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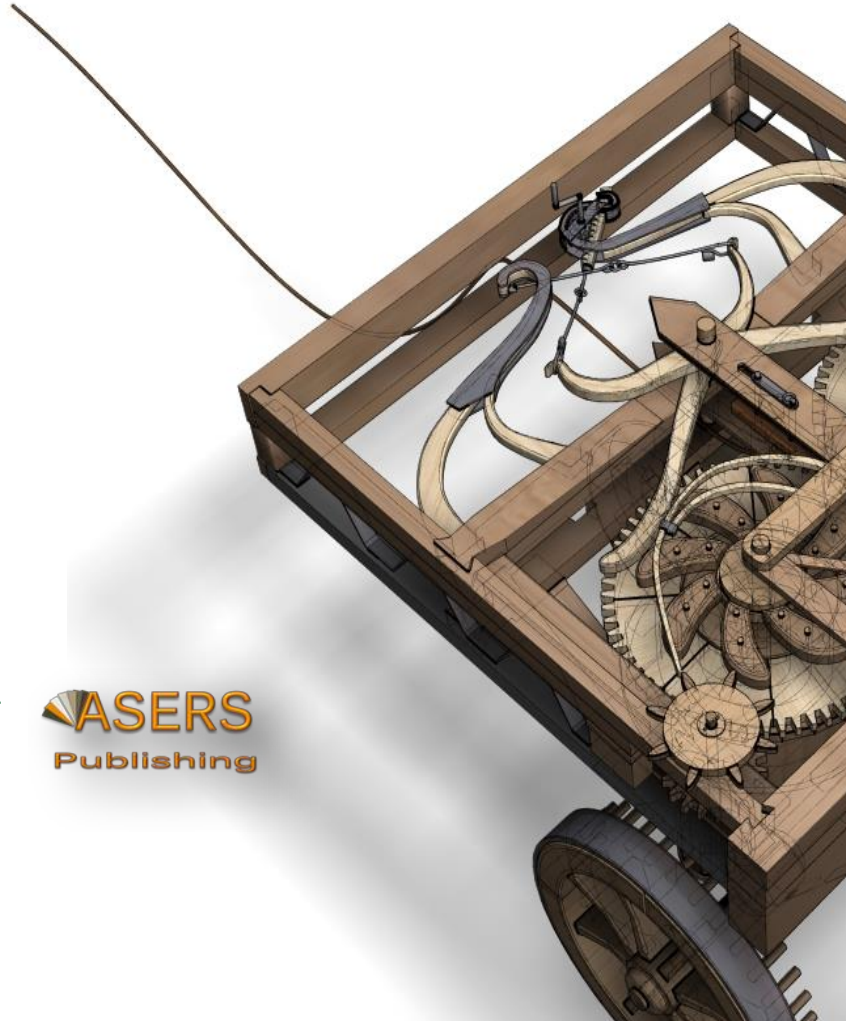
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# Call for Papers

## Winter Issues 2023

### Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism

**Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism** is an open access, peer-reviewed interdisciplinary research journal, aimed to publish articles and original research papers that contribute to the development of both experimental and theoretical nature in the field of Environmental Management and Tourism Sciences. The Journal publishes original research and seeks to cover a wide range of topics regarding environmental management and engineering, environmental management and health, environmental chemistry, environmental protection technologies (water, air, soil), pollution reduction at source and waste minimization, energy and environment, modelling, simulation and optimization for environmental protection; environmental biotechnology, environmental education and sustainable development, environmental strategies and policies.

Authors are encouraged to submit high quality, original works that discuss the latest developments in environmental management research and application with the certain scope to share experiences and research findings and to stimulate more ideas and useful insights regarding current best-practices and future directions in Environmental Management.

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## Bibliometric Analysis of Research Interest in Rural Tourism

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**Abstract:** Rural tourism is a form of tourism that takes place in non-urban areas and is characterized by traditional lifestyle, rural culture, and nature-based activities. Over time, its features drew attention not only to more and more visitors, but also to researchers, transforming it into one of the most active fields of scientific study. The main objective of this paper is to investigate the evolution of academic work in rural tourism and the main trends in this domain. Using VOS Viewer, we processed a number of 6,656 studies published between 1964 and 2022 and indexed by Scopus, the world's largest database for academic journals. Results showed a growing interest in rural tourism, with almost 800 articles published each year over the last couple of years. Different European organizations (e.g. British universities) and scientific journals (e.g. Tourism Management) proved to be highly influential, and through most cited authors and documents have shaped the perspective of academic communities on rural tourism. Finally, the cluster analysis of documents, countries, and word frequency in abstracts, titles, and keywords, based on relevance scores and term frequencies, allowed the mapping of bibliometric networks. Consequently, links and interrelations between all these elements were highlighted, as well as specific timelines showing the exact year when researchers, from different parts of the world, decided to focus on certain issues related to rural tourism and thus, managed to convert them into popular subject areas of study.

**Keywords:** rural tourism; bibliometric analysis; Scopus; VOS Viewer; publications; citations.

**JEL Classification:** R10; Y10; Z30.

### Introduction

Rural areas, generally characterized by low population densities, display traditional elements regarding lifestyle and social structures dominated by agriculture, forestry, livestock and/or fisheries activities that have shaped, to a

different extent, the world natural ecosystems. The new rural landscapes that emerged, nowadays cover more than 70% of the surface area of many countries, according to some sources, while others stipulate higher occupancy rate that reach 90% of the world's surface. Given this impressive percentage of dominance by rural landscapes, people may have practiced rural tourism in empirical ways from time immemorial within non-urban areas where the local communities used to be engaged in the above-mentioned sectors. However, while the first trips started in Antiquity and continued in the Middle Ages, for various reasons, including cultural, commercial and military ones, it was only during the 16th and 17th centuries that rural space truly became the point of interest for people who were fond of the correspondent natural and human built environment. Repeated tourist activities, revolving around rural culture, agriculture, craft and nature-based elements, culminated in the development of a new form of tourism that, by the end of the 20th century became a main subject of interest of both theoretical and practical significance. Thus, researchers and visitors of the rural area, along with investors and services providers have brought their contribution to the development of rural tourism transforming it in one of the most popular forms of tourism that, in addition to this, is also an effervescent scientific field of study, as results of this bibliometric analysis will continue to show.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1. Rural Tourism

Rural tourism, as a concept, is difficult to define (Lane, 1994; Rosalina *et al.*, 2021) because it could take different forms and develop '*within the vast range of physical, social and political environments and results in a wide diversity of outcomes*' (Sharpley and Roberts, 2004: 119). The definition of rural tourism varies from country to country (Lane and Kastenholz, 2015); some countries may include certain activities within this definition while others may not. Similarly, there are differences in the way researchers conceptualize rural tourism (Barbieri, 2019). For example, some researchers define rural tourism as synonymous to *agritourism* and *farm tourism* and use these terms interchangeably (Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005; Yang *et al.*, 2010), whereas other researchers see agritourism and farm tourism as niche forms that are part of a broader rural tourism (Phillip *et al.*, 2010). If we are to try a more general definition, we could say, following Lane (1994), that rural tourism, in its '*pure*' form, should be located in rural areas and should be rural in scale, character and functions.

First, tourists may have started to visit the countryside in the 19th century (Kohl, 2006; cited in Karali *et al.*, 2021); however, this praxis has not become really visible until the 1950s (Lane, 1994) when two things happened: rural-to-urban migration intensified and rural areas became more accessible to urbanites due to major improvements in the transportation systems. Lane and Kastenholz (2015) have distinguished three phases in the development of modern rural tourism:

- *Phase 1* – Started in the 1970s in Western Europe and it was seen as a way through which farmers could supplement their declining incomes from agriculture. Because, at the time, rural tourism was so closely connected to farming activities, it was also referred to as *agritourism* or *farm tourism*. Rural tourism was seen as a diversification tool that allowed small farmers to survive the crisis affecting rural space (Egresi, 2002).
- *Phase 2* – In this phase, which started approximately in the mid-1980s, rural tourism spread from Western Europe to other world regions (Central and Eastern Europe, North America, parts of Latin America and of Asia and Australia and New Zealand). Rural tourism became popular and started to attract many urbanites who opened tourism businesses in the countryside. Rural tourism also became more diversified in this phase. Besides farm holidays/agritourism, rural tourism started to incorporate other niche forms, such as *activity tourism* or *cultural and heritage tourism*.
- *Phase 3* – Starting with 2000, we see a decline of rural tourism activities in the more mature markets due to aging infrastructure, increased competition among businesses, and competition from other types of tourism. Interest in rural tourism will either die out, or will be rejuvenated through innovation.

This evolutionary model mirrors the basic phases of Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC). The timing of the phases varies from region to region and even from country to country (Lane and Kastenholz, 2015). While rural tourism in one country may already be in the third phase, in other countries it may still be in its incipient development.

### 1.2. Bibliometric Analyses in Rural Tourism

Rural tourism has been an important area for research over the last decades (Karali *et al.*, 2021). However, a quick search of the major databases will demonstrate that there are relatively few bibliometric studies on rural

tourism (Ruiz-Real *et al.*, 2020). In fact, as Karali *et al.* (2021) have pointed out, rural tourism is one of the least researched areas of tourism from a bibliometric perspective (Karali *et al.*, 2021).

