

Acquirements of three decades of literature on cultural tourism

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CITATION

Benhaida S, Saddou H, Safaa L, et al. (2024). Acquirements of three decades of literature on cultural tourism. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*. 8(6): 3817. <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i6.3817>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 24 December 2023

Accepted: 16 January 2024

Available online: 13 June 2024

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Abstract: Cultural tourism, an important component of the wider tourism industry, has received significant attention due to the complex interplay between cultural heritage and tourism experiences. This form of tourism invites tourists to discover the arts, traditions, and lifestyles of diverse communities, thereby enriching intercultural encounters. Examining the rapidly evolving field of cultural tourism research, this article looks at its many facets, highlighting its growth, thematic focus, and global importance. In order to better understand the wealth and highlight the body of work, this study undertakes a bibliometric analysis of the concept of cultural tourism. This exploration employs bibliometric searching of journals indexed in the web of science database from 1996 to 2023, using the biblioshiny software in rstudio. This approach provides a global perspective, revealing a prolific and multidisciplinary production of the concept of cultural tourism. The study identifies a total of 369 articles published between 1996 and 2023, involving 781 authors and 244 journals. The results underline the widespread engagement with the subject across diverse scientific communities and geographical regions.

Keywords: tourism; culture; cultural tourism; bibliometric analysis; bibliometrix R-package; biblioshiny

1. Introduction

Interest in cultural tourism has been growing steadily since the 1980s of the 20th century, spurred on by heritage inflation due to the rapid and far-reaching expansion of the heritage field. From a focus exclusively on the oldest and most imposing monuments in the 19th century to today's interest in intangible heritage (dances, songs, ritual practices, traditional festivities, games, etc.), the scope of heritage is constantly expanding.

Admittedly, this expansion has not been a continuous process but one that has seen its share of ups and downs. The term 'heritage inflation' refers to a turning point starting in the 1980s when the number of objects that could be listed, inventoried, and classified increased considerably (Deschepper, 2021). At least three factors contributed to this:

- The emergence of national and, above all, international heritage protection policies, particularly with the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1972, subsequently followed by national and regional inventories in many countries.
- Intense socio-economic changes in the decades following the Second World War led to the rapid disappearance of what was then known as "folklore," popular arts,

and traditions, particularly in rural areas, and triggered preservation and inventory initiatives.

- In the wake of these changes, the economic crises and deindustrialization of the states most involved in defining the field of heritage led to a growing awareness of the need to safeguard urban, industrial, popular, or contemporary heritage, as well as natural heritage, now considered a common good to be preserved (Deschepper, 2021).

Culture and tourism have maintained an inseparable connection throughout history. The expansion of both international and domestic travel, along with the recognition of cultural sites, attractions, and events, significantly drives travel motivation, and the act of traveling itself contributes to cultural dynamics. Within the broader realm of global travel and tourism, cultural tourism has emerged as a dynamic and multi-faceted segment. This distinct form of tourism revolves around immersing in local cultural heritage, artistic expressions, traditions, and ways of life, thereby allowing travelers to engage with diverse cultural narratives in destinations worldwide (Richards and Wilson, 2004; Smith et al., 2003). The confluence of culture and tourism has given rise to a multifaceted discourse encompassing not only economic implications but also social, environmental, and sustainability considerations intrinsic to this particular form of tourism (Robinson and Jamal, 2009).

Over time, researchers have become increasingly interested in the study of cultural tourism, resulting in a growing number of publications spanning various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, geography, and marketing (Leask and Fyall, 2006). As cultural tourism evolves and diversifies, it becomes crucial to gain a deeper understanding of its dimensions, impact, and challenges. In this context, bibliometric analysis is a valuable tool to systematically examine the scholarly landscape and identify trends, key contributors, and research gaps in the field (Abramo et al., 2009; Glänzel and Schubert, 2005).

This article is the result of a bibliometric analysis that provides a comprehensive framework for cultural tourism research. By grouping and analyzing relevant research publications, this analysis aims to highlight publication patterns, identify influential authors and journals, reveal emerging themes, provide an overview of the geographical and thematic distribution of research, and provide insight into research trends. Thanks to this comprehensive assessment, the study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on cultural tourism and lays the foundations for informed research orientations and practical applications.

