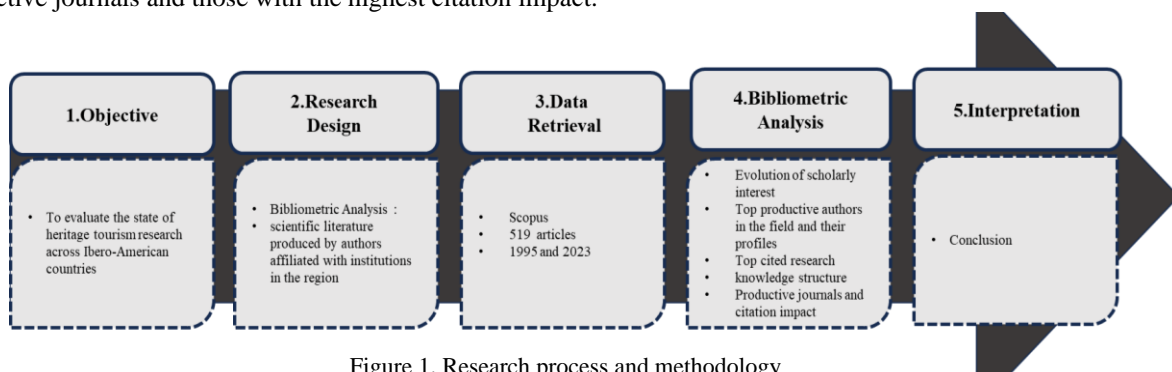


Figure 1. Research process and methodology

To achieve the objective, a bibliometric analysis was conducted, a method for evaluating scientific outputs, to understand the progression of the discipline (Öztürk et al., 2024). The primary rationale for selecting this analytical approach lies in its ability to provide insights, identify research gaps, and map the collaborative network within the field. The research process and methodology are illustrated in Figure 1.

2. Data Retrieval Strategy and Query

The study examines the available research in the Scopus database. The data retrieval process was designed to be both comprehensive and precise. To obtain an initial overview, the first query conducted was: (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("heritage city") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("heritage tourism") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("heritage cities")), this query string initially resulted in 5,043 documents of various types (article, book chapter, conference paper, review, book, conference review, editorial, note, erratum, retracted, short survey, letter), To align with the focus of this study, the search was limited to published articles: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("heritage city") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("heritage tourism") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("heritage cities") AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")). The initial extraction of articles from Scopus yielded 3,954 publications from 130 countries worldwide, dating from 1989 to 2024.

The results indicate that only 16 of the 22 countries within the Ibero-American region are represented in this academic output: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Portugal, and Spain. Consequently, the following six countries were excluded from the final analysis: Andorra, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

3. Data Cleaning and Refinement

The search was limited to these 16 Ibero-American countries with scientific production and to full calendar years. The final advanced query was: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("heritage city") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("heritage tourism") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("heritage cities") AND PUBYEAR > 1994 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND (LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Bolivia") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Brazil") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Chile") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Colombia") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Costa Rica") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Cuba") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Ecuador") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Mexico") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Nicaragua") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Peru") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Panama") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Spain") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "El Salvador") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Guatemala") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Portugal") OR LIMIT-TO (AFFILCOUNTRY , "Argentina")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar"))

A total of 519 articles were retrieved. All articles were subsequently analyzed to ensure no duplicates were present.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Between 1995 and 2023, Scopus indexed a total of 3,954 publications on heritage tourism, contributed by researchers from 130 countries. Of this global output, 13.1% (519 articles) originated from authors affiliated with Ibero-American institutions. Analysis of this subset reveals that only 16 out of the 22 countries in the region contributed to this research field. Table 1 presents the distribution of publications by country over the period.

Table 1. Heritage Tourism Publications from Ibero-America (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

Country	HT	Country	HT
Spain	59%	Cuba	1.2%
Portugal	13%	Argentina	0.8%
Brazil	6%	Bolivia	0.5%
Mexico	5%	Costa Rica	0.3%
Ecuador	5%	Guatemala	0.3%
Chile	4%	El Salvador	0.2%
Colombia	2%	Nicaragua	0.2%
Peru	2%	Panama	0.2%

Notes: HT= percentage of published articles on heritage tourism (N = 519 articles)

Collectively, these 519 publications have received 8,666 citations and involve 1,212 unique researchers. They were published across 200 academic journals in 7 different languages, and span 21 subject areas, highlighting the field's multidisciplinary character. Over the 28-year period, authors employed 1,811 distinct keywords, revealing a broad and diverse thematic landscape. The key characteristics of the dataset are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Data set summary (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

Notes: HTA= published articles on heritage tourism in Ibero-American countries (N = 519 articles)

HTA	Total number	HTA	Total number
Ibero-American countries (based on author institutional affiliation within the geographic region)	16	Languages	7
Articles	519	Journals	200
Citations	8,666	Author Keywords	1,811
Authors	1,212	Study subject area	21

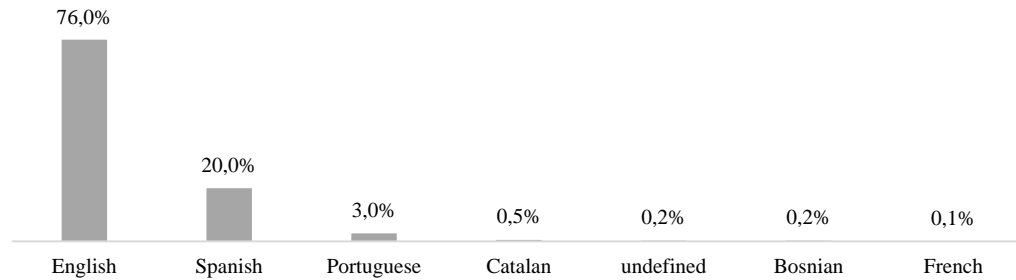


Figure 2. Publication languages (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

As shown in Figure 2, the analysis of publication languages reveals that English dominates the academic discourse on heritage tourism in Ibero-American countries, accounting for 76% of the total output. Spanish, the primary language of the region, constitutes 20% of the publications, while Portuguese accounts for only 3%. The remaining 1% of articles were published in Catalan, Slovenian, French, and Bosnian.

Based on the Scopus database, the disciplinary focus of heritage tourism research in Ibero-American countries is the Social Sciences, representing the core disciplinary foundation of heritage tourism research, accounting for the majority of academic output (34%) beyond the social sciences, substantial contributions come from Business, Management and Accounting (16%) and Environmental Science (13%). Figure 3 illustrates the disciplinary focus distribution.

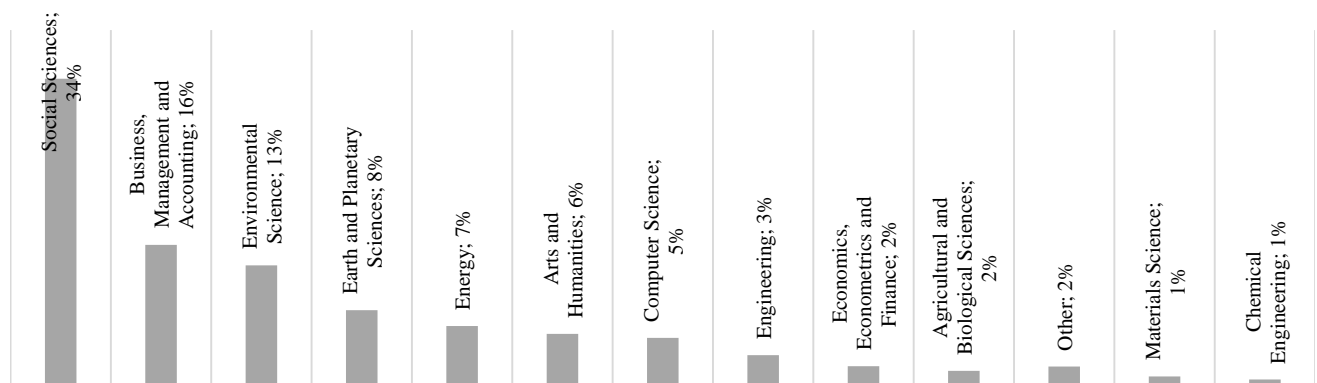


Figure 3. Disciplinary focus (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

1. Evolution of scholarly interest

Productivity behavior over time is a crucial indicator of research growth. Figure 4 illustrates the evolution of the field based on annual publication trends. The temporal distribution reveals that the first article was published in 1995, followed by a five-year gap without any publications until 2000. Between 2000 and 2019, approximately 50% of the scientific output was produced, indicating that it took 19 years to reach half of the total scholarly production. In contrast, the period from 2020 to 2023 alone accounts for the remaining 50% of publications. This remarkable acceleration over just four years underscores a substantial surge in academic interest and research activity on heritage tourism within Ibero-American institutions. In particular, 2023 stands out as the most productive year, with 70 published articles, followed closely by 2021 (67 articles), 2020 (59 articles), and 2019 (54 articles).

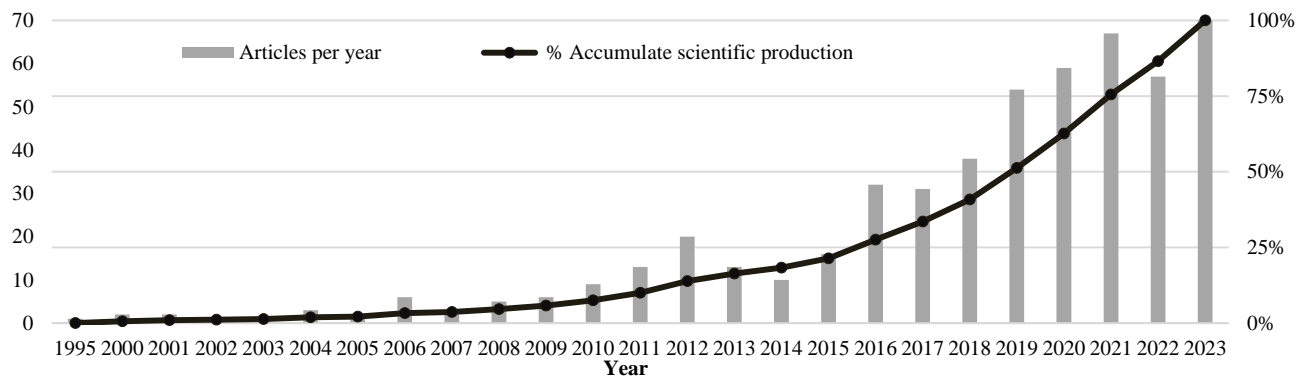


Figure 4. Annual publication growth (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

2. Top productive authors in the field and their profiles

The analysis of author productivity reveals a strong concentration of scholarly output among a limited number of researchers. When examining co-authorship patterns (measured by the number of papers in which authors participated)

it becomes evident that, of the 1,212 unique authors, the overwhelming majority (86.4%) were involved in only a single publication. This pattern indicates that the field is predominantly sustained by occasional contributors (complete results are presented in Table 3). Table 4 presents the profiles of the most prolific scholars contributing to heritage tourism research in Ibero-American countries. The selection criterion for inclusion was authorship of a minimum of ten heritage tourism articles (HTA). To create a profile of each author, the table includes different indicators of broader academic performance: institutional affiliation, total Scopus-indexed publications across all topics (TD), total citations across all documents (TC), and the h-index (H). The evaluation of these metrics reveals the following profile of top authors: García-Villaverde, Pedro M. (Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha) leads the ranking with 18 articles on the subject, positioning him as the most productive author in the dataset on this specific topic. His overall Scopus record includes 60 publications, supported by a robust citation count of 1,509 and an h-index of 23. In the second tier, Martínez-Pérez, Ángela; Hernández-Rojas, Ricardo David; and López-Guzmán, Tomás each contributed 12 heritage tourism articles. Within this group, López-Guzmán stands out with a particularly robust academic profile, including 103 total Scopus publications, 1,755 citations, and an h-index of 21. This record reflects significant scholarly visibility that extends beyond the boundaries of heritage tourism. Mid-level contributors include Elche, Dioni (11 HTA, 27 TD, 732 citations, h-index 15) and Pérez Gálvez, Jesús Claudio (10 HTA, 46 TD, 594 citations, h-index 14), both of whom demonstrate balanced profiles.

Table 3. Co-authorship patterns (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

Articles co-authored	Number of authors	%TSA	Articles co-authored	Number of authors	%TSA
1	1047	86.4%	7	1	0.1%
2	113	9.3%	8	2	0.2%
3	23	1.9%	10	1	0.1%
4	14	1.2%	11	1	0.1%
5	4	0.3%	12	3	0.2%
6	2	0.2%	18	1	0.1%

Notes: %TSA = Authors as a percentage of the total unique authors (N = 1,212)

Table 4. Most prolific scholars (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

Author name	HTA	Affiliation Institutions	TD	TC	H
García-Villaverde, Pedro M.	18	Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Ciudad Real, Spain	60	1509	23
Martínez-Pérez, Ángela	12	Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Ciudad Real, Spain	14	381	8
Hernández-Rojas, Ricardo David	12	Universidad de Córdoba, Cordoba, Spain	29	250	10
López-Guzmán, Tomás	12	Universidad de Córdoba, Cordoba, Spain	103	1755	21
Elche, Dioni	11	Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Ciudad Real, Spain	27	732	15
Pérez Gálvez, Jesús Claudio	10	Universidad de Córdoba, Cordoba, Spain	46	594	14

Notes: HTA, published articles on heritage tourism in Ibero-American countries; AF, affiliation Institutions; TD, total of documents produced on Scopus (despite the study area); TC, total citations of all their published documents (despite the study area); H, h – index

An examination of the most prolific author, García-Villaverde, Pedro M., shows that between 2015 and 2023 he authored 18 publications on heritage tourism, which together have accumulated 436 citations. His research output, disseminated through 12 different journals, reflects both thematic diversity and a high degree of academic visibility.

3. Top cited research publications

The examination of citation patterns for the 519 heritage tourism publications produced by authors affiliated with Ibero-American institutions shows a total of 8,666 citations. As illustrated in Figure 5, 17.9% of these articles have never been cited, while an additional 74.8% have received fewer than 50 citations. Collectively, these two groups represent 92.7% of the total output, suggesting that the majority of research from the region has achieved limited scholarly visibility. By contrast, only 4.8% of the articles fall within the 50 to 100 citation range, and just 2.5% have exceeded the 100-citation threshold, highlighting the presence of a small number of influential studies.

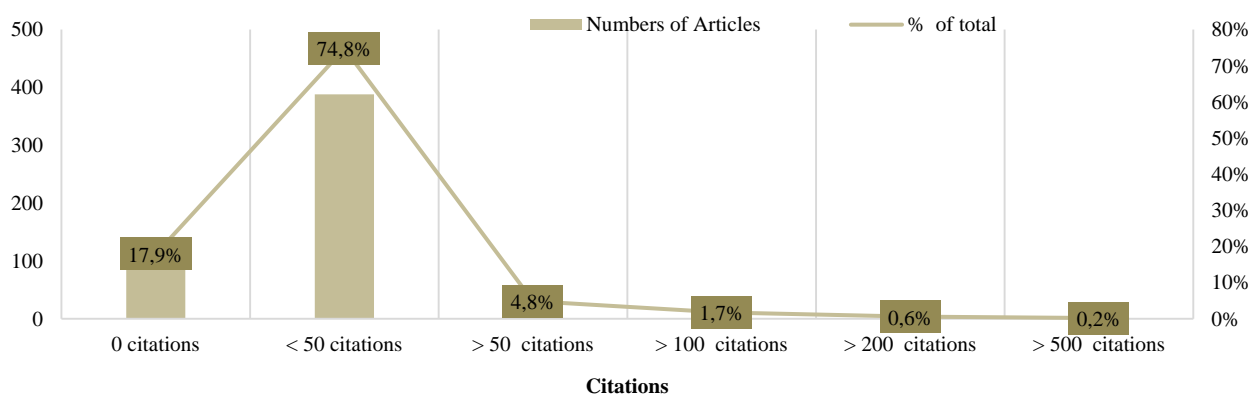


Figure 5. Citation Structure (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

An analysis of citation metrics highlights the three most influential heritage tourism publications authored by researchers affiliated with Ibero-American institutions. As is evident from Table 5, which lists only articles with more than 100 citations, the most cited article is "Developing Creativity in Tourist Experiences: A Solution to the Serial Reproduction of Culture?" (Richards & Wilson, 2006), which has garnered 660 citations over the study period. Ranked second is "Visitors' Experience, Mood, and Satisfaction in a Heritage Context: Evidence from an Interpretation Center" (Rojas & Camarero, 2008), which has received 414 citations (246 fewer than the leading study). In third place is "Geotourism and Geoparks as Novel Strategies for Socio-Economic Development in Rural Areas" (Farsani et al., 2011), with 256 citations (404 fewer than the top-cited publication). This citation gap illustrates a disproportionate distribution of scholarly impact, whereby a single publication has achieved significantly higher visibility and influence compared to others.

The evidence from Table 5 highlights that scholars are characterized by notable thematic diversity, addressing creativity, visitor experience, geotourism, mining heritage, cultural events, and urban dynamics. A recurring feature among these highly cited works is their reliance on emblematic case studies, such as the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, the European Capital of Culture in Salamanca, and the World Heritage City of Porto.

Table 5. Articles surpassed the 100-citation mark (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

Article	Citations	Journal
Developing creativity in tourist experiences: A solution to the serial reproduction of culture?	660	Tourism Management
Visitors' experience, mood and satisfaction in a heritage context: Evidence from an interpretation center	414	Tourism Management
Geotourism and geoparks as novel strategies for socio-economic development in rural areas	256	International Journal of Tourism Research
The development of cross-cultural (mis)understanding through volunteer tourism	242	Journal of Sustainable Tourism
Evaluating the influence of a large cultural artifact in the attraction of tourism: The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao case	165	Urban Affairs Review
Identity and community - Reflections on the development of mining heritage tourism in Southern Spain	149	Tourism Management
Gentrification, transnational gentrification and touristification in Seville, Spain	136	Urban Studies
Intangible heritage tourism and identity	127	Tourism Management
The economic impact of cultural events: A case-study of Salamanca 2002, European Capital of Culture	121	European Urban and Regional Studies
Motivation-based cluster analysis of international tourists visiting a World Heritage City: The case of Porto, Portugal	121	Journal of Destination Marketing and Management
The mediating role of experience quality on authenticity and satisfaction in the context of cultural-heritage tourism	117	Current Issues in Tourism
Spatial-temporal study on the effects of urban street configurations on human thermal comfort in the world heritage city of Camagüey-Cuba	115	Building and Environment
A closer look at Santiago de Compostela's pilgrims through the lens of motivations	105	Tourism Management

4. Knowledge structure based on authors' keywords

Keyword analysis in bibliometric research is commonly used to uncover the intellectual structure and thematic orientation of a research domain (Chen & Xiao, 2016). To identify the most frequent terms associated with heritage tourism research in Ibero-American countries, this study examined authors' keywords, resulting in a dataset of 1,811 unique terms. These keywords were categorized into four frequency groups: (a) those appearing only once (1,524 keywords), (b) those appearing 2 to 10 times (275 keywords), (c) those appearing 11 to 19 times (7 keywords), and (d) those appearing more than 20 times (5 keywords). Figure 6 presents a word cloud visualization representing groups (c) and (d), which include the 12 most frequently used keywords. The relative size of each word in the figure reflects its frequency, offering a visual representation of the most prominent themes in the field.



Figure 6. Most frequently used keywords word cloud visualization (Source: own construction)

Table 6 presents a comprehensive summary of the frequency metrics for groups "c" and "d," ranking the results based on the frequency of keywords and the percentage of total published articles. The combined analysis of Table 6 and the word cloud visualization (figure 6) highlights both the central themes and the fragmentation characterizing heritage tourism research in Ibero-American countries. The dominant keywords: "Tourism" (12.1%), "Cultural tourism"

(11.9%), and “Heritage tourism” (7.3%), confirm that the field is primarily rooted in cultural and heritage frameworks. These core terms are closely followed by related concepts such as “Heritage,” “Cultural heritage,” and “World heritage cities,” further reinforcing the sector’s orientation toward cultural identity, preservation, and place-based tourism narratives. Beyond the cultural dimension, the appearance of keywords such as “Sustainability” (3.7%), “Geotourism” (3.3%), and “Urban tourism” (2.7%) suggests an increasing diversification of research interests toward environmental concerns, alternative tourism modalities, and urban dynamics.

Table 6. More frequent authors’ keywords (Source: own construction)

Authors’ keyword	F	R3	%HTA	Authors’ keyword	F	R3	%HTA
Tourism	63	1	12.1%	Geotourism	17	7	3.3%
Cultural tourism	62	2	11.9%	World heritage cities	15	8	2.9%
Heritage tourism	38	3	7.3%	Sustainable tourism	15	8	2.9%
Heritage	28	4	5.4%	Urban tourism	14	9	2.7%
Cultural heritage	23	5	4.4%	Heritage	12	10	2.3%
Sustainability	19	6	3.7%	Spain	12	10	2.3%

Notes: F, frequency appearance, R3, Ranking position according total frequency appearance, %HTA, Percentage of total published articles on heritage tourism in Ibero-American countries

Thematic classification of author keywords, as shown in Table 7, provides a crucial complement to the keyword frequency analysis by offering a higher-level synthesis of research content. While keyword analysis identifies the most commonly used terms, thematic grouping reveals the conceptual organization and knowledge structure underlying the field, in this examination author keywords were systematically categorized into 27 thematic groups. The results are presented in Table 7, which details each theme along with its corresponding percentage of total keyword occurrences (%TW).

Insight into the conceptual architecture of heritage tourism research in Ibero-American countries reveal a strong focus on empirical, place-based approaches, with “Case study” (15.1%) emerging as the most dominant theme. This underscores a research preference for examining heritage tourism through localized analyses of cities, regions, and countries. Closely following is “Tourism studies” (13.4%), a broad category encompassing research on visitor behavior, satisfaction, destination image, and tourism impacts. The high percentage of keywords categorized as “Other” highlights a fragmented thematic landscape, where many studies employ niche or context-specific terms without alignment to established thematic clusters.

Table 7 Conceptual architecture (Source: own construction)

Theme	%Total key Word	Theme	%Total key Word	Theme	%Total key Word	Theme	%Total key Word
Case of study	15.1%	Sustainability	4.4%	Urban	1.8%	Web	0.7%
Tourism studies	13.4%	Marketing	4.0%	Digital	1.5%	Spatial	0.6%
Other	13.0%	Economics	3.5%	Territory	0.9%	Education	0.5%
Methodology	7.5%	Cultural	3.3%	Development	0.8%	Organization	0.5%
Heritage	6.6%	Historical	3.2%	Knowledge	0.8%	Covid	0.3%
Topic	5.8%	Type of tourism	3.1%	3D and virtual	0.7%	Innovation	0.3%
Social	4.9%	Geo	2.1%	Planning	0.7%	Urban	1.8%

5. Productive journals and citation impact

Identifying the most productive journals (by publication count, as shown in Table 8) and the most influential (by citation count, as shown in Table 9) is crucial for understanding the channels through which Ibero-American scholarship gains visibility in the global academic landscape. The analysis of journal metrics reveals a generally low level of productivity in heritage tourism research across journals publishing work by Ibero-American scholars.

Findings indicate that the total output (N = 519) was disseminated across 200 journals over the 28-year study period. As shown in Figure 7, two notable outliers emerge. First, Sustainability (Switzerland) published 59 articles, making it the most prolific outlet and accounting for 11.4% of all publications. Second, 128 journals (64% of the total) published only a single article each, which collectively represent 24.7% of the total output.

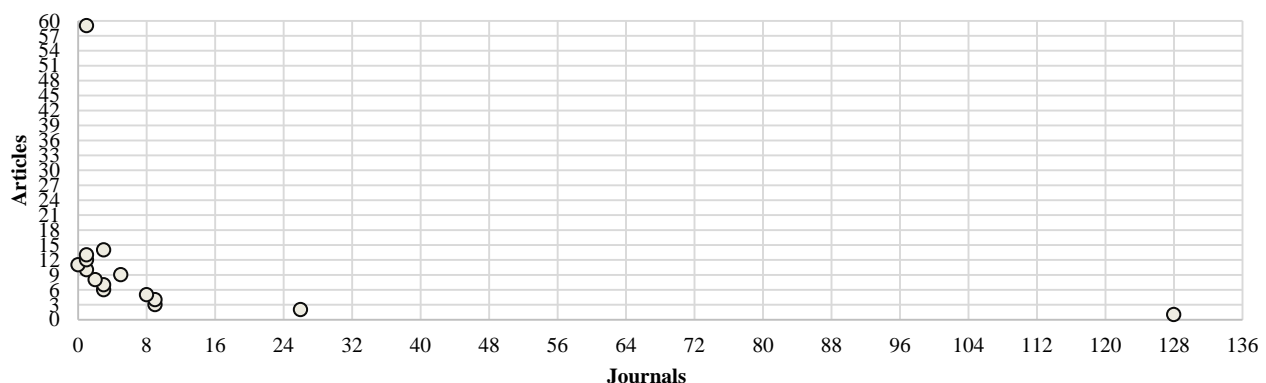


Figure 7. Number of articles published (N=519) per number of Journals (N = 200) (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

By ranking the most productive journals with a threshold of 10 articles as the criterion for inclusion, the findings demonstrate that only 7 out of 200 journals meet this requirement. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Most productive journals (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

R1	Journal	publication count	%HTA	TCHTA
1	Sustainability (Switzerland)	59	11.4%	1,005
2	Journal of Heritage Tourism	14	2.7%	161
3	Cuadernos Geograficos	14	2.7%	43
4	International Journal of Tourism Research	14	2.7%	643
5	Geoheritage	13	2.5%	334
6	Tourism Management	12	2.3%	1,795
7	Documents d'Analisi Geografica	10	1.9%	53

Notes: R1 = productivity ranking position based on a minimum threshold of 10 articles; %HTA = percentage of published articles relative to the total output (N = 519); TCHTA = total number of citations of journal articles

By the examination of the citation count data revealed that the 200 journals accomplish a total of 8,666 citations over the analyze period, 18% of total journals receive cero cites, Tourism Management journal leads with 1,795 citations, despite accounting for only 12 articles that represent 2.3% of the total publications. Second place is Sustainability (Switzerland) with 1005 cites but with 47 articles more (Figure 8).

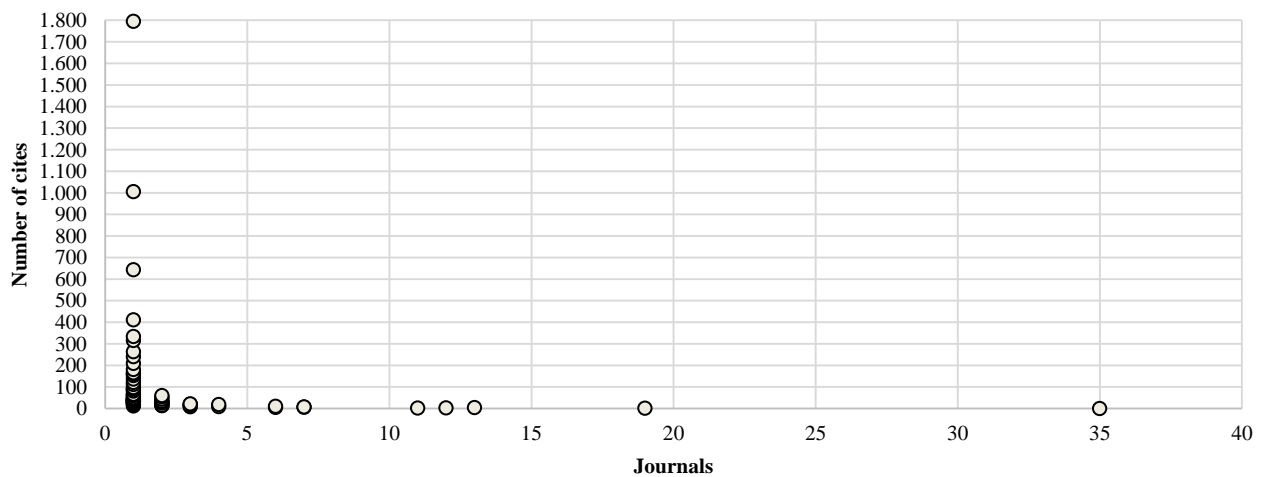


Figure 8. Total number of cites (N=8,666) per number of Journals (N = 200) (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

Table 9 presents the top ten journals according to the total citations received over the period for all their published articles on the subject. This ranking (R2) identifies the journals with the highest cumulative citations of heritage tourism publications in Ibero-American countries (TCHTA). Collectively, the top ten journals account for 62% of total citations, based on 141 articles produced by 473 unique authors.

Tourism Management emerges as the most influential journal, with only 12 publications authored by 29 scholars generating 1,795 citations, representing 20.7% of all citations in the dataset. By contrast, Sustainability (Switzerland), despite publishing 59 articles authored by 220 scholars, received 1,005 citations (11.6%), indicating a much lower citation efficiency compared to Tourism Management. Beyond the two leading journals, the International Journal of Tourism Research ranks third with 14 publications and 643 citations (7.4%), followed by the Journal of Sustainable Tourism (411 citations, 4.7%) and Geoheritage (334 citations, 3.9%).

Table 9. Top 10 influential journals (Source: Own elaboration based on retrieved data)

R2	Journal	Publication count	Total Authors	% TCHTA	TCHTA
1	Tourism Management	12	29	20.7%	1,795
2	Sustainability (Switzerland)	59	220	11.6%	1,005
3	International Journal of Tourism Research	14	43	7.4%	643
4	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	7	18	4.7%	411
5	Geoheritage	13	51	3.9%	334
6	Current Issues in Tourism	8	25	3.6%	315
7	Tourism Geographies	9	21	3.0%	263
8	Journal of Destination Marketing and Management	5	19	2.8%	240
9	Tourism Economics	9	27	2.4%	209
10	Journal of Travel Research	5	20	2.1%	181

Notes: R2 = Top 10 Impact ranking position based on total citations; % TCHTA = percentage of citations relative to the total citation number (N = 8,666); TCHTA = total number of citations of journal articles in heritage tourism

CONCLUSION

In a region that safeguards a substantial share of the world's cultural heritage, the establishment of a bibliometric baseline is not only timely but essential. This study offers a dual contribution to the field of heritage tourism in Ibero-America: first, by providing an empirical mapping of nearly three decades of scientific output; and second, by functioning as a strategic instrument for diagnosing the structural, thematic, and institutional dimensions of research development. Strengthening this field is fundamental to enhancing Ibero-America's academic presence in global tourism scholarship.

Based on the analysis of 519 articles retrieved from the Scopus database (1995–2023), the study confirms significant geographic asymmetries. Spain alone accounts for 59% of the total output, revealing a clear imbalance in scholarly engagement across the Ibero-American space. Authorship patterns further reveal a highly concentrated structure: a small cohort of Spanish academics accounts for a disproportionate share of the literature.

Although Ibero-America holds approximately 16% of the world's cultural heritage, its contribution to global academic discourse on heritage tourism remains disproportionately low. Citation metrics further underscore the limited scholarly impact of most contributions: 17.9% of the analyzed articles had received no citations at all, and an additional 74.8% had accumulated fewer than 50 citations. Only 2.5% of the articles surpassed the 100 citation mark, with just one study exceeding 600 citations. This pronounced disparity suggests that the majority of Ibero-American heritage tourism research lacks visibility and resonance. Of the 1,212 identified contributors to heritage tourism research in Ibero-America, 86.4% authored only a single publication. This pattern reflects a fragmented and intermittent research landscape, characterized by limited continuity and engagement.

Keyword and thematic analyses reveal a fragmented intellectual landscape, characterized by low terminological standardization and conceptual dispersion. Of the 1,811 author-provided keywords, 84% appeared only once, and 13% were classified within "Other" category. These findings underscore the absence of a unified conceptual framework and highlight the need for greater epistemological coherence.

At the journal level, the data underscore the critical need for strategic dissemination. This is evidenced by the finding that the research is fragmented across a long tail of 200 different journals, 64% of which have published only a single paper on the topic. Sustainability (Switzerland) was identified as the most prolific journal, accounting for 11.4% of the articles analyzed. However, Tourism Management (despite comprising only 2.3% of the publications) accrued the highest citation count (1,795), illustrating a clear divergence between publication volume and academic influence. Additionally, 74% of journals in the dataset published fewer than ten articles on the topic, indicating a fragmented editorial landscape and a lack of sustained engagement with heritage tourism as a central theme.

The evidence points to a clear misalignment between productivity and academic impact, extending across journals and individual authors. Pedro M. García-Villaverde dominates in terms of output, yet the most substantial citation influence is associated with less frequent contributors such as Richards and Wilson, illustrating how scholarly visibility is not always proportional to research productivity.

Limitations and future research

Finally, the methodological limitation of relying exclusively on Scopus-indexed literature is acknowledged. Future studies would benefit from incorporating data from complementary databases, such as Web of Science or Google Scholar, to construct a more comprehensive and robust understanding of heritage tourism research dynamics in the region.

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