Bibliometric analysis has more recently become a common tool for the review of prior literature (Khanra *et al.*, 2021). Bibliometric analyses are useful to monitor and evaluate the progress made in a certain area of study (Boyack *et al.*, 2005; Hall, 2011; Köseoğlu *et al.*, 2016; McBurney and Novak, 2002; Xiao and Smith, 2006), to identify the most popular areas of research (Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021), and to better understand the newest trends and future directions in this research domain (Bozok *et al.*, 2017; Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021).

Bibliometric analyses are increasingly employed by researchers because they allow them to identify current and emerging research clusters within the discipline (Donthu *et al.*, 2021; Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021) and to learn about relationships between keywords and between authors representing various academic and research units and countries (Khanra *et al.*, 2021; Park *et al.*, 2011; Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021). This research method is also useful to identify the most productive and most influential researchers, and contribution of universities, research institutions and countries to the development of certain areas of research (Park *et al.*, 2011; Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021).

The majority of the reviewed studies based their bibliometric analysis on between a few hundred (Adenidji and Özçatalbaş, 2021; Bozok *et al.*, 2017; Guan and Huang, 2023; Karali *et al.*, 2021; Priatmoko *et al.*, 2023; Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021; Ruhanen *et al.*, 2015; Singhania *et al.*, 2022) and almost 900 studies (Ruiz-Real *et al.*, 2020). The most comprehensive bibliometric analysis on rural tourism was undertaken by Lane and Kastenholz (2015) and included no less than 1,848 publications. On the other hand, a few such analyses were carried out using less than one hundred publications. This can be explained by the fact that the authors introduced some restrictive criteria when searching for relevant publications. For example, the study by Leković *et al.* (2020) considered only those publications that had at least ten Scopus citations. Thus, they ended up with only 23 usable publications for their bibliometric analysis. Another study, by Yılmaz (2019), considered only peer-reviewed bibliometric articles published in Turkish journals. Based on this criterion, only 48 articles were found. Finally, Ranjan and Chowdhary (2020) were interested only in those tourism articles indexed by Scopus that focused on the image of rurality. Only 75 articles published between 1980 and 2020 met these criteria.

The studies considered in previous bibliometric analyses were published over a period of between ten (Leković *et al.*, 2020; Priatmoko *et al.*, 2023; Yılmaz, 2019; Zeng *et al.*, 2022) and 40 years (Karali *et al.*, 2021; Ranjan and Choudhary, 2020; Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021). Most analyses of this type relied on either the Web of Science (Dimitrovski *et al.*, 2019; Lane and Kastenholz, 2015; Lulu *et al.*, 2023; Zeng *et al.*, 2022) or Scopus databases (Adenidji and Özçatalbaş, 2021; Priatmoko *et al.*, 2023; Ranjan and Choudhary, 2020; Singhania *et al.*, 2023), although some bibliometric studies were based on publications indexed by two databases, such as Web of Science and Scopus (Leković *et al.*, 2020; Guan and Huang, 2023; Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021; Yılmaz, 2019) or Scopus and JCR (Karali *et al.*, 2021). Further, some bibliometric analysis on rural tourism considered only journal articles (for example, Karali *et al.*, 2021), whereas others took into consideration a wider range of publication types, including book chapters or articles published in conference proceedings (Bozok *et al.*, 2017; Ruiz-Real *et al.*, 2020). Also, while some previous studies analyzed papers published exclusively in tourism and hospitality journals (Karali *et al.*, 2021) or, even more restrictively, in the four highest ranked journals in the tourism field (Ruhanen *et al.*, 2015), other studies considered any paper on rural tourism regardless of the focus of the journal (Lane and Kastenholz, 2015; Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021; Ruiz-Real *et al.*, 2020).

In terms of the software used, most bibliometric analyses performed on rural tourism academic documents employed VOS (as was also noted by Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021). VOS (Visualization of Similarities) Viewer was developed by Van Eck and Waltman (2010) and works by analyzing co-citations and co-occurrences of authors and of keywords or words that appear in the abstract or in the full text as well as other bibliographic coupling and then mapping these relationships for a better visualization (Leong *et al.*, 2021; Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021). We found only two bibliometric analyses on rural tourism academic documents that employed different software. Leković *et al.* (2020) used Harzing's (2007) *Publish or Perish* software to conduct a bibliometric analysis in order to review the most recent trends in rural tourism literature, while Lulu *et al.* (2023) employed CiteSpace. At the same time, Guan and Huang (2023) used CiteSpace in addition to VOS Viewer. According to the website mentioned '*Publish or Perish is a software program that retrieves and analyzes academic citations. It uses a variety of data sources to obtain the raw citations, then analyzes these and presents a range of citation metrics, including the number of papers, total citations and the h-index*'.

Most bibliometric studies on rural tourism were performed at global level and only one of the review articles we surveyed analyzed peer-reviewed articles published in Turkish journals (Yılmaz, 2019). Further, the great majority of bibliometric analyses were performed on rural tourism publications; however, a few such studies

focused on topics which are more or less synonymous, such as *agritourism* (Dimitrovski *et al.*, 2019; Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021). There are, also, studies that investigate the relationship between rural tourism and another area of research, such as rural development (Singhania *et al.*, 2022), *sustainable development* (Adenidji and Özçatalbaş, 2021), *rurality* (Ranjan and Chowdhary, 2020), residents' perception (Lulu *et al.*, 2023), wine production (Marco-Lajara *et al.*, 2023), or crafts (Fernández Bellver *et al.*, 2023).

Employing a bibliometric approach, Karali *et al.* (2021) found that most articles on rural tourism were published in the last decade. Also, while before 2000 most studies on rural tourism were from developed countries, after 2000 a greater number of scientific articles came from developing countries (Karali *et al.*, 2021). Ruiz-Real *et al.* (2020) indicated that most studies on rural tourism deal with Spain, Romania, and China. These findings were confirmed by Adenidji and Özçatalbaş (2021), who found that most studies related to rural tourism and sustainable development are from China. On the other hand, the most prolific authors on this subject are from Portugal, China, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Ruiz-Real *et al.*, 2020). A survey of rural tourism studies, published between 1980 and 2019, found that the most frequently covered topics in these studies are: community politics, power struggle, resource control and, more recently, climate change and epidemic (Karali *et al.*, 2021). Previous bibliometric analyses have shown that research on rural tourism is fragmented and that there are gaps in the literature that can be speculated by scholars who want to do research in rural tourism (Ruiz-Real *et al.*, 2020).

## 2. Research Questions and Methodology

The main objective of this study is to synthesize the literature on rural tourism and to identify past, present and future research trends. We also seek to understand how the literature on rural tourism has evolved over the last 60 years, what were the most common types of publications, and which academic fields were the most interested in this subject. Finally, we employ a range of descriptive statistics analyses to classify authors, organizations and journals, and even popular topics that set research direction. For these purposes, a series of questions were designed and were further correlated with the results' section, as follows:

1. Was there any growth in interest over the third phase of modern rural tourism development (i.e. starting with 2000) compared to the first decades of online publications?
2. Which are the most common types of publications?
3. What sort of academic fields were concerned about the rural tourism topic?
4. Which are the most productive and prominent research organizations and where are they from?
5. Which are the most prestigious scientific journals according to citations?
6. Who are the most productive and prominent authors in rural tourism field?
7. Which are the most cited papers in rural tourism of all times?
8. Which countries (according to authors' academic affiliation) produce the most research? Are they also the most cited ones?
9. Which topics have been the most debated during the 60 years of research in rural tourism studies?

For this bibliometric study we decided to use the Scopus database; firstly, because it provides access to older rural tourism studies (i.e. 1964) that are not available in other collections such as Web of Science (WoS). Secondly, Scopus includes a greater number of document results (over 7,600) compared to its counterparts (e.g. around 6,000 results on WoS for rural tourism publications), thus being the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed papers (Rauniyar *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, all data archives can be also visualized in VOS Viewer, the main software tool that was employed first in generating and measuring relevance scores, then in constructing and analysing bibliometric networks and clusters.

The initial search resulted in a number of 7,600 publications. Of these 6,825 publications were written in English and were further considered for our analysis. Another 169 publications were found to be lacking important data and were excluded from the list. In the end, a number of 6,656 publications were considered for this study.

Based on publications' year, type, academic fields, journals, researchers and their organizations, countries, most cited authors, papers and states that stood out for their occurrences, several conclusions related to this body of tourism literature were drawn. They were highlighted either by tabular or graphical representations including the mapping process as well. Undoubtedly, the most complex maps that have been created illustrate the most frequently debated topics and issues that have aroused great interest among researchers during the six decades of studies in the rural tourism matter.



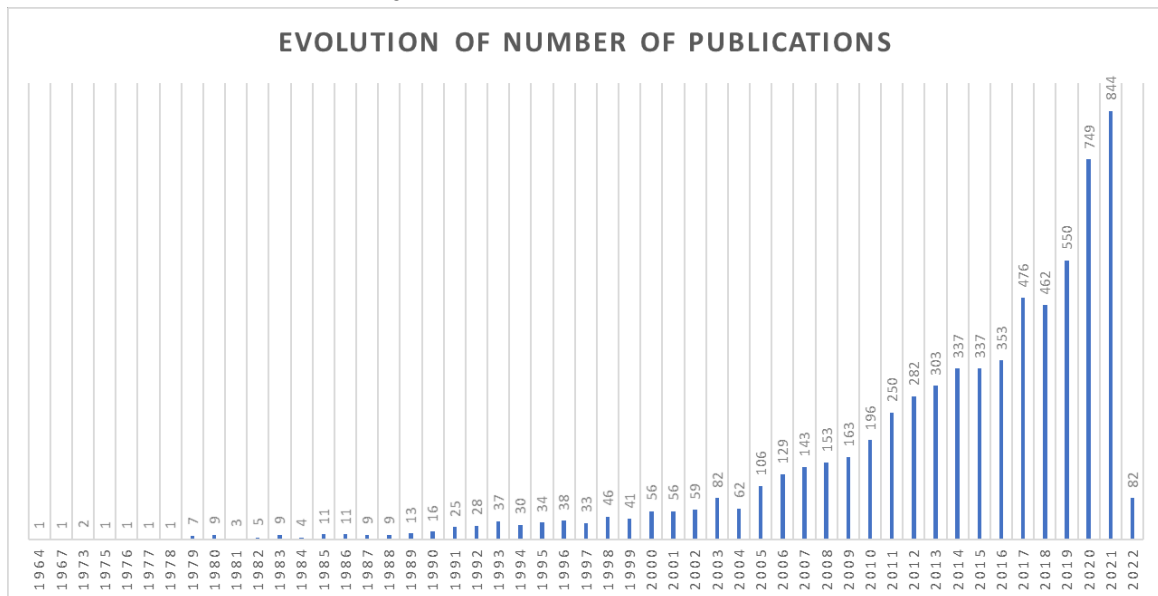
### 3. Analyses and Results

#### 3.1. Evolution of Online Publications Regarding Rural Tourism

The first paper on rural tourism was published in 1964 (Figure 1). Although probably not the first study ever conducted, it has the merit of being the oldest one made available online to Internet users worldwide.

Statistics show that the first two decades of research (assimilated with Phase 1 of modern rural tourism development) were less productive in terms of number of publications. On average, less than four studies were published each year during this time period (Table 1; Figure 1). However, in the next 10 years (1985-1994), meaning the beginning of Phase 2 of modern rural tourism, the average number of publications increased more than five fold to almost 20 per year. The average number of publications then doubled during the last five years of the twentieth century and again during the first five years of the twenty-first century, when Phase 3 of modern rural tourism also started. The same growth rate was maintained during the next five-year periods. Between 2015 and 2019, on average 435 studies were published and indexed by Scopus each year.

Figure 1. Evolution of number of publications



Source: Authors' research  
 Primary data: Scopus

In 2020, no less than 749 research studies on rural tourism were published which increased to 844 studies in 2021 (table 1) that seemingly 'random' perfectly coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1. Number of publications published over different periods of time

Phases of modern rural tourism development	Year	No. of publications per year (min. – max.)	Average no. (art./year)
PHASE 1	1964 - 1984	1 – 9	3.46
PHASE 2	1985 - 1994	9 – 37	18.90
	1995 - 1999	33 – 46	38.40
PHASE 3	2000 - 2004	56 – 82	63
	2005 - 2009	106 – 163	138.80
	2010 - 2014	196 – 337	273.60
	2015 - 2019	337 – 550	435.60
	2020 - present time	749 – 844 (2021) – 82 (february 2022)	796.50

Source: Authors' calculations  
 Primary data: Scopus

The reason could be twofold: firstly, authors had more time to invest in research during the lockdown that has required them to engage in online working and secondly, after the outbreak of the pandemic, tourists considered more and more rural areas as alternative to other destinations, contributing to the thriving of this form

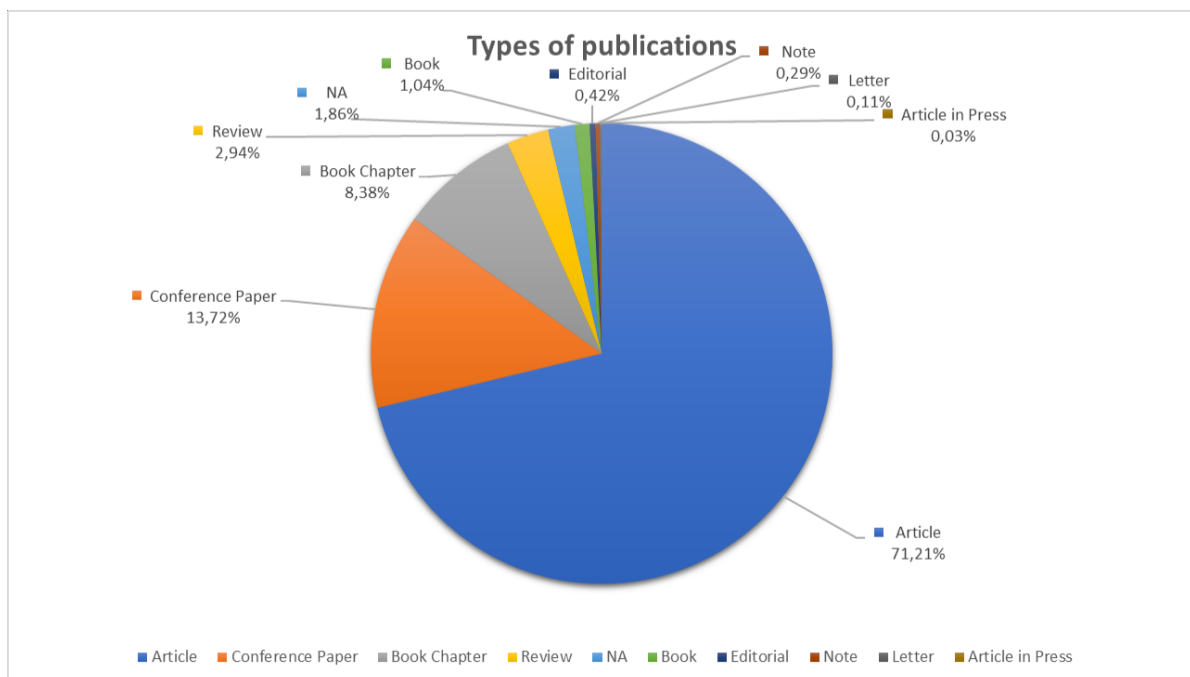
of tourism. Thus, the more attractive the activities for visitors in non-urban areas, the more interest paid by researchers in the study of motivation, satisfaction, impact, and effects etc. related to rural tourism.

By analyzing the growing trend, we observed that we are dealing with a number of publications organized in geometric progression. Given that the ratio between consecutive terms is the same (i.e. a period of five years) and that these series are the successive power of two (i.e. 50, 100, 200, 400, 800), we could estimate there could be 1,500-1,600 publications on rural tourism in 2025. These numbers could double in the following years (approximately 3,000 papers in 2030) if both authors and visitors continue to express interest in rural tourism. If the current rate of growth is maintained, the numbers could even pass the threshold of 10,000 studies in 2040.

### 3.2. Most Common Types of Publications

Of the 6,656 Scopus indexed publications considered for this study, 4,740 (or 71.4%) were articles published in different scholarly journals (Figure 2). Conference papers (913 publications) and book chapters (558) come next while rural tourism publications in the form of books (69), editorials (28), notes (19), letters (7) and articles in press (2) are much less widespread (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Types of publications



Source: Authors' calculations

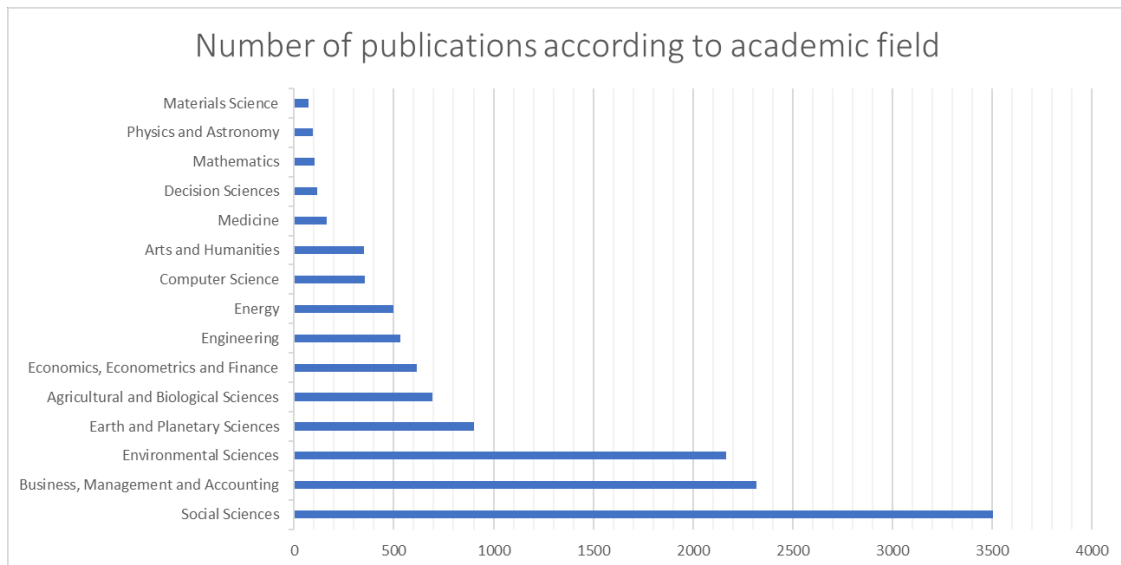
Primary data: Scopus

### 3.3. Academic Fields

To start with, it should be mentioned here that an article may be assigned to more than one academic field. As for academic fields, Figure 3 shows that most studies on rural tourism published between 1964 and 2022 belong to three scientific domains: Social Sciences (3,500 studies), Business, Management and Accounting and Environmental Sciences (over 2,000 studies each).

Further research showed that even less conventional sciences (e.g. Decision Sciences, Mathematics, Physics and Astronomy, Materials Science etc.), that have limited connection to rural tourism domain, claim some related studies, but they represent less than 1 percent of all publications.

Figure 3. Number of publications according to academic field



Source: Authors' research

Primary data: Scopus

### 3.4. Most Productive and Prominent Research Organizations

In order to determine the scholarly productivity, only those research organizations with at least three publications on rural tourism were included in this analysis. This process left us with 161 research centres, institutes and universities (with different faculties and departments), as well as specialised schools and colleges.

The results show that the highest number of publications by one organization is nine. Furthermore, only nine organisations have managed to produce more than five academic works as follows:

- 9 publications: Geography Department, The University of Leicester, United Kingdom and the Department of Geography and Economic History, Umeå University, Sweden (two organizations);
- 8 publications: Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China (one organization);
- 7 publications: Department of Tourism, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand; University Putra Malaysia, Malaysia and University of Tehran, Iran (three organizations);
- 6 publications: School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts, Taylor's University, Subang Jaya, Malaysia; School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong; National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland (three organizations).

The remaining 152 organisations published between three and five Scopus-indexed studies on rural tourism. The distribution is detailed below:

- 5 publications: 15 organisations, half of them from Europe and among them one from Romania - Bucharest University of Economic Studies;
- 4 publications: 32 organizations, 50% of these are from Europe - including two from Romania (University of Bucharest and University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest);
- 3 publications: 102 organizations, out of which one third are from Europe and three organizations are from Romania.

Another meaningful indicator for the prominence or prestige of an organization is the number of citations publications authored by researchers from this organization have received. When it comes to rural tourism research, each organization boast of between 0 and almost 800 citations; however, most organizations have received less than 50 citations for their publications (Table 2).

More than half of all organizations that have received 100 or more citations for their publications are from Europe (none from Romania). The highest ranked two organizations in Romania have received between 10 and 49 citations. Other two Romanian organizations received between one and nine citations (Table 2).

However, the organisations with the greatest number of publications related to rural tourism (more than five publications per organisation) are not necessarily the most cited ones.

Table 2. Number of citations according to research organizations

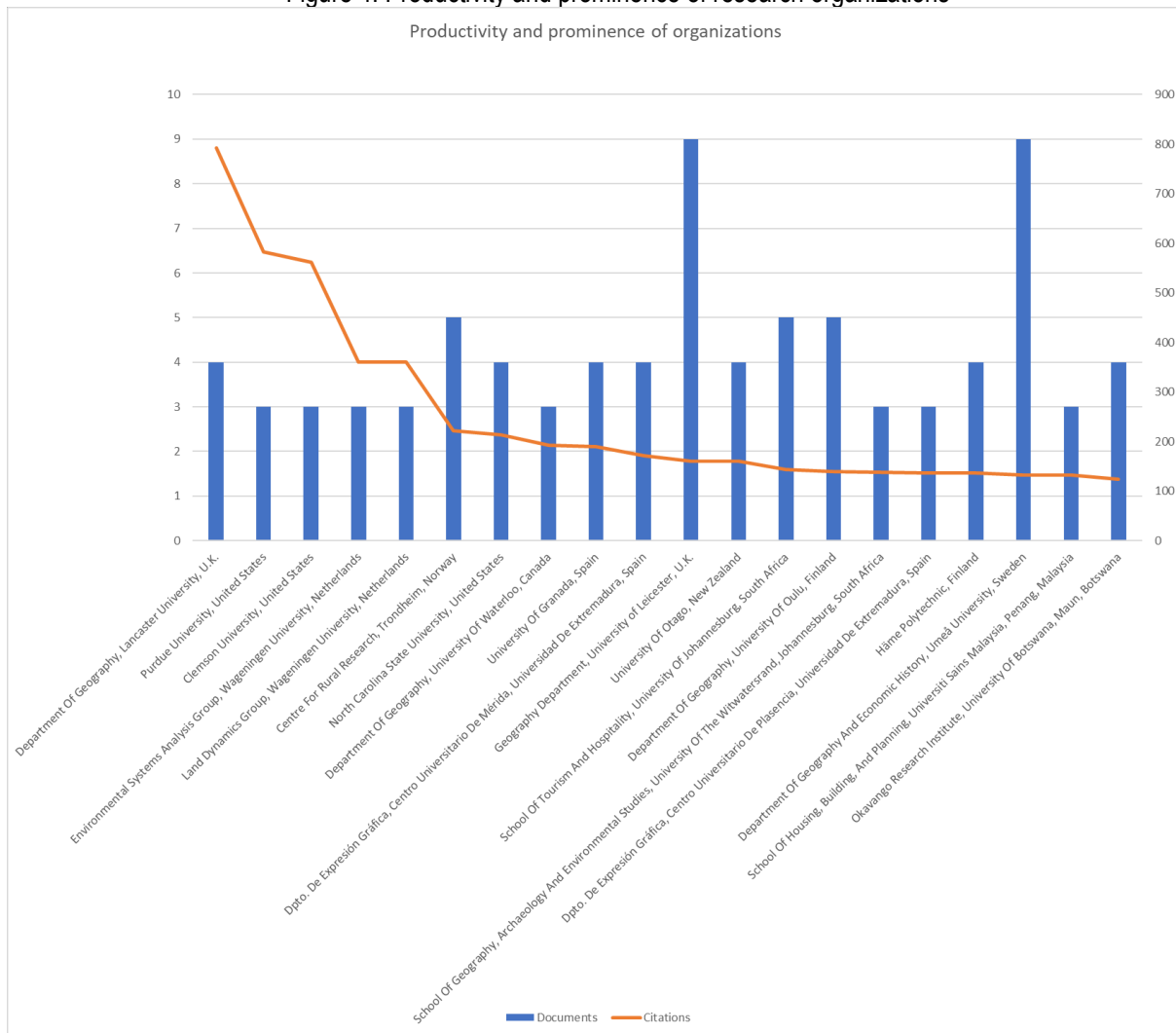
No. of citations	Total no. of organizations	No. of organizations in Europe	No. of organizations in Romania
750-999	1	1	0
500-749	2	0	0
250-499	2	2	0
100-249	22	11	0
50-99	29	7	0
10-49	52	21	2
1-9	48	18	2
0	5	3	2
Total	161	63	6

Source: Authors' calculations

Primary data: Scopus

Thus, in top ten most prominent universities, one can observe the prevalence of those institutes with three important studies on rural tourism and more than 350 citations each (e.g. Purdue University - 582, Clemson University - 562, Wageningen University - 361) or four publications that have received between 171 (University of Extremadura) and 792 citations (the Department of Geography, Lancaster University, United Kingdom) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Productivity and prominence of research organizations



Source: Authors' research

Primary data: Scopus

In addition to United Kingdom, Netherlands, Norway and Spain, other European countries that stand out are Finland and Sweden, both in Top 20 due to the three universities whose publications on rural tourism have received more than 130 citations each.

At the other end of the spectrum, publications by five organizations (two of them from Romania) received no citations so far and publications by ten organizations (of which two from Europe) received only one citation.

### 3.5. Prestigious Scientific Journals According to Citations

In general, it is considered that the more citations a journal receives, the more prestigious it is. For this reason, we have limited our analysis to those journals that have been cited at least 100 times. It turned out that 161 journals find themselves in this situation as follows:

- more than 10,000 citations/journal: one journal – Tourism Management (10,367);
- 5,001 – 10,000 citations/journal: one journal – Annals of Tourism Research (8,644);
- 1,001 – 5,000 citations/journal: eight journals – Journal of Sustainable Tourism (4,747); Journal of Travel Research (3,518); Journal of Rural Studies (2,044); Sustainability (1,837); Tourism Geographies (1,366); Current Issues in Tourism (1,310); International Journal of Tourism Research (1,153); Land Use Policy (1,019);
- 501 – 1,000 citations/journal: nine journals – Sociologia Ruralis, Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism, World Development, Ecological Economics, Landscape and Urban Planning, Tourism Management Perspectives, Tourism Economics, Geoforum, International Journal of Hospitality Management;
- 251 – 500 citations/journal: 33 journals – e.g. Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing, Journal of Vacation Marketing, Tourism Recreation Research etc.;
- 151 – 250 citations/journal: 48 journals – e.g. Journal of Cleaner Production, Nature, PLoS One etc.;
- 100 – 150 citations/journal: 61 journals – e.g. Journal of Small Business Management, Canadian Geographer, Area etc.

Most journals in this list (88.2%) have received less than 500 citations.

### 3.6. Most Productive and Prominent Authors in Rural Tourism

Productivity and prominence can be measured both for institutions and for individual authors. Here we considered only those authors that, by the end of February 2022, published more than three studies on rural tourism. A number of 290 authors met this criterion. The most productive authors are listed in figure 5. A summary of this analysis follows below:

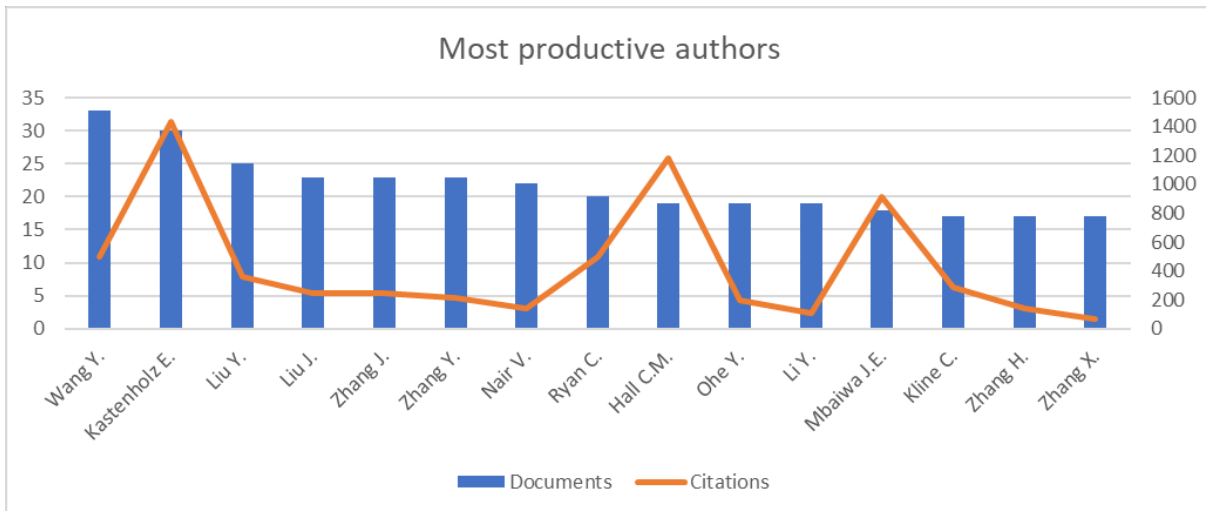
- 30 – 33 publications: two researchers (0.68%);
- 20 – 29 publications: six researchers (2.06%);
- 15 – 19 publications: nine researchers (3.10%);
- 10 – 14 publications: 31 researchers (10.68%);
- 6 – 9 publications: 139 researchers (47.93%);
- 5 publications: 103 researchers (35.51%).

One can see, from this summary, that the majority of authors (83.44%) have published less than 10 articles in the scientific field of rural tourism and only 3% have 20 or more publications. The most productive researchers appear to be Wang, Y. (with 33 publications on rural tourism) and Kastenholz, E. (with 30 publications), followed by Y. Liu, J. Liu, J. Zhang, Y. Zhang, V. Nair and C. Ryan (with between 20 and 25 publications (Figure 5).

In terms of citations received by researchers, we can summarize the results of our analysis as follows:

- 1,500 – 1,812 citations: two researchers (0.68%);
- 1,000 – 1,499 citations: four researchers (1.37%);
- 500 – 999 citations: 14 researchers (4.82%);
- 100 – 499 citations: 108 researchers (37.24%);
- 0 – 99 citations: 162 researchers (55.86%).

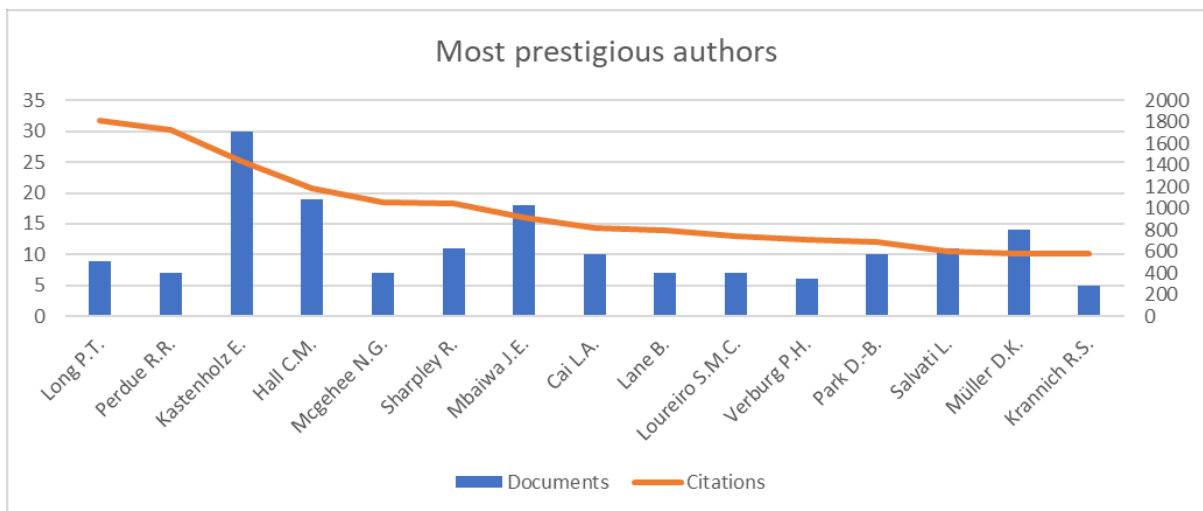
Figure 5. Most productive authors



Source: Authors' research  
 Primary data: Scopus

It can be noticed that only six researchers (2%) received 1,000 citations or more. The most cited authors of rural tourism studies are P.T. Long (1,812 citations), R.R. Perdue (1,730 citations) and E. Kastenholz (1,436 citations). While for Long, as first author, the most important study continues to be *Rural Resident Tourism Perceptions and Attitudes by Community Level of Tourism*, written in co-authorship with Perdue R.R. and Allen L., for the second most prestigious researcher in the world (i.e. Perdue R.R.), the paper that received most citations (also written in co-authorship with Long P.T. and Allen L.) remains *Resident support for tourism development*. Kastenholz's most cited works remain: *Segmenting tourism in rural areas: The case of north and central Portugal*; *Understanding and managing the rural tourism experience - The case of a historical village in Portugal*; and *'Cultural proximity' as a determinant of destination image*.

Figure 6. Most prestigious authors



Source: Authors' research  
 Primary data: Scopus

The other three researchers that received more than 1,000 citations are C.M. Hall (1,184 citations), N.G. McGehee (1,052 citations) and R. Sharpley (1,049 citations) (figure 6). Of these authors, McGehee has only seven studies on rural tourism indexed by Scopus, but, as it was stated before, prominence or prestige is not necessarily determined by the number of articles published.

As a conclusion that we can draw from the two graphical representations is that the top 15 most productive researchers is dominated by Asians, while the top 15 most prestigious authors is mainly composed of those who work at organizations of the Anglo-Saxon world.

### 3.7. Most Cited Papers in Rural Tourism

Considering that in the previous sections we have conducted an analysis of prominence from a macro perspective, by establishing which are the most prestigious organizations that have brought their contribution to the development of rural tourism, and then, we continued by listing those authors who enjoy the best reputation in this field, it is now time to focus on those specific papers that received the highest number of citations over the years.

The situation at the level of publication can be summarized as follows:

- 500 – 599 citations: five publications (0.07%);
- 400 – 499 citations: one publication (0.01%);
- 300 – 399 citations: twelve publications (0.18%);
- 200 – 299 citations: 32 publications (0.48%);
- 100 – 199 citations: 122 publications (1.83%);
- 50 – 99 citations: 281 publications (4.22%);
- 20 – 49 citations: 770 publications (11.56%);
- 10 – 19 citations: 830 publications (12.46%);
- 5 – 9 citations: 963 publications (14.46%);
- 1 – 4 citations: 1,925 publications (28.92%);
- 0 citations: 1,715 publications (25.76%).

Our analysis has shown that one-quarter of all publications on rural tourism have not been cited yet and another quarter received only between one and four citations. Only around 2.5% of the publications received 100 or more citations. Top five most cited papers, with more than 500 citations, illustrates studies conducted at almost 20 years apart (from 1990 to 2009) and authors who also stood out in top five most prestigious researchers, namely, Perdue R.R. and McGehee N.G., who also owe their reputation to the publications from this top (Table 3).

Table 3. Top 10 list of the most cited publications

Author	Year of publication	Title of research	No. of citations
Sims R.	2009	Food, place and authenticity: Local food and the sustainable tourism experience	597
Cai L.A.	2002	Cooperative branding for rural destinations	557
Bessiere J.	1998	Local development and heritage: traditional food and cuisine as tourist attractions in rural areas	534
Perdue R.R.	1990	Resident support for tourism development	526
McGehee N.G.	2004	Factors predicting rural residents' support of tourism	503
Andereck K.L.	2000	The relationship between residents' attitudes toward tourism and tourism development options	420
Briedenhann J.	2004	Tourism routes as a tool for the economic development of rural areas- vibrant hope or impossible dream?	396
Park D.-B.	2009	Segmentation by motivation in rural tourism: A Korean case study	393
Bennett N.J.	2014	Why local people do not support conservation: Community perceptions of marine protected area livelihood impacts, governance and management in Thailand	389
Pearce D.	1989	Tourist development. Second edition	378

Source: Authors' research

Primary data: Scopus

If we were to establish the main preoccupations of the researchers solely based on the above Top 10 list of most cited documents, we could clearly identify the most popular areas of study, starting from tourism development and sustainability, as general directions, to more specific ones, based on attitude, motivation, and perception of both tourists and residents.

### 3.8. Most Productive and Prominent Countries According to Authors' Academic Affiliation

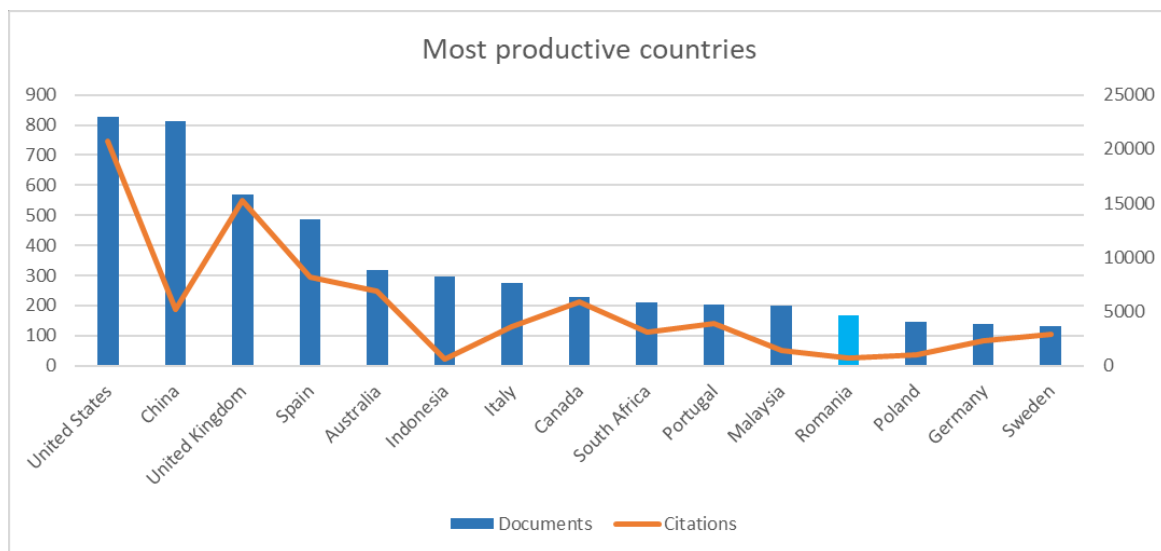
We have also analysed the number of studies on rural tourism and the number of citations they have received based on the authors' country of academic affiliation. Here, we need to keep in mind that a publication can have authors from multiple countries. The results of the analysis have shown that the authors of the 6,656 publications

come from a total of 136 countries. Based on the number of studies published we could distinguish seven categories of countries:

- 500 – 999 publications: three countries (2.20%);
- 200 – 499 publications: seven countries (5.14%);
- 100 – 199 publications: twelve countries (8.82%);
- 50 – 99 publications: 15 countries (11.02%);
- 15 – 49 publications: 29 countries (21.32%);
- 5 – 14 publications: 26 countries (19.11%);
- 1 – 4 publications: 44 countries (32.35%).

It came out that one third of the states that were part of our sample produced less than five articles each and almost half of this category is represented by countries with a single publication. Most of these countries seem to be from Africa (e.g. Benin, Comoros, Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea). The countries with the greatest number of publications are the United States and China (around 800 each). These are followed by the United Kingdom and Spain (approximately 500 publications each). It is encouraging to see Romania among these countries, in top 15 most productive states in the world, and in top five European states, and also displaying more articles than the countries that have a tradition in rural tourism, such as Germany and Poland (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Most productive countries according to authors' academic affiliation



Source: Authors' calculations

Primary data: Scopus

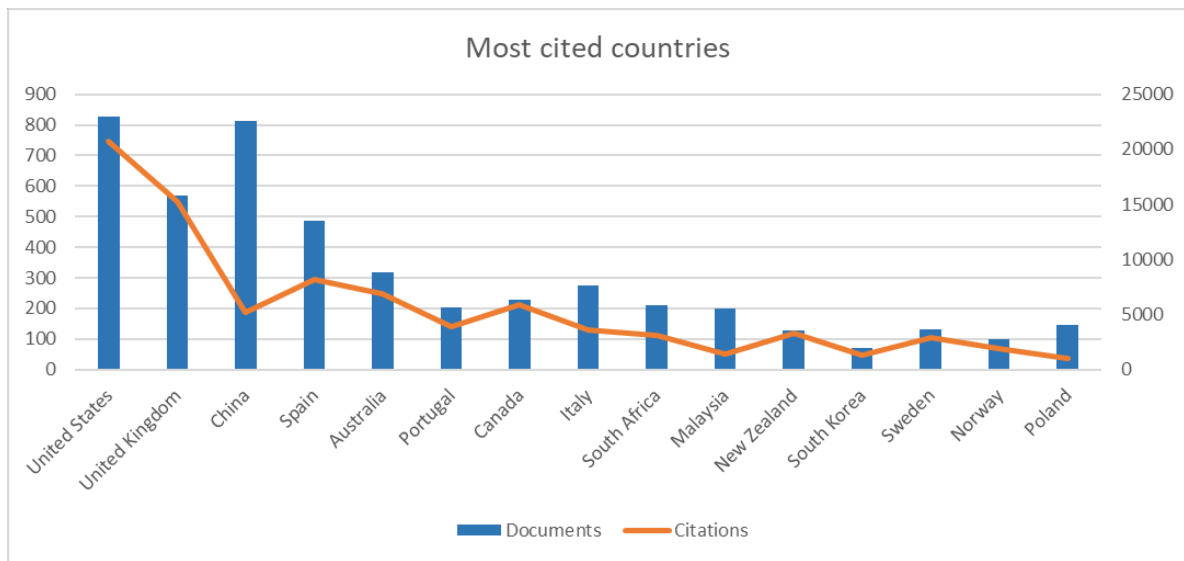
Analysing the number of citations received, the 136 countries can be divided into the following categories:

- 20,000 – 24,999 citations: one country (0.73%);
- 10,000 – 19,999 citations: one country (0.73%);
- 5,000 – 9,999 citations: four countries (2.94%);
- 1,000 – 4,999 citations: 18 countries (13.23%);
- 500 – 999 citations: 16 countries (11.76%);
- 100 – 499 citations: 31 countries (22.96%);
- 50 – 99 citations: 16 countries (11.76%);
- 10 – 49 citations: 31 countries (22.79%);
- 0 – 9 citations: 18 countries (13.23%).

As indicated above, almost 50% of the analysed countries received less than 100 citations each, while 24 countries (or approximately 17.5% of the total number of studied countries) received 1,000 or more citations. The greatest number of citations was received by the United States (20,749), the United Kingdom (15,274), and Spain (8,172). Other countries that received more than 5,000 citations are Australia, Canada, and China (Figure 8).



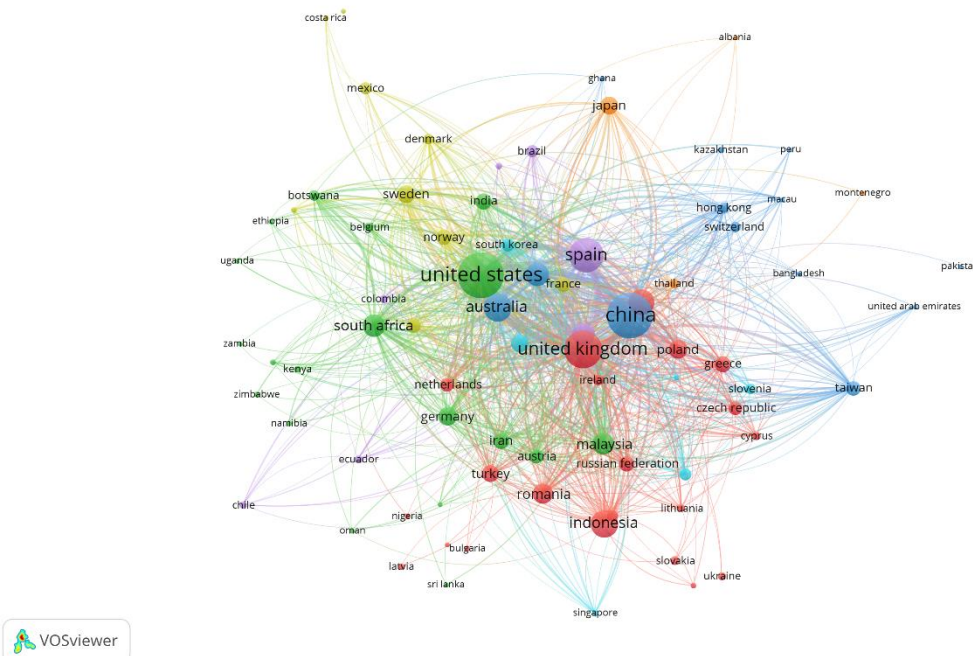
Figure 8. Most cited countries according to authors' academic affiliation



Source: Authors' calculations  
 Primary data: Scopus

By combining the two criteria, namely the number of documents of a country (productivity) for which we have established a minimum value of 5, and the number of citations of a country (prominence) whose minimum settlement amount was limited to 10, seven different clusters related to citations between countries emerged, including a total of 80 states, as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Citation countries



Source: Authors' research via VOS Viewer  
 Primary data: Scopus

The bibliometric analysis allowed us to visualize and understand more meaningful connections between countries by means of citations between them (Figure 9). It can be observed how United States (green cluster), United Kingdom (red cluster), and China (dark blue cluster) stand out not only within their clusters, with total link strength values that exceed 2500 (Table 4), but also at global level. Next in line comes Spain, which shares the

same purple cluster with Portugal, the sixth most important country according to its total link strength (1612). Australia (fifth place at global level – 1731 link strength) and Canada (seventh place at global level – 1577 link strength) demonstrate important collaborations with China and other countries within the dark blue cluster having the most privileged positions in comparison with the second and third best rated citation countries in all clusters. Other values and relationships, sometimes justified by common cultural background, other times by geographical proximity, are exhaustively listed in the table below (Table 4).

Table 4. Citation countries and correspondent clusters

Cluster number and colour	No. of countries in cluster	Citation countries in cluster	Total link strength
1 - red	21	Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Egypt, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom	United Kingdom (3824), Italy (1401), Poland (592), Greece (471), Romania (419), Ireland (405), Indonesia (331), Netherlands (307), Russian Federation (292), Turkey (257), Hungary (223) etc.
2 - green	19	Austria, Belgium, Botswana, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, India, Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Namibia, Oman, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, United States, Zambia, Zimbabwe	United States (4111), South Africa (1105), Malaysia (865), Germany (439), Austria (409), Iran (400), Botswana (355), India (275) etc.
3 - dark blue	13	Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Ghana, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, Macau, Pakistan, Peru, Switzerland, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates	China (2879), Australia (1731), Canada (1577), Taiwan (551), Hong Kong (440) etc.
4 - yellow	9	Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Venezuela	Sweden (768), Norway (732), Finland (586), France (507), Denmark (281) etc.
5 - purple	7	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Portugal, Spain	Spain (1952), Portugal (1612), Colombia (112), Brazil (107) etc.
6 - light blue	7	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel, New Zealand, Serbia, Singapore, Slovenia, South Korea	New Zealand (820), South Korea (808), Israel (423), Serbia (267) etc.
7 - orange	4	Albania, Japan, Montenegro, Thailand	Japan (350), Thailand (208) etc.

Source: Authors' research

Primary data: Scopus

### 3.9. Most Debated Topics of Research in Rural Tourism

In order to determine which topics have been most debated during the 60 years of research in rural tourism studies, we analysed word frequencies in abstracts, titles, and keywords (Table 5).

Table 5. Top 10 list of the most frequently used terms in abstracts, titles, and keywords

ABSTRACTS		TITLES		KEYWORDS	
Terms	Occurrences	Terms	Occurrences	Terms	Occurrences
community	3276	tourism	1282	rural tourism	1045
village	2109	rural tourism	598	tourism	725
tourist	1809	development	558	rural development	309
landscape	1155	case study	451	sustainable development	242
experience	1135	village	395	sustainability	191
tourism development	1096	case	369	sustainable tourism	169
place	1087	community	321	rural areas	157
agriculture	915	analysis	319	China	145
quality	891	China	309	ecotourism	142
income	858	impact	282	agritourism	137

Source: Authors' research

Primary data: Scopus

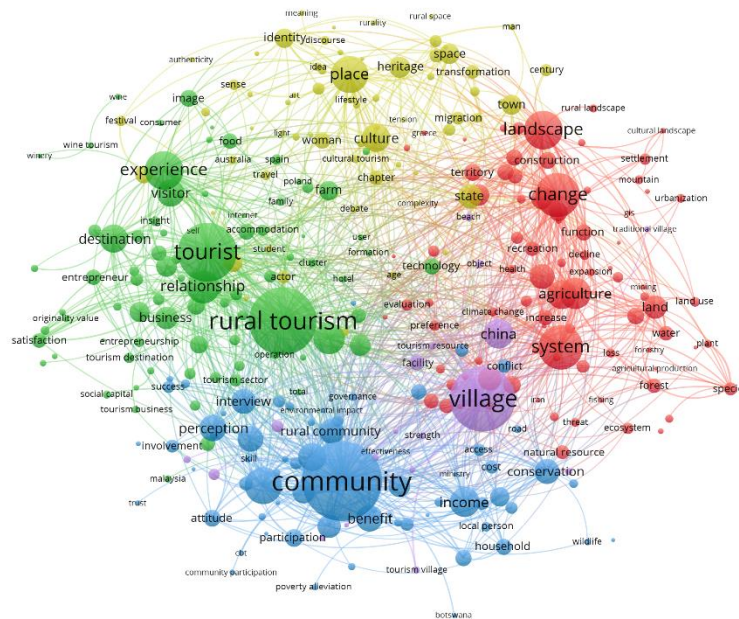
A cross-sectional analysis shows that, except for the word *tourism*, which sets the context of the research, the only term that can be found in all three sections is the one indicating *development*, a direction that most of the studies refer to as a general objective. However, while the titles and abstracts have in common the *community* and the *village* that could both be assimilated to the socio-cultural side of the rural universe, the overlapping of

keywords and abstracts reveals the economic side by means of income generator activities such as *agriculture* and *agritourism*.

### 3.9.1. Co-Occurrence of Words in Abstracts

By considering only terms with more than 50 frequencies, five clusters, composed of 320 items, emerged as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Co-occurrence of words in abstracts



Source: Authors' research via VOS Viewer  
Primary data: Scopus

As previously stated, and illustrated in table 5, *tourism development* could be considered the leitmotif of many studies regarding rural areas. However, only by considering the network generated by VOS Viewer and the blue cluster, one can better understand that this concept is closely linked to that of *community* and *income* (Figure 10). According to further connections, the solution could either come from different *stakeholders* and even from *government* or could rely on forms of *conservation* and *ecotourism* (Table 6).

Table 6. Terms' frequency in abstracts and correspondent clusters

Cluster number and colour	No. of words in cluster	Examples of abstracts' words occurrences (min. 550) in cluster	Relevance scores (of the previous examples)
1 - red	86	landscape (1155), agriculture (915), population (815), source (640) land (570) etc.	all 5 examples < 1
2 - green	83	tourist (1809), experience (1135), quality (891), destination (789), visitor (780), business (612), literature (576), farmer (556), farm (512) etc.	experience (10.632) destination (11.681) farm (10.322) all other six examples < 1
3 - dark blue	68	community (3276), tourism development (1096), income (858), resident (806), conservation (685), perception (666), stakeholder (654), local community (635), government (592), ecotourism (515) etc.	all 10 examples < 1
4 - yellow	65	place (1087), state (669), heritage (554), space (545), identity (520) etc.	identity (10.695) all other examples < 1
5 - purple	18	village (2109), China (850) etc.	both examples < 1

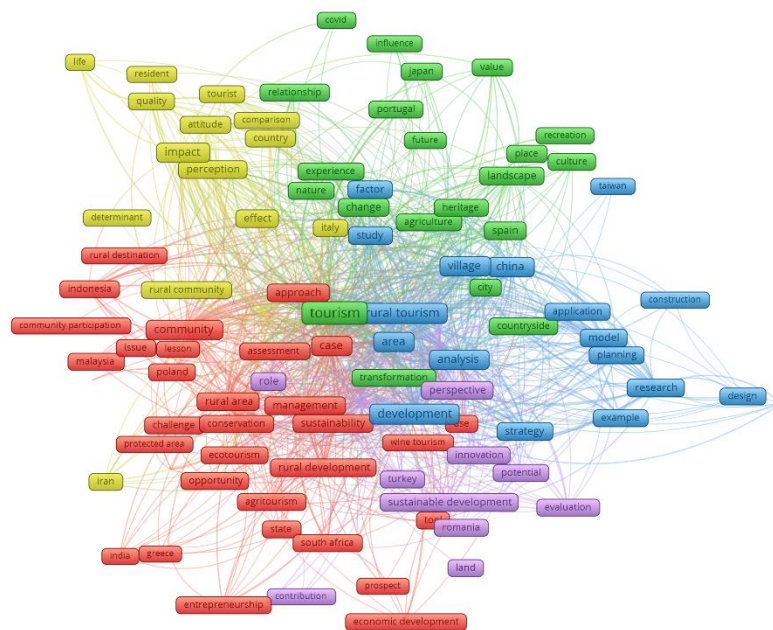
Source: Authors' research  
Primary data: Scopus

As for the *tourist* term that dominates the green cluster, the *experience* seems to matter most, which is why both *quality* and interesting *destinations* are mainly sought. Based on terms' frequency in abstracts, these ideas are highly debated in the literature since both values of occurrence (789 and more) and relevance scores (over 10.500) indicate the focus of publications towards them. Finally, while *landscape* and *agriculture* go hand in hand and share the same red cluster, *place* and *identity*, most often correlated with *culture* (figure 10), also tend to become inseparable. The fact is that the two terms complete each other since *place* seems to be rather general, whereas *identity* could represent specific topics covered by dedicated researchers. This is also confirmed by low relevance score for *place* (0.544) in contrast to the high relevance score for *identity* (10.695).

### 3.9.2. Co-Occurrence of Words in Titles

Only those words that appear in titles at least 25 times were considered for this analysis. Thus, five clusters resulted, as shown in Figure 11, consisting of 110 items.

Figure 11. Co-occurrence of words in titles



Source: Authors' research via VOS Viewer  
 Primary data: Scopus

In order to better operate with the most frequently used words in the titles of publications, a supplemental limit was established: minimum 150-occurrences, which left us with 22 terms (Table 7).

Table 7. Terms' frequency in titles and correspondent clusters

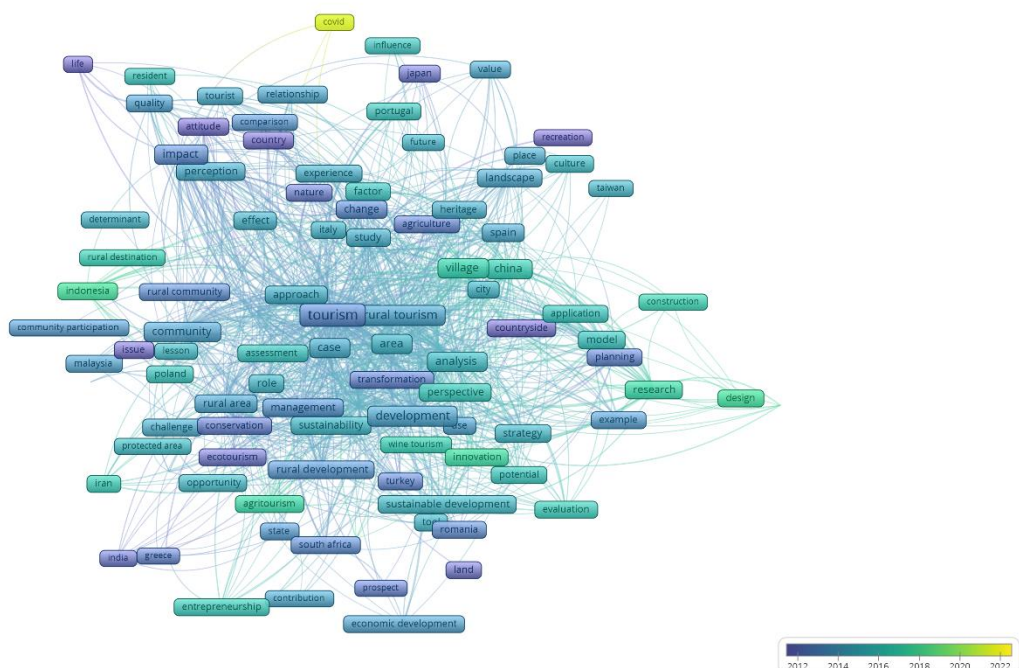
Cluster number and colour	No. of words in cluster	Examples of titles' words occurrences (min. 150) in cluster	Relevance scores (of the previous examples)
1 - red	38	case (369), community (321), approach (202), management (172)	all four examples < 1
2 - green	23	tourism (1282), landscape (181)	both examples < 1
3 - dark blue	19	rural tourism (598), development (558), village (395), analysis (319), China (309), area (264), study (215), research (181), model (173), strategy (165)	research (17.563) all other examples < 1
4 - yellow	16	impact (282), tourism development (208)	both examples < 1
5 - purple	14	case study (451), region (278), perspective (224), role (189)	all four examples < 1

Source: Authors' research  
 Primary data: Scopus

Even so, each cluster has maintained at least two examples that we can refer to. While the green one incorporates the best rated term, *tourism* (with 1282 occurrences), the blue cluster is the best represented one, catching the eye by two aspects. Firstly, by the highest number of words that met our criterion, more precisely, 10 examples with more than 150-occurrences, of which 50% are part of the Top 10 list of the most frequently used terms in titles (Table 5; Table 7). Secondly, it offers a wider perspective of the interconnections between words, no matter how low the relevance score is (< 1) and thus, how less specific the topics appear (e.g. rural tourism, development, village, analysis). In the end, the blue cluster is the only one within which we could find a high relevance score (i.e. 17.563) for a quite general term, namely *research*.

Due to the timeline function available in VOS Viewer, the mapping of the previous networks and links was also made according to the year when researchers started to cover the following topics (Figure 12). It turned out that older preoccupations regard nature, agriculture, countryside, conservation, and ecotourism subjects, whereas the newest ones refer to COVID-19, innovation, and design in the field of rural tourism studies.

Figure 12. Co-occurrence of words in titles according to correspondent timeline



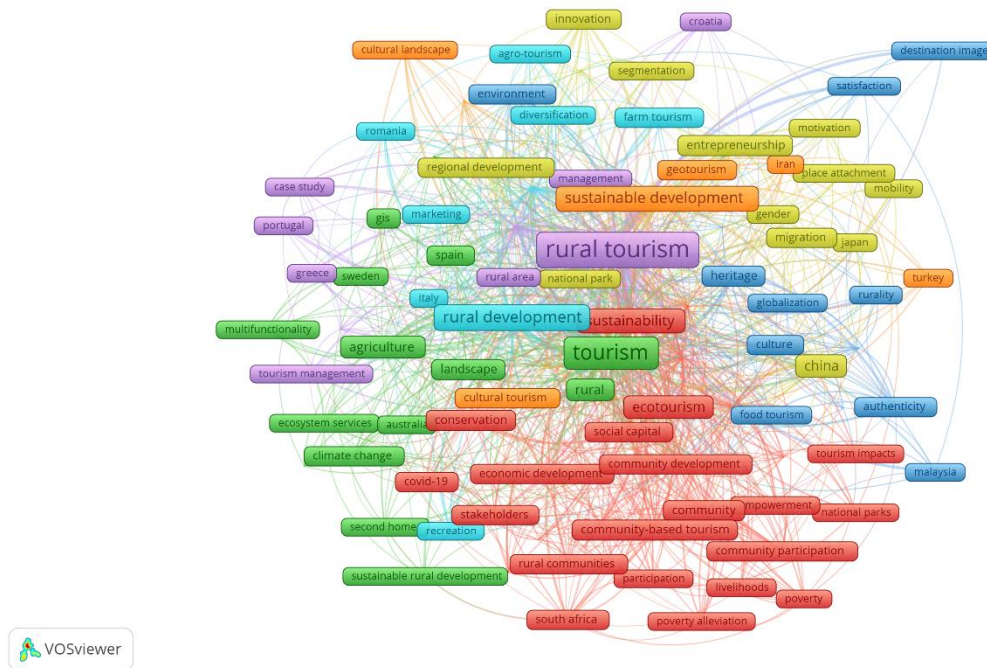
Source: Authors' research via VOS Viewer  
 Primary data: Scopus

### 3.9.3. Co-Occurrence of Words in Keyword Lists

Finally, by taking into consideration the terms with more than 20 frequencies in the keyword lists, seven clusters came to light (Figure 13), comprising 105 items as shown below.

As we are dealing with a type of analysis where occurrence of words coincides with the total link strength, in terms of order from largest to smallest values (Table 8), both hierarchies follow the same line, enabling a better observation of clusters' configuration. This time, the purple one stands out due to the specific nature of most studies held under the aegis of *rural tourism* (Figure 13). Given the characteristics of this form of tourism, which takes place in *rural areas*, that sometimes require special *management*, we can totally understand the existing connections within this cluster. Next, the light blue cluster reveals the directions that both phenomenon and its research focused on, namely *rural development*, sometimes via *agritourism*. In the end, the latest trends in research seem to be introduced by the red cluster. On one hand, it highlights terms with an average of 150 occurrences such as sustainability, sustainable tourism, and ecotourism that are still trendy; and, on the other hand, it shows some possible further research directions, the case of COVID-19 being the most relevant of all (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Co-occurrence of words in keyword lists



Source: Authors' research via VOS Viewer

Primary data: Scopus

Table 8. Terms' frequency in keyword lists and correspondent clusters

Cluster number and colour	No. of words in cluster	Examples of keyword lists' terms occurrences (min. 100) in cluster	Total link strength (of the previous examples)
1 - red	30	sustainability (191) sustainable tourism (169) ecotourism (142) tourism development (123)	sustainability (157.00) sustainable tourism (117.00) ecotourism (102.00) tourism development (78.00)
2 - green	17	tourism (725) rural (115)	tourism (503.00) rural (90.00)
3 - dark blue	16	-	-
4 - yellow	15	China (145)	China (103.00)
5 - purple	10	rural tourism (1045) rural areas (157)	rural tourism (633.00) rural areas (124.00)
6 - light blue	9	rural development (309) agritourism (137)	rural development (236.00) agritourism (102.00)
7 - orange	8	sustainable development (242)	sustainable development (188.00)

Source: Authors' research

Primary data: Scopus

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has the advantage of being the most comprehensive one so far, in terms of number of publications (6,656) and in terms of years (58) that were taken into consideration. On one hand, approximately 5,000 documents were added to the previous bibliometric analysis made by Lane and Kastenholtz in 2015. On the other hand, in comparison with other studies undertaken in 2020 or 2021 (which referred to 40 years of research) almost two decades of new contributions were included in the present evaluation of the progress related to the area of rural tourism studies. Furthermore, except for the language barrier and some lacking data that eliminated around 950 documents from the very beginning, no other restrictive criteria were applied. Neither quantitative, nor qualitative limits such as number of Scopus citations, types of documents or main focus of the publication have influenced the results, leading to a broader perspective and understanding of the field at global.

It is worth mentioning that our study not only confirmed the impressive number of publications released in the last decade as Karali *et al.* (2021) did, but also correlated the average of 800 papers/year with the COVID-19 Pandemic. Furthermore, it clearly stated the propensity of authors for articles, with more than 70% of all documents ever written being classified as so, irrespective of the academic field of the researcher. Apart from the observation that more than a quarter of the papers are currently indexed by Social Sciences, our study highlighted the British universities as the most productive and the most prominent organizations in the field of rural tourism. With more than 10,000 citations, Tourism Management turned out to be the most prestigious scientific journal that authors have selected to publish their work. Speaking about authors, this study drew the conclusion that although nowadays Asians (China) are the most productive researchers, the Anglo-Saxons (United States and United Kingdom) remain the most prestigious figures of the academic field of rural tourism, placing the three countries in every top that concerns outstanding results. In the end, the final analyses revealed not only the most debated topics such as development and sustainability, local communities and villages, agriculture and landscapes, but also the latest trends which nowadays are still dealing with the COVID-19 Pandemic impact and effects, community-based tourism, destination image, place attachment, innovation and experience, management and strategy.

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### Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

**Bianca Sorina Răcăşan:** contribution and relevant actions, but not limited to Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Data curation, Funding acquisition.

**Cristian-Emanuel Adorean:** contribution and relevant actions, but not limited to Methodology, Software, Formal analysis, Data curation, Validation, Visualization.

**István Egresi:** contribution and relevant actions, but not limited to Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review and editing, Funding acquisition.

**Ştefan Dezsi:** contribution and relevant actions, but not limited to Project administration, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Funding acquisition.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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