2. Cultural tourism: A brief review

Culture and tourism share such an inseparable bond that envisioning one without the other is nearly impossible. Some even perceive cultural tourism as redundant; until the dawn of the 20th century, tourism inherently held cultural dimensions. With the escalation of international and domestic travel, the recognition of cultural sites, attractions, and events has now become a pivotal driving force behind travel motivation. The allure of cultural tourism continued its ascendancy from 1980 to 1990, guided by the phenomenon of heritage inflation experienced worldwide during that era, the expansion of national and international tourism, and the acknowledgment of

cultural tourism as a ‘successful’ form of travel—an effective economic stimulant and cultural catalyst (Richards, 2001). The evolution of cultural tourism has further paved the way for the emergence of various niche tourism types, including heritage, artistic, gastronomic, and creative tourism. The richness of the cultural concept itself fosters the proliferation of articles and scholarly publications dedicated to this emerging field of research.

The early 1990s marked a period of transformation for cultural tourism, giving rise to a distinct form of consumption. Cultural tourism has evolved into a social phenomenon driven by the mass market, presenting a novel avenue for its development. This surge of cultural tourism across various European destinations, particularly in Spain, France, and Italy, further heightened academic interest in this burgeoning research field. The initial works emerged (Ivanovic, 2008; Smith, 2003), followed by more in-depth and rigorous investigations employing diverse theories and methodologies (Richards and Munsters, 2010; Smith and Richards, 2013). The expansion of cultural tourism also occurred through the emergence of various niche tourism types, such as heritage tourism, artistic tourism, gastronomic tourism, and creative tourism. The intrinsic richness of the cultural concept itself has facilitated the proliferation of articles and scientific publications dedicated to this novel research domain. With increased income and consumption during the 1960s and 1970s, there was a surge in research documents related to international travel and cultural consumption. Different theoretical and methodological approaches (Richards and Munsters, 2010; Smith and Richards, 2013) responded to the influx of international tourists to major sites and attractions in the 1980s.

Cultural tourism has established itself as a distinct and diverse discipline within the broader context of tourism. It encompasses a range of experiences through which travelers engage with the cultural heritage, arts, traditions, and ways of life of various communities (Richards and Wilson, 2004). Primarily centered around cultural and introspective encounters, this form of tourism involves visits to cultural sites and heritage locations, highlighting the broad spectrum of cultural experiences while often requiring less tourist involvement compared to creative tourism (Safaa and Szostak, 2023). Scholars have highlighted the potential of cultural tourism to foster intercultural understanding, contribute to local economies, and preserve cultural assets, all while addressing challenges related to authenticity, sustainable development, and the involvement of local communities (Robinson and Jamal, 2009). Furthermore, research underscores the significance of cultural tourism in shaping destination image and branding strategies (Govers and Go, 2009; Prebensen et al., 2013). The evolution of cultural tourism research has been characterized by interdisciplinary synergy, incorporating perspectives from anthropology, sociology, marketing, and geography, collectively enhancing the understanding of its complexities and implications (Leask and Fyall, 2006; Urry, 2007). In delving into these aspects, the literature on cultural tourism lays the groundwork for the bibliometric analysis of the research landscape in this domain, conducted within the framework of the present study.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Bibliometric

In this study, a bibliometric mapping analysis was conducted. Bibliometrics involves a quantitative analysis of scholarly publications, such as articles, books, and conference proceedings, to measure research impact (Morandi, 2014). It employs statistical methods to analyze patterns and trends within the scientific literature, including citation analysis, co-citation analysis, and bibliographic coupling (Gimpl, 2017). Furthermore, bibliometrics is used to evaluate the productivity and impact of individual researchers, research groups, institutions, and countries (Morandi, 2014).

It can also be employed to identify emerging research areas and collaborations among researchers (Gimpl, 2017). Bibliometric mapping has gained increasing popularity across various disciplines in recent years (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2020). The compatibility of bibliometrics with scientific mapping might underlie its growing acceptance among scholars (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017). The entire procedure of bibliometric mapping analysis in this study encompassed data collection, filtering, extraction, analysis, and data processing.

3.2. Data collection and research strategy

To identify and retrieve articles, we utilized the ClarivateWoS database, widely acknowledged as a premier academic repository for evaluating global scientific output (Baier-Fuentes et al., 2019). The data retrieval process took place on May 28, 2023. The term “cultural tourism” was searched across all indexes within the Web of Science collection. Following the eligibility criteria, peer-reviewed articles composed in English and published in reputable scientific journals were selected for inclusion.

The initial query, free of any filters, yielded a total of 3,253 document results. These outcomes were subsequently subjected to filtering to eliminate irrelevant items. This filtering was guided by our eligibility criteria, as outlined in **Table 1**. The specific search string combinations, indicators, and filtering mechanisms, in accordance with the criteria from **Table 1**, are presented below:

(All Fields) AND “cultural tourism” (Title) AND “cultural tourism” (Author Keywords) AND Article or Proceeding Paper (Document Types) AND English (Languages).

In total, 369 data entries were collated following meticulous sorting based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. It’s important to note that only articles featuring the keyword “cultural tourism” within the title, abstract, and keywords were included. Furthermore, this analysis exclusively incorporated articles and Proceeding Papers published in the English language.

3.3. Data analysis and visualization

This article employed the bibliometrix R-package software, an open-source toolkit designed for conducting quantitative bibliometric research. Developed within the R language by Aria and Cuccurullo (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017), this software encompasses a range of tools essential for statistical and scientific cartographic analyses. Notably, the bibliometrix R package’s later versions (from version 2.0 onward) include a web interface program named Biblioshiny. This addition facilitates bibliometric analysis for users without coding expertise. Through the Biblioshiny interface, data from Scopus or Web of Science databases can be input in BibTex, CSV,

or Plain Text formats. For bibliometrix, it's necessary to import WoS data in the BibTex format.

An overview of the dataset is provided in **Table 1**, offering summary details such as the count of various document types encompassed within the data. In the context of this study, Author Keywords (AT) pertain to a curated set of keywords, typically limited to under ten, chosen by the article authors to describe their research focus. Conversely, "Keywords Plus (ID)" denote a compilation of keywords and extended phrases generated by the WoS system. These terms are derived from references cited in the publications, as mentioned by the authors.

Table 1. Main information about data.

Description	Results
Timespan	1996: 2023
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	244
Documents	369
AnnualGrowth Rate %	9.97
Document Average Age	6.45
Average citations per doc	9.103
References	12,194
Document contents	
Keywords Plus (ID)	381
Author's Keywords (DE)	1263
Authors	
Authors	781
Authors of single-authored docs	111
Authors collaboration	
Single-authored docs	117
Co-Authors per Doc	2.32
International co-authorships %	12.47
Document types	
Article	243
Article; earlyaccess	5
Article; proceedingspaper	1
proceedingspaper	120

4. Results

This session is dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the results obtained from our research. These findings affirm the observations and hypotheses regarding the continuous rise of cultural tourism. We will begin by reviewing the relevant literature concerning this form of tourism and its sources. Subsequently, we will spotlight the most significant publications, particularly those with a notable local citation count. Our focus will then shift to authors, their countries of origin, the most active and renowned research institutions in the field of cultural tourism, author impact

assessed by the H-index and its generalizations, as well as the average number of citations per year.

4.1. Retrieved literature

As mentioned earlier, the scientific interest in cultural tourism research began in the 1990s, the year of the first scholarly article's emergence. The number of article publications surged over the years, growing from a single article in 2000 to thirty-five published in 2022, with a peak of forty-one articles in 2017. **Figure 1** visually represents this upward trend, highlighting the transition from an average of 4.2 articles per year for the first decade of the 21st century to 24.3 articles published annually for the decade from 2010 to 2020. The numbers remained relatively stable for the years 2021 and 2022, with 35 articles published each year. This trend underscores the growing academic interest and significant research developments in the field of cultural tourism.

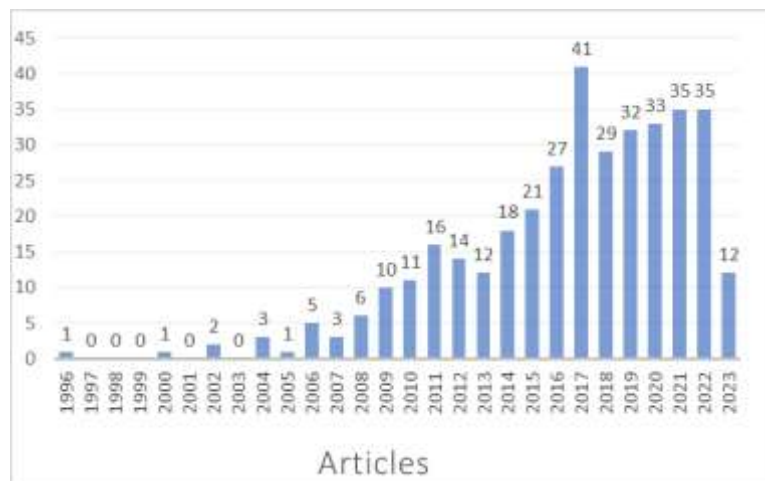


Figure 1. Annual scientific production.

4.2. Sources

The landscape of cultural tourism research publications is characterized by several prominent journals. At the forefront is the “Sustainability Journal,” which holds the lead with an impressive 21 articles related to cultural tourism. In close pursuit are the “Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change” and “Tourism Management,” both contributing significantly with nine articles each. Notably, the “Land Journal” secures the fourth position with seven published articles in this domain. These journals have played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse on cultural tourism, offering a wealth of valuable insights to researchers and enthusiasts alike. **Figure 2** illustrates the distribution of articles among these leading sources, providing a clear visual of their respective contributions to the field.

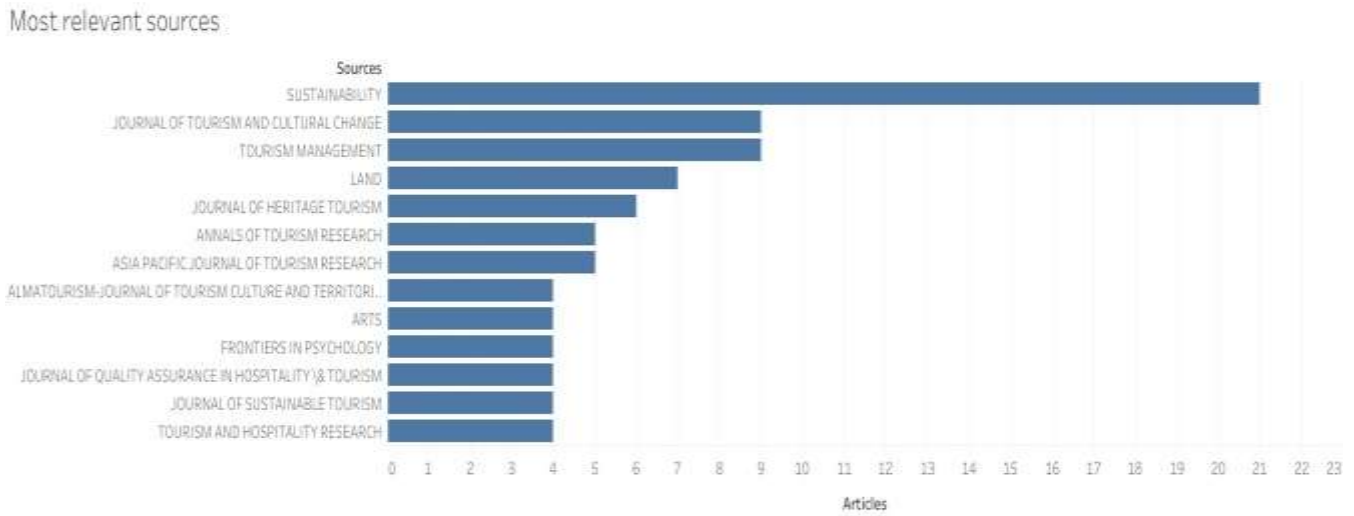


Figure 2. Distribution of articles by relevant sources from 1996 to 2023.

4.3. Authors

Table 2. Top productive authors.

Documents written	N. of Authors	Proportion of Authors
1	720	0.923
2	48	0.062
3	9	0.012
4	2	0.003
5	1	0.001

In terms of author productivity within the field of “cultural tourism,” our bibliometric investigation reveals that a significant majority of authors, specifically 92.3%, have contributed only one article. A small percentage, approximately 6.2%, have managed to publish two articles on this subject. A more select group, comprising 1.2% of researchers, boasts three published articles, while a mere 0.3% have four articles to their name. Finally, the most exclusive category, constituting just 0.1% of authors, has accomplished the remarkable feat of publishing five articles in the realm of cultural tourism. These findings are summarized in **Table 2**, which details the distribution of author contributions across the corpus of cultural tourism literature.

4.4. Countries

As for the ranking of countries with corresponding authors, China, where interest in cultural tourism dates back to the 1980s, solidifies its position as a global leader in this field, as depicted in **Figure 3**. It is followed by Croatia and the United States of America, with Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom closely contesting the subsequent positions. This hierarchy of contributions is visualized in **Figure 4**, which highlights the individual country outputs in cultural tourism research. The apparent enthusiasm among the Chinese population for culture and tourism can be partially explained by a societal turn towards heritage and tradition as a refuge from the rapid industrialization

and Westernization of their lifestyle. Cultural tourism thus offers a form of solace and connection to the past.

Despite these collaborative connections among these countries, the network of scientific researchers in the field of cultural tourism remains somewhat distant and less cooperative on the international stage, indicating a need for more globally concerted efforts to foster cross-border partnerships and knowledge exchange.

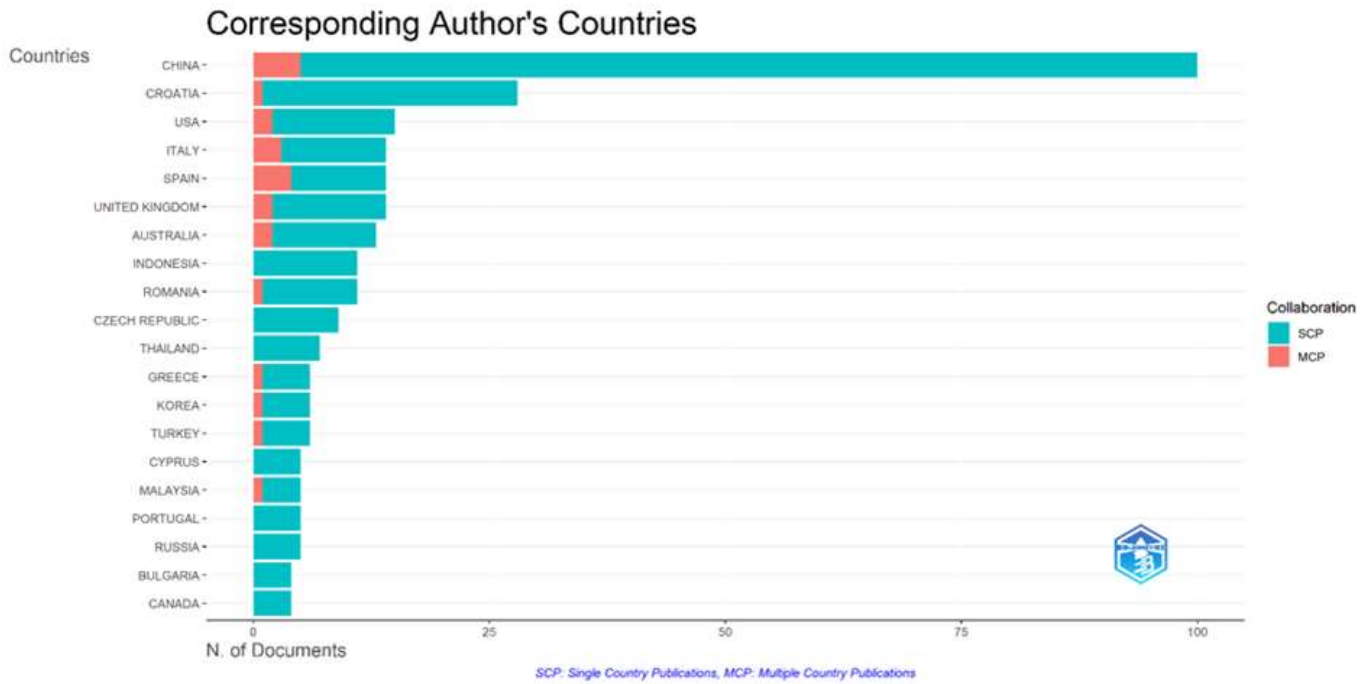


Figure 3. Corresponding author's country.

Country Scientific Production

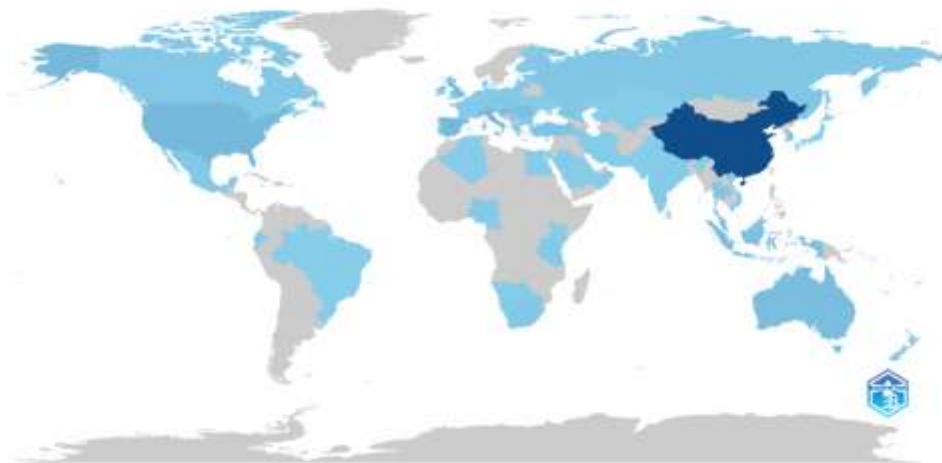


Figure 4. Countries' scientific production.

4.5. Citations

Based on the bibliometric analysis, **Table 3** allows us to identify the most cited authors in scientific publications related to cultural tourism, along with their annual article production rates. At the top of the list, we find Han Chen, who is the most

prominent and active author in terms of scientific output in this field, with 232 citations and a citation rate of 38.67 articles per year. Next is Greg Richards, with a total of 207 citations, followed by Noel B. Salazar with 175 citations.

Table 3. Most cited articles.

TI	Total Citations	TC per Year	Normalized TC
Chen H, 2018, <i>Tour Manag Perspect</i>	232	38.67	16.29
Richards G, 1996, <i>Ann Touris Res</i>	207	7.39	1.00
Salazar Nb, 2012, <i>J Sustain Tour</i>	175	14.58	8.25
Altunel Mc, 2015, <i>J Destin Mark Manag</i>	120	13.33	7.61
Russo Ap, 2002, <i>Tourism Manage</i>	110	5.00	1.59
Stylianou-Lambert T, 2011, <i>Ann Touris Res</i>	98	7.54	5.98
Hughes H, 2005, <i>Tourism Manage</i>	75	3.95	1.00
Seyfi S, 2020, <i>J Herit Tour</i>	73	18.25	8.51
Martinez-Perez A, 2016, <i>Int J Contemp Hosp Manag</i>	68	8.50	19.13
Yan H, 2008, <i>Ann Touris Res</i>	61	3.81	4.58

In the fourth position is Mustafa Cevdet Altunel from Turkey, with 120 citations, just ahead of Antonio P. Russo, who has 110 citations. Antonio P. Russo’s work includes research on a framework for conviviality, a complex concept encompassing key dimensions of urban tourism products such as quality, accessibility, and image projection within four European cities (Russo, 2002).

These authors present cultural tourism as an alternative to address environmental uncertainty and undesirable consequences associated with the tourism industry, especially pollution, mass tourism, and the degradation of heritage sites it can lead to. Their work also seeks to pinpoint critical factors tied to the evolution of the cultural tourism system. Additionally, they aim to understand the roles of cultural tourism stakeholders in evaluating the benefits of cultural assets, protection investment ratios, attendance ratios, and resident participation ratios in tourism. These aspects are regarded as key leverage points to support the development of cultural tourism.

4.6. Keywords

It is unnecessary to reiterate that the primary objective of a bibliometric study is to explore the themes and trends in a predefined research domain, helping to identify the most popular terms and their relationships, as well as keyword occurrences.

The growing interest in ‘cultural tourism’ is affirmed by the significant online research conducted. These investigations not only focus on cultural tourism itself, but also encompass a range of keywords related to this research topic. Among the prominent research themes arising from the examination of publications listed in Scopus is heritage as a major focus of cultural tourism. Other keywords complement this core theme of heritage, including authenticity, management, impact, hospitality, satisfaction, experience, image, motivation, quality, and more.

A cross-reading of these different keywords, in an effort to derive possible connections, suggests that cultural tourism is no longer limited to the visitation of a few cultural sites such as museums or art galleries, nor is it merely about discovering

the culture, traditions, or heritage of a travel destination. Cultural tourism now plays a crucial role in destination selection and consumption, serving as motivation to travel, a quest for authentic emotional experiences, satisfaction, and loyalty. It represents a different perspective on the act of traveling, considering the impact of the journey on both the tourist and the destination. The analysis of the ‘Word cloud of frequently used keywords’ indicates that cultural tourism must inevitably become part of destination management due to its significance in territorial competitiveness.



Figure 5. A Visualized Word cloud of frequently used keywords.

Bibliometric analyses of the most frequent keywords in articles related to the research theme have revealed the prominence of ‘cultural tourism,’ ranking first with a frequency rate of 275. This is followed by the terms ‘tourism’ (26 times), ‘cultural heritage’ (18 times), ‘heritage’ (16 times), culture (15 times), and development and authenticity (13 and 12 times, respectively).

Further exploration of these keyword frequencies sheds light on the increasing significance of ‘cultural tourism’ as a dominant theme within the research landscape. It not only reflects the evolving travel preferences of modern tourists but also underscores the pivotal role that cultural experiences play in destination choices and consumer behavior. These findings, as visually summarized in **Figure 5**, signal a shift from traditional notions of cultural tourism, such as museum visits or heritage exploration, to a broader, more holistic understanding that encompasses emotional experiences, satisfaction, and destination management. This expanded perspective recognizes the profound impact of cultural tourism on both travelers and the destinations themselves, making it a crucial factor in destination competitiveness.

4.7. Structure of knowledge

The thematic analysis carried out here using author keywords and their connections provides valuable insights into the key research themes. These themes are distinguished by their characteristics of density and centrality, as illustrated in **Figure 6**.

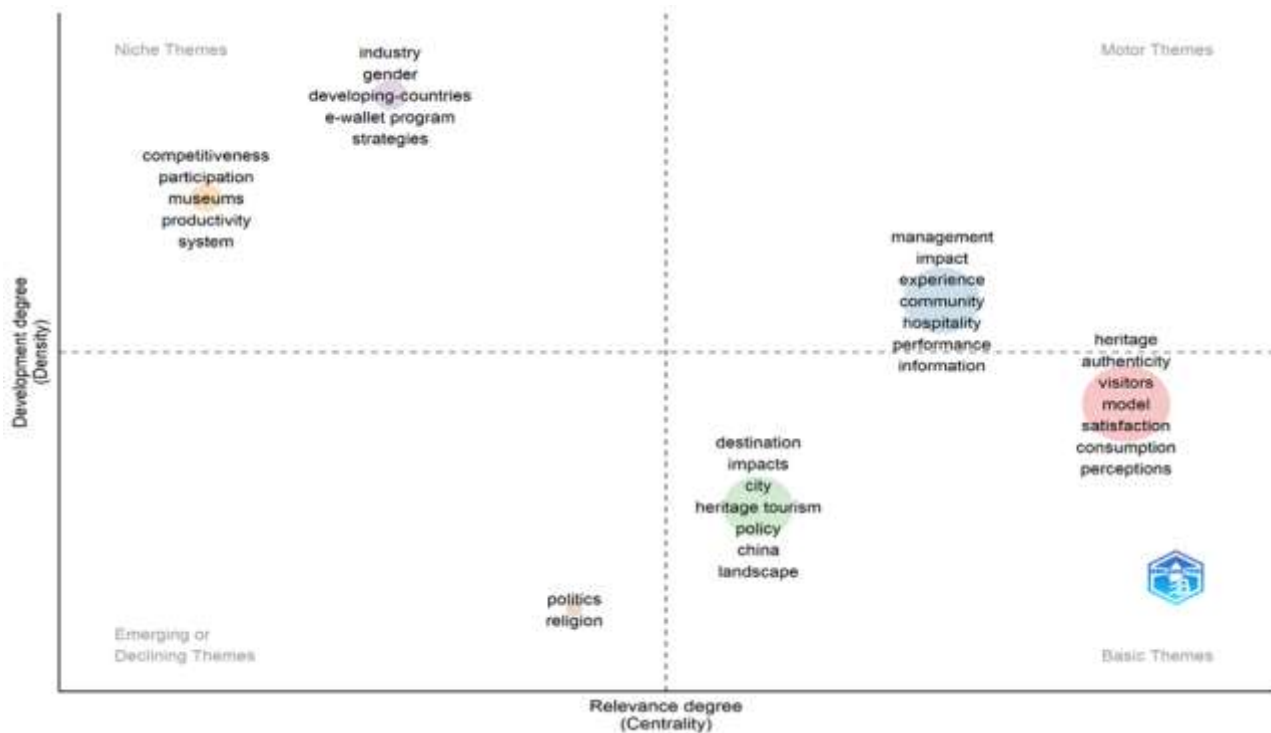


Figure 6. Thematic map.

The dominant theme, situated in the upper-right quadrant, is ‘management.’ This theme, characterized by high centrality and density, appears to be a comprehensive and highly relevant subject within the cultural tourism research domain. It serves as a foundational topic that plays a central role in structuring the field.

Moving to the upper-left quadrant, we encounter two niche themes. The first is led by the keyword ‘competitiveness,’ while the second is centered around ‘industry.’ Although these themes exhibit strong internal connections, they have limited external links. Consequently, they possess high centrality but relatively low density, indicating a somewhat modest contribution to the advancement of cultural tourism research.

In the lower-left quadrant, we identify emerging or declining themes, specifically ‘politics’ and ‘religion.’ These themes are in the early stages of development within the cultural tourism domain and have yet to gain substantial prominence.

Lastly, the themes of ‘heritage’ and ‘destination’ occupy the lower-right quadrant, underscoring their fundamental significance. This suggests that certain aspects covered by these themes are essential for the further development of the cultural tourism field.

The centrality of themes like ‘management’, ‘heritage’, ‘competitiveness’, ‘industry’, ‘politics’, and ‘religion’ in cultural tourism research has significant theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, these themes appear to form the foundational pillars of the field. ‘Management’ and ‘heritage’ suggest future theoretical advancements in cultural tourism are likely to emerge from these core areas. Themes like ‘competitiveness’ and ‘industry’ indicate an evolving landscape where the interplay between market dynamics and tourism sectors is crucial. Practically, the emphasis on ‘management’ indicates a need for more innovative and effective management strategies in the cultural tourism industry, particularly in

response to modern challenges such as digitalization and sustainability. The consistent focus on ‘heritage’ underlines its importance in creating authentic, meaningful tourist experiences, guiding industry practitioners in developing heritage-centric tourism offerings. Additionally, emerging themes like ‘politics’ and ‘religion’ highlight the increasing relevance of socio-political and cultural aspects in shaping tourism trends and policies. ‘Competitiveness’ and ‘industry’ emphasize the need for strategic positioning and adaptation of the tourism sector in a globally competitive market. Together, these themes offer a multifaceted view of cultural tourism, suggesting rich avenues for future research and practice that cater to an ever-evolving global tourism landscape.

Our co-occurrence network consists of seven groups with links: Group 1 (7 keywords), Group 2 (9 keywords), Groups 3 and 4 (6 keywords each), Group 5 (3 keywords), and Groups 6 and 7 (2 keywords each).

Group 1, depicted in purple, has “Heritage” as its central node and includes other keywords like “competitiveness,” “image,” “travel,” “visitors,” “heritage tourