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Cultural Heritage Tourism and Sustainability: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract: Cultural heritage tourism is a very important issue for the cultural transfer and sustainability of tourism. In parallel, cultural heritage tourism in the context of sustainability has become a popular field that has attracted the attention of researchers in recent years. Therefore, this study aims to analyze international publications on the relationship between cultural heritage tourism and sustainability, identifying trends in development and future research opportunities. Based on this purpose, 657 related studies have been found in the Web of Science database and analyzed in the Bibliometrix R package to map and systematically review the literature. By focusing specifically on the relationship between cultural heritage and sustainability, this study fills a gap in the existing literature, which often handles these issues separately. In addition, the research results contain valuable information that can shape future research agendas.

Keywords: culture; cultural heritage tourism; sustainable tourism; bibliometric analysis

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1. Introduction

Tourism stands as a fundamental development tool for countries both socially and economically [1]. Internationally, tourism ranks among the largest sectors generating export revenues by significantly utilizing cultural, natural, and historical environments [2]. However, the rapid development of tourism also brings along environmental and cultural issues [3]. These negative impacts have spurred debates on the sustainability of tourism. Consequently, academic studies have focused extensively on the concept of sustainable tourism, leading to numerous research endeavors [3–6].

Sustainable tourism is defined as preserving future opportunities while meeting the needs of current tourists and local people [7]. Sustainable tourism enables the management of all resources in a balanced manner while protecting ecological systems, cultural integrity, and biodiversity, as well as satisfying economic, social, and esthetic needs [8]. Managing tourism based on sustainable principles not only enhances the long-term quality of life of local people but also guarantees the quality of visitor experiences [9]. Tourist destinations should be planned and presented without damaging the cultural heritage, natural environments, and ecosystems of local people [10]. Previous studies indicate that

tourism development can be achieved through sustainable practices [11–13]. The essence of the sustainable tourism concept lies in preserving the environmental, economic, and social resources utilized by tourism and passing them on to future generations [5]. Cultural tourism, which handles this issue seriously within tourism fields, is regarded as an understanding of tourism that allows historical and cultural values to be transferred to future generations while providing opportunities for current economic, social, and ecological benefits [14]. In this context, cultural tourism contributes to the transfer of cultural and historical traditions to future generations, while also assisting in the preservation and revitalization of cultural heritage [15]. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines cultural tourism as "a tourism activity that meets the cultural needs of tourists and enables them to gain experiences by acquiring new information". Heritage tourism within cultural tourism is a rapidly growing tourism field that requires specialization [16]. Although tourism activities are generally perceived as a threat to the world's cultural heritage, they constitute a balance mechanism for the protection and transmission of heritage to future generations. This emerging field has been attracting academic interest thanks to its high potential for generating income and enhancing sustainability [17–19].

The increasing number of articles, reports, and related materials focusing on the sustainability of cultural heritage tourism in the literature [20–23] demonstrates the rapid growth of academic knowledge in this field. In recent years, the rapid increase in the number of academic journals, conferences, and other publication platforms regarding cultural heritage tourism and sustainability has led to a corresponding rise in academic articles, reports, and dissertations. This situation results in the accumulation of academic knowledge, requiring researchers to spend significant time and effort to navigate through this vast amount of information [24]; however, accessing accurate information in a timely manner provides significant advantages for academicians, institutions, and even countries [25]. Thus, analyzing and reviewing the existing literature will facilitate insights into the general developmental characteristics and trends in the academic community [26].

Based on this, a comprehensive review of the literature is aimed with this study, which uses a bibliometric method. Bibliometric studies are defined as a method used to identify prominent topics, themes, and trends following a comprehensive and detailed literature review [26]. It is observed in the literature that there are many bibliometric studies on cultural heritage tourism [27–34]. A detailed review of bibliometric studies on cultural heritage tourism over the last five years has been presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Bibliometric research in the last five years.

	Author and Year	Purpose of the Research	Software	Years Covered	Indexes Covered	Conclusions
1.	Su, Li and Kang [27]	To identify the research trends in the literature	CiteSpace	2003–2018	WoS	It has been revealed that there is no serious cooperation between countries. The main themes are heritage tourism, conservation, development and authenticity.
2.	Bhowmik [28]	To visualize innovative concepts, contribution models, and the knowledge domain	CiteSpace	2000–2020	Scopus	The themes identified in the studies are sustainable tourism activities, integration of heritage into urban planning and the perspectives of local communities.

Table 1. *Cont.*

	Author and Year	Purpose of the Research	Software	Years Covered	Indexes Covered	Conclusions
3.	Zhang et al. [29]	To clarify the information system and assist in envisioning international theoretical boundaries	CiteSpace, VOSviewer	1992–2020	WoS	It has been determined that the number of studies has gradually increased. It has also been noted that studies conducted with multi-stakeholder collaboration are prevalent.
4.	Boboc et al. [30]	To provide an overview of the last decade of augmented reality use of cultural heritage	ScientoPy, VOSviewer, and Microsoft Excel	2012–2020	WoS, Scopus	Eight trend topics have been identified: 3D display, digital heritage, virtual museums, user experience, education, tourism, intangible cultural heritage, and gamification.
5.	Maldonado-Erazo et al. [31]	To determine the current scientific production investigating the relationship between touristic use of natural and cultural resources and regional development.	Prısma	1980–2021	WoS, Scopus	It has been concluded that there are few studies evaluating the relationship between the use of natural and cultural resources for tourism and the regional development of regions from both economic and social perspectives.
6.	Liu, Zhang and Osmani [32]	To reveal the current situation of cultural heritage tourism	CiteSpace VOSviewer	1997–2022	WoS	Three research themes have been determined; preservation of cultural: heritage, tourism management, and the support of emerging technology.
7.	Chen et al. [33]	To analyze the volume of intangible cultural heritage tourism research	CiteSpace	2005–2022	CSSCI, CSCD, and CCJI	It has been indicated that the words cultural tourism, authenticity, and development are common in both Chinese and international literature, but loyalty, motivation and quality are more preferred outside of China.
8.	Vlase and Lähdesmäki [34]	To understand the role of the WoS database as an information management tool	VOSviewer	2003–2022	WoS	It has been stated that the topic of cultural heritage tourism in WoS has been studied by a limited number of authors, and the main themes focus on emphasizing the development of digital technology and the increasing number of participants.

As shown in Table 1, the majority of bibliometric studies conducted in the last five years have been prepared by using CiteSpace and VOSviewer software. On the other hand, it is also visible that the relevant studies have not directly included sustainability in their scopes. When we consider the findings of the studies, it is observed that the themes of cultural heritage protection, sustainability, and authenticity are used intensively [27,32,33]. However, changing needs and expectations are believed to affect and alter the trend topics in the literature. Another result of the research is that the number of studies in the literature has been increasing, but only a limited number of countries cooperate [29,34]. It is thought that the results of bibliometric studies on cultural heritage tourism will attract the attention of researchers in different countries as sustainability becomes more widespread day by day. Furthermore, the bibliometric studies do not include developments in 2023 and 2024 due to the lack of studies in the last 2 years. Therefore, our research aims to fill this gap in the literature by using highly valuable Bibliometrix software to determine the volume of publications related to the relationship between cultural heritage tourism and sustainability in the WoS database from 2001 to 2024, and by identifying the most frequently chosen topics, trends, and methods.

In other parts of our study, the literature review has been addressed from a broad perspective by providing theoretical information about the related concepts. In the third part of our research, the bibliometric analysis used for scientific documentation has been detailed and presented comprehensively. The findings from the analysis of the study have been evaluated and discussed in the subsequent sections. In the final part of the study, the results obtained from the analyses and the limitations of the research have been discussed, and various suggestions for future research have been presented.

2. Literature Review

Cultural Heritage Tourism and Sustainability

Culture refers to all of the values that societies have created over time [35]. The cultural expression of individuals has historically been fascinating, forming a significant part of their travel motivations [36]. Tourists visit historical and cultural areas to explore new cultures, gain knowledge, and derive various benefits [37]. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), cultural tourism is defined as "tourism activity that satisfies tourists' cultural needs and enables them to gain new knowledge and experiences" [8]. Kumar [38] emphasized in his study that historical and cultural heritage are fundamental factors in tourism, driving strong tourist motivation. Moreover, he highlighted that cultural and historical heritage assets can contribute economically to modern cities and positively impact their image [38]. Cultural heritage encompasses the traditions, practices, places, objects, and artistic expressions developed by societies and passed down through generations as a whole [39].

UNESCO recognizes monuments, groups of buildings, and sites of historical, esthetic, archeological, scientific, ethnological, or anthropological value as cultural heritage [40]. Cultural heritage is categorized into three main types: built environment (buildings, cityscapes, and archeological remains), natural environment (canyons, waterfalls, forests, and beaches), and artifacts (books, documents, objects, paintings) [41]. Cultural heritage tourism is described as an alternative tourism type that reflects the values and beliefs of societies, offering opportunities to learn about their historical processes [42]. Cultural heritage tourism is very important for regions, countries, and individuals because it has the characteristics of contributing to the economic and social development of societies, having a significant effect on the formation and strengthening of cultural identity, and facilitating societies to know each other by promoting understanding [17]. Moreover, cultural heritage tourism enables the revival of monuments, historical artifacts, cultures, and traditions. Importantly, it encompasses not only tangible heritage, such as historical landscapes, artifacts, and monuments, but also intangible heritage, such as values, beliefs, and social structures [17]. These attributes make cultural heritage tourism highly appealing to tourists, who frequently prefer it over other forms of tourism [43]. The rapid development of cultural heritage

tourism has attracted the interest of scholars, and a large number of studies have been carried out over time [44–46].

In the literature on cultural heritage tourism, two distinct viewpoints are prominently observed. Some studies focus on the stable and sustainable aspects, emphasizing the positive effects of cultural heritage tourism [38,47,48]. Conversely, other studies express uncertainty about its benefits [49–51]. Research emphasizing the positive aspects highlights that cultural heritage tourism contributes directly to local economies, providing income and enhancing community welfare [47]. One study suggests that tourism revitalizes endangered destinations and significantly contributes to the sustainability of cultural heritage [52]. Rasoolimanesh et al. [43] found that communities living in cultural heritage areas develop a stronger sense of identity and belonging, positively impacting the sustainability of an area. Ismagilova [48] argues that sustainable tourism development depends not only on economic foundations but also on the promotion and attractiveness of historical and cultural heritage. Conversely, studies addressing the challenges of cultural heritage tourism argue that commercialization can lead to the loss of cultural meaning for local communities [49]. Opening cultural heritage sites to tourism may diminish their authenticity and contribute to their deterioration, thereby negatively impacting sustainability [50]. Further negative perspectives include the commodification of heritage sites as tourism products [53], the influence of global culture on local traditions [51], and the negative effects of overtourism on destination capacity [54]. In another research, De Oliveira et al. [55] stated that it is necessary to put forward more realistic solutions to ensure the sustainability of cultural heritage through tourism. In this regard, they argued that it would be critical to develop effective strategies for the protection of cultural heritage. Furthermore, Sangchumnong and Kozak [56] stated in their study that the economic dimension overshadows all other dimensions and constitutes the biggest obstacle to sustainability activities.

Ensuring the sustainability of cultural heritage is linked to its comprehensive cultural and social sustainability, as well as fulfilling its physical maintenance. Sustainability here refers to the sensitive transfer of heritage to future generations, taking into account natural and historical legacies, along with the social and cultural processes that created them [57]. Broadly, sustainability encompasses long-term planning on how economic, social, cultural, and biological systems can harmoniously coexist, not just decisions related to heritage preservation [58].

3. Methodology

Bibliometric analysis is a frequently preferred method by scholars for assessing scientific performance [59,60]. Accordingly, its results clearly illustrate scientific production, the development of literature on a topic, and its current status by using visuals (maps, graphs, etc.). In this study, bibliometric analysis was employed to identify the areas where cultural heritage tourism and sustainability subjects intersect, to determine the effectiveness of scientific publications in this field, and to observe the development and direction of the literature.

The research methodology was structured in three stages. During the application of bibliometric analysis, the first step involved data collection, starting with the selection of a database. It is known that there are two comprehensive databases, Scopus and Web of Science Core Collection (WoS), where tourism literature is extensively indexed. One of these databases was chosen for the study. The reason for including only one database was to avoid potential duplication issues that could arise during data transfer. Web of Science (WoS), created by Thomson Reuters, comprehensively covers most scientific disciplines and is widely recognized as the most suitable data source for objective bibliometric analysis [61]. In this regard, the WoS database, which has proven its validity all over the world and contains high-quality and effective scientific articles, was used. WoS is widely utilized in academia to track high-quality research and is considered one of the most authoritative bibliographic databases [62]. Furthermore, it has been observed that many highly cited

bibliometric studies published in SSCI-, SCI-E-, and ESCI-indexed journals in the field of tourism prefer the WoS database [24,59,63].

In the second stage of the research, data importation was conducted. During this phase, the imported raw data were filtered and transformed into a bibliometric file to align with the research purposes. In this filtering process, only English texts were preferred, and no date restriction was applied in an attempt to reach all of the articles. Thus, a dataset was obtained to be used as the sample. The final stage of the research involved analyzing and visualizing the data. In this sense, data analyses were carried out to identify the general characteristics of the dataset, sources, number of publications, journals, citations, trends, collaborations, and keywords.

As stated by UNESCO [40], in the event of the deterioration or destruction of real cultural heritage, the danger of destruction of world heritage arises as well. In this respect, the sustainable management and utilization of cultural heritage tourism is a very important issue. In this respect, in line with the research objective, an analysis was conducted in the WoS database on 10 June 2024 using the keywords "cultural heritage tourism" and "sustainability". The initial search, without any filters, yielded 921 works (including books, monographs, reports, theses, periodicals, etc.). To clearly define the scope of the research, only articles were included in the analysis. No restrictions were placed on the publication year, resulting in works ranging from 2001 to 2024. Only studies in English, the internationally accepted academic language, were included in the analysis to avoid any ambiguity issues. Following the filtering and search process, a total of 657 publications were identified, forming the sample of the research, and the data analysis was carried out.

There are several software tools available for conducting bibliometric analysis, such as VOSviewer, Citespace, and R Bibliometrix v4.3.1. In this study, R Bibliometrix software [64], developed in R in 2017, was preferred for bibliometric analysis due to its flexibility and ability to integrate a range of other statistical and graphical packages.

4. Findings

As a consequence of the literature search using the keywords "cultural heritage tourism" and "sustainability", 657 articles were accessed in the Web of Science database, and the findings have been presented in Table 2. When the table is analyzed, it can be observed that the first article for these keywords was published in 2001. It is determined that 657 articles were published in 251 different journals in total until 2024, and a total of 1021 keywords were used. The annual increase rate of these articles is 19.4% on an annual basis, with an average of 12.3 citations per year. It can be stated that 1855 different authors took part in the studies and the rate of international collaboration was 26.33%. It has been determined that the total number of authors in the articles in the analyzed literature is 1855. Out of the studies, 107 are single-author papers. In parallel with this information, the average number of authors per paper is 3.12. Lastly, research findings indicate that there are 34,096 references in 657 articles, with an average of 30 citations per publication.

When examining studies on the relationship between cultural heritage tourism and sustainability over the years of publication, it is found that the first publication on the topic appeared in 2001. During the initial decade, 16 studies were published. From 2010 onwards, there has been a significant increase in the number of studies. By 2015, the number of studies had reached double digits and an average of 38.5 publications were produced annually between 2015 and 2020. In particular, in the four-year period from 2020 to the present there has been an unprecedented surge in research. In fact, it has been identified that 116 studies on this topic were published in the year 2023 alone. The number of publications by year is presented in Figure 1 and Table 3.

Table 2. General characteristics of the studies.

Time Span	2001–2024
The number of articles	657
Sources	251
Average citations per document	12.3
Annual growth rate %	19.4
References	34,096
Keywords plus	1021
Average citations per publication	30.09
Total number of authors	1855
The number of single-author publications	107
The number of authors per article	3.12
International co-authorships %	26.33

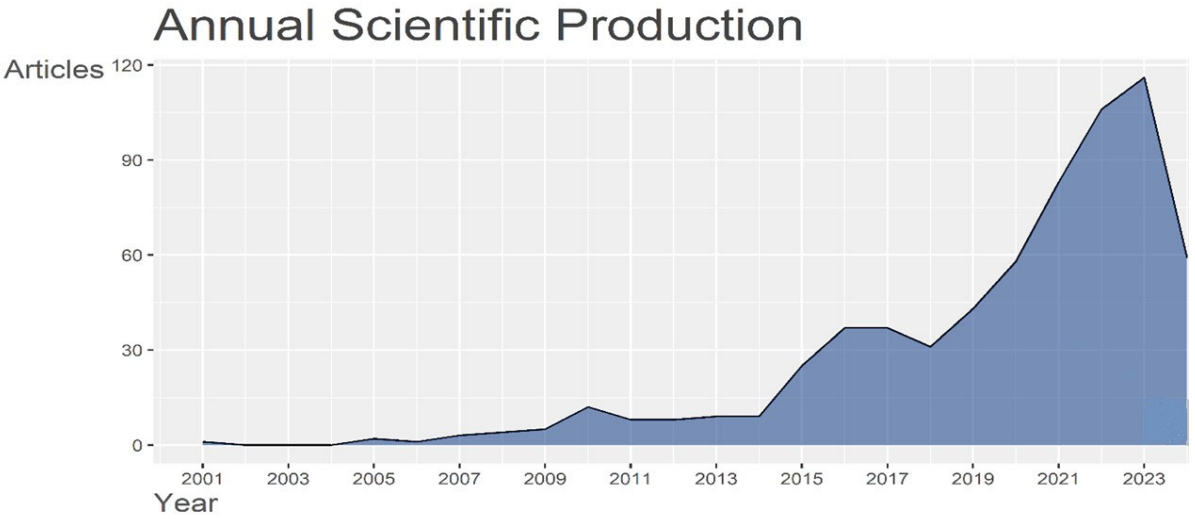


Figure 1. Annual scientific production.

Table 3. Annual scientific production.

Year	Number of Publications	Year	Number of Publications
2001	1	2015	25
2005	2	2016	37
2006	1	2017	37
2007	3	2018	31
2008	4	2019	43
2009	5	2020	58
2010	12	2021	83
2011	8	2022	106
2012	8	2023	116
2013	9	2024	59 *
2014	9		

* The year is not yet complete.

The list of journals with the highest number of publications is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Journals that published the highest number of articles on cultural heritage tourism and sustainability *.

Journal Name	Number of Articles
Sustainability	162
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	30
Land	20
Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development	17
Journal of Heritage Tourism	14
Tourism Management	12
Heritage	11
Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes	7
Current Issues in Tourism	6
European Journal of Sustainable Development	6

* Top 10 journals have been presented.

The list of the most cited journals regarding the studies on the subject in the Web of Science database can be found in Figure 2. Considering the list, while *Tourism Management* is in the first place, with 1631 local citations, *Annals of Tourism Research* ranked second, with 1288 citations, and sustainability ranks third, with 1255 citations.

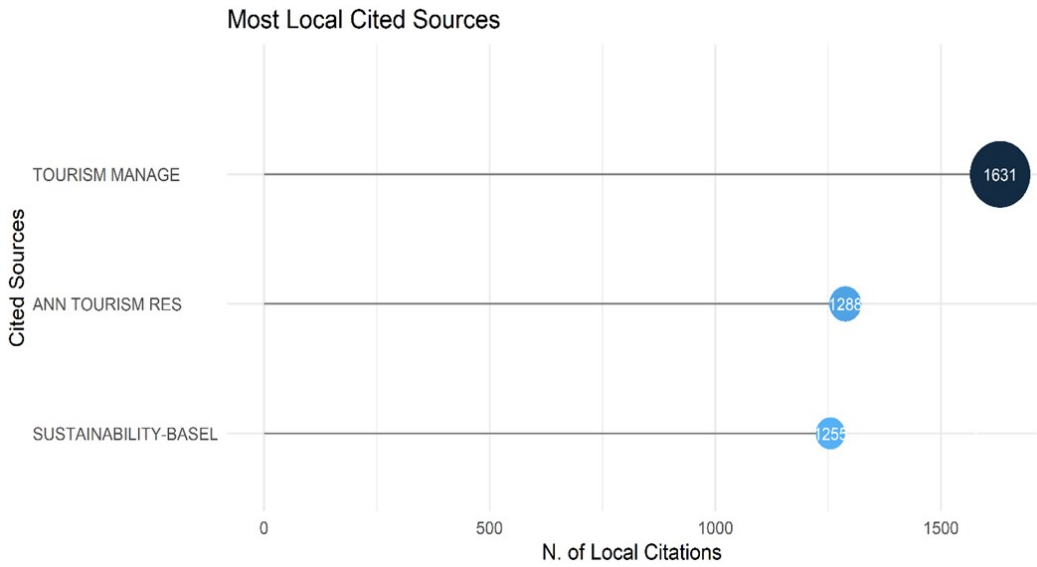


Figure 2. Most local cited sources.

In Figure 3, the keywords of articles on cultural heritage tourism and sustainability from journals indexed in the Web of Science database have been analyzed, and a word cloud visualization is presented. Upon examining the figure, it has been determined that the top five most frequently recurring keywords are conservation (n = 52), authenticity (n = 45), satisfaction (n = 25), ecotourism (n = 24), and experiences (n = 24).

The trend topics have been evaluated over the years and the results are presented in Figure 4. Upon examining the figure, it is apparent that in earlier years, cultural heritage tourism was more often associated with concepts such as diversity, preferences, and economy. In recent years, however, it has increasingly been linked with topics such as staged authenticity, world heritage, and place attachment. Concepts such as diversification, evolution, and culture were preferred in research between 2016 and 2018. Regarding the

years 2018–2020, concepts such as preferences, stakeholders, and economy were extensively analyzed. Starting from 2020 to 2022, there was a significant increase in the examination of sustainability and sustainable tourism concepts in articles. The studies in the years 2022–2024 focused on issues such as management, satisfaction, and belonging, where the details of cultural heritage tourism were analyzed.



Figure 3. Word cloud of keywords plus.

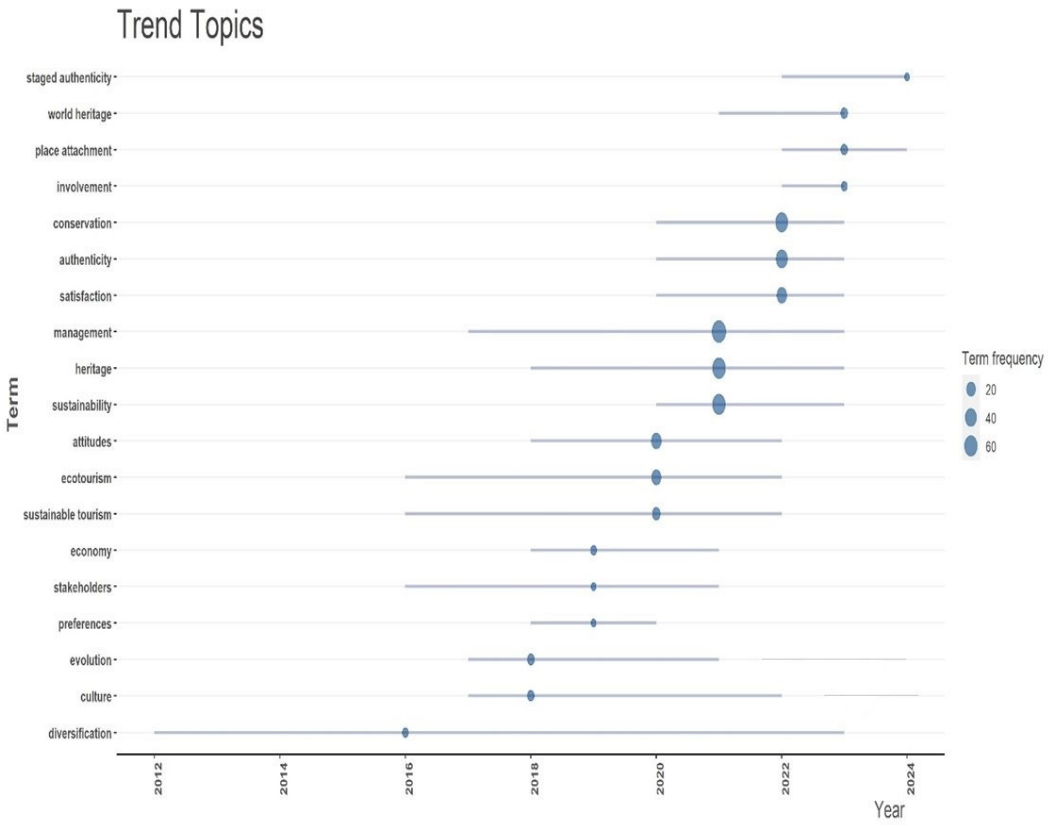


Figure 4. Trend topics.

Finally, the countries collaborating on studies related to the topic have been examined, and the results are displayed in Figure 5. The ones in dark blue represent the countries with the highest number of publications; as for the light-colored countries, they have fewer studies on the topic. The red lines indicate collaboration between countries, with the thickness of the red lines signifying the strength of the collaboration. Upon evaluating Figure 5, it is evident that the most studies on the topic have been conducted in China and the United States. A considerable number of studies have also been carried out in Canada,

Australia, Spain, and Italy. The strongest collaborations have been observed between the United States and China, as well as between China and Australia.

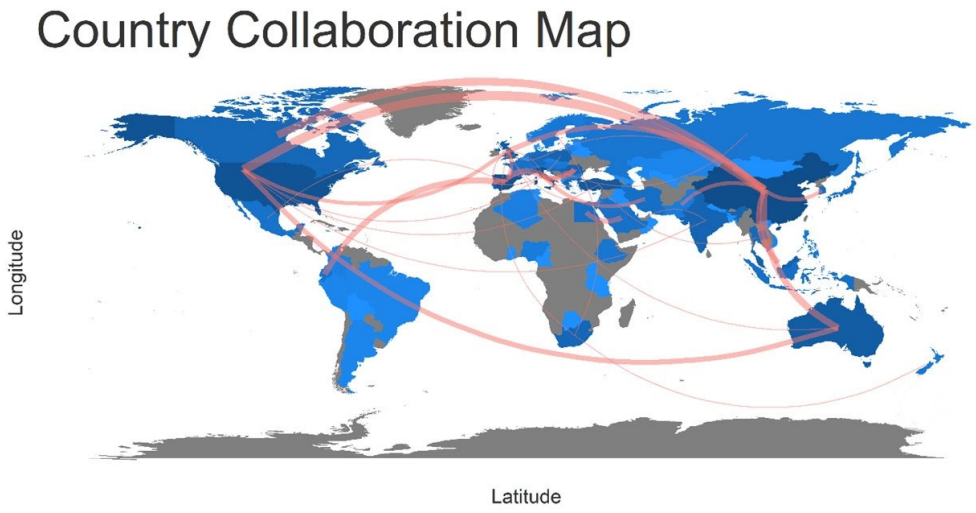


Figure 5. Country collaboration world map.

5. Discussion

The sustainability of tourism and cultural heritage tourism practices has been increasingly studied, and the literature in this field is rapidly expanding [9,10,17,19,20,65]. However, the intense focus on these topics has also made it challenging for academics to access information, identify issues related to the field, and pinpoint the gaps in the literature [66]. Therefore, carefully analyzing and reviewing the existing literature and determining the trends in academic research have become critically important. In this context, our study employs a bibliometric method to thoroughly examine and analyze the literature on cultural heritage tourism and sustainability.

This research presents a bibliometric analysis of the tourism literature on cultural heritage tourism and sustainability up to 2024. The analysis covers the studies carried out in the whole publication period from 2001 to 2024. The bibliometric analysis of the research involves a detailed analysis of 657 articles in the Web of Science database. When the average annual scientific production is considered from the findings of the research, it is observed that there is an increase of 19.4%. Within the analysis of our research, it was determined that that the highest number of publications occurred in 2023, with 116 studies. This demonstrates the growing global importance of both cultural heritage tourism and sustainability since 2001. Kumar [38] supports the analysis that we have obtained in his own study, stating that the main reason behind the increase in cultural heritage and tourism sustainability studies is the various problems that arise due to the fact that tourism is now an intensively utilized sector for political and economic development. He stated that researchers have focused on this area due to the severe pressure on natural and cultural resources, which are irreversible and non-substitutable [38]. Loulanski and Loulanski [67] examined 483 studies that they selected after an extensive literature review with the help of a qualitative data analysis program (Nvio). In their research, it was emphasized that heritage conservation had many economic and social benefits for regional promotion and cultural integrity; however, they underscored the critical importance of research conducted by experts to achieve these benefits. Additionally, Loulanski and Loulanski [67] warned that the mismanagement or neglect of cultural heritage could result in irreversible consequences and various issues in passing heritage on to future generations.

Another finding from our research reveals that a significant majority of articles on cultural heritage tourism and sustainability have been published in the journal *Sustainability*. Following this journal, the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *Land*, and the *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development* have the next highest numbers

of articles. However, this situation is not the same in terms of the citation ranking. A comprehensive review of the research literature identifies *Tourism Management* as the most cited journal, with 1631 local citations. This journal is followed by *Annals of Tourism Research* and *Sustainability* in terms of citation count. Zhang et al. [52] conducted a bibliometric study using the SSCI and SCI sub-databases in the Web of Science Core Collection through the use of CiteSpace and VOSviewer software. In the study, it is argued that examining and analyzing the literature through a bibliometric method in a wide scanning area will be highly beneficial in learning the theoretical boundaries, evaluating the field from a comprehensive perspective and identifying relevant gaps. However, the scarcity of bibliometric studies in the related literature suggests that academics, constrained by time and budget, may prefer to reference more popular journals. This tendency can lead to less attention being paid to other reference sources, thus narrowing the scope of the literature reviewed [68]. In this respect, it is essential to conduct more frequent bibliometric studies to increase the visibility of existing knowledge, foster the emergence of diverse discussion areas, and promote stronger theoretical development [69].

The ongoing development of the concept of cultural heritage tourism and the implementation of sustainable tourism practices have contributed to the emergence of new research trends [29]. Our study provides a macro perspective on the general developmental characteristics and trends in the academic community, offering a number of insights to relevant scholars. An analysis of the keywords in articles from journals indexed in the Web of Science database has revealed that "conservation" is the most frequently used term, appearing 52 times. Following this, "authenticity", "satisfaction", and "ecotourism" are also commonly used keywords. The sustainable management of culture is a critical issue for cultural tourism to yield economic and social benefits. For this reason, the preservation and transfer of cultural values, beliefs, and historical artifacts that societies have created over the years to future generations is of vital importance [58]. Therefore, the topic of cultural heritage preservation is well represented in the literature and aligns with our study's analysis [17,18]. Considering the preferred topics over the years, which is another finding of our research, cultural heritage tourism is frequently associated with concepts such as diversity, preferences, and economy. Nevertheless, in the past four years, this focus has shifted towards themes like authenticity, world heritage, and place attachment. As the field progresses with theoretical analyses and an increase in scientific applications, studies on cultural heritage tourism have evolved from addressing broad topics, such as economic and social impacts, to more specific subjects like authenticity and world heritage.

The effect of tourism development is felt worldwide [70]. Many countries have utilized tourism as a tool for economic, social, cultural, and environmental development, and conducted research that will contribute to the relevant literature [71]. However, the emphasis on sustainable tourism is not evenly distributed globally [72]. Our research's final findings analyzed the countries with the most publications in the literature. It was found that the majority of articles on cultural heritage tourism and sustainability are concentrated in China and the United States. These countries are followed by Canada, Australia, and Spain. Additionally, this study has identified collaboration on these topics between the United States and China, as well as between China and Australia. In a statistical study conducted by the IMARC group, which supports the findings of our research, it is reported that cultural heritage tourism is mostly realized in Asia–Pacific countries (China, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia, and Indonesia) and North American countries (United States and Canada) [73]. It is well known that many regions in Asia–Pacific are home to cultural heritage left behind by ancient civilizations [27]. The region's promotion of heritage tourism, advanced travel infrastructure, and ease of booking create a significant market. Furthermore, the desire of individuals engaging in cultural heritage tourism to experience authentic and immersive experiences is considered a major contributing factor to the region's popularity.

6. Conclusions

Tourism has emerged as a dynamic and increasingly significant economic sector on the global scale. However, it is not only considered from the perspective of revenue generation and development but also as an area where all aspects of sustainability should be evaluated [70]. The development of tourism poses significant threats, particularly to the preservation of cultural heritage [74]. In this respect, the strong relationship between cultural heritage preservation and sustainability has attracted the attention of academic research. Specifically, research on cultural heritage tourism, which connects culture and tourism, has become a focal point in the field of tourism in recent years [17,18,67]. The number of studies conducted in academic journals, conferences, and other platforms has been increasing rapidly. The abundance of academic materials containing knowledge and expertise restricts scholars' access to information for new studies, necessitating more effort and time. From this point of view, in this study a bibliometric study method was preferred by comprehensively examining and analyzing the academic texts published in the relevant literature.

This research covers 657 academic studies in the Web of Science database between 2001 and 2024. It was determined that the articles in our research were published in 251 different journals and a total of 1021 keywords were used. During this period, 1855 authors contributed to the research on the relationship between cultural heritage tourism and sustainability, citing a total of 34,096 sources. The majority of these studies were conducted after 2015, with 2023 emerging as the peak year with 116 publications. As tourism evolves, efforts to promote destinations have been increasing, leading to changes in tourists' preferences [75]. Cultural tourism activities to discover new places and cultures are increasingly garnering interest [36]. However, this trend imposes various pressures on cultural and historical destinations, jeopardizing the sustainability of cultural heritage [76]. The necessity for the supervision and regulation of visits to these regions by experts underscores the growing frequency of academic research in this field. Many researchers have undertaken studies on cultural heritage tourism and its sustainability [17,18,20,65]. The analysis of this study contributes to a clearer understanding of this process.

Following the analysis, it has become evident that a significant majority of studies focusing on cultural heritage tourism and sustainability have been published in *Sustainability*. However, in terms of citation rankings, *Tourism Management* stands out with 1631 citations, occupying the top position. The noticeable surge in the number of journals addressing cultural heritage tourism and sustainability concepts over the past two decades holds substantial value in the academic literature. Nonetheless, it is apparent that scholars tend to cite studies predominantly from similar journals, possibly due to the extensive volume of literature available, which makes accessing studies published in other journals time-consuming. Additionally, the relatively sparse number of bibliometric studies conducted in the broad field of tourism literature, compared to other studies, is considered as a significant reason contributing to this result. Therefore, it is thought that bibliometric studies are crucial in terms of preventing the citation of certain journals within the field and enhancing knowledge dissemination among a wider academic audience. Upon examining the trend in the relevant literature, it is observed that while studies in previous years often emphasized concepts such as diversity, preferences, and economy, there has been a notable shift in the 2020s towards topics such as staged authenticity, world heritage, and place attachment. In the analysis of cultural heritage tourism and sustainability literature, it is evident that research has evolved to focus more on specific issues, accompanied by the emergence of new theories and robust practices. This trend allows for a detailed examination of the concept of cultural heritage, particularly facilitating studies that delve into the identification and preservation of cultural heritage with more nuanced concepts. Furthermore, through the bibliometric method employed in this study, analyses have been generated to assist academics interested in conducting research in this field, aiding in the discovery of gaps in the field.

Within the context of cultural heritage and sustainability, it has been concluded that China and the USA are the leading countries conducting the most research globally. In addition, it has also been determined that the highest level of collaboration has been established between the USA and China, together with China and Australia. Tourism activities have been used as a tool for economic and social development by most countries around the world, leading to the carrying out of academic research. However, the varying levels of importance that each country places on tourism result in differences in the intensity of academic research. The prominent position of the United States and China in research on cultural heritage tourism is considered indicative of their respective commitments to cultural activities. Furthermore, these two countries are observed to contribute to the global development of cultural heritage tourism through collaborations both domestically and internationally.

From a theoretical perspective, the bibliometric analysis performed in this study has identified important concepts that researchers should consider in their studies on sustainability and cultural heritage tourism. This research has also contributed to academicians by facilitating the discovery of gaps in the field and the identification of new trends. Furthermore, through the bibliometric analysis, academicians have been assisted in identifying the journals that predominantly focus on cultural heritage tourism and sustainability concepts and the reference points in this field. Additionally, when examining the intensity of the concepts researched over the years, it is observed that while cultural heritage tourism is associated with concepts such as management, sustainability, and heritage, more recently, concepts such as staged authenticity, world heritage, and place attachment have been preferred more frequently. This situation indicates that the research on cultural heritage tourism examines place in both specific and general terms. These emerging trends suggest a growing inclination in cultural heritage tourism research towards highlighting the value of heritage. Recognizing cultural heritage at the level of world heritage is known to be a strong tool in tourism creation potential. Therefore, the identified trends in this study are considered significant concepts that will guide future research.

When considering the limitations of the research and implications for future research, the first limitation of the research is that it focuses on a single database. Our research used the Web of Science (WoS) database, which is internationally recognized as the most important database. In this sense, it would be beneficial to include the secondary major database, Scopus, for the expansion of the research. Another limitation is that our study selectively focused on scholarly materials, specifically articles from the relevant literature. Future studies could enhance the detection of trends in the literature by including doctoral theses and scientific reports. In addition, our research analyzed studies within the framework of cultural heritage tourism and sustainability perspectives. Future studies could contribute to improving the analysis by delving deeper into different research clusters and themes. In conclusion, expanding the databases used, considering a broader range of scholarly materials, and exploring diverse research themes could enhance the depth and scope of future studies in this field. International organizations should encourage coordination by promoting future collaborations with different countries and research institutions. This will help spread awareness about the preservation of cultural heritage, especially in economically disadvantaged and developing countries, and facilitate the attainment of various benefits. It is believed that future research will contribute to the literature by highlighting the outcomes of raising awareness about cultural heritage.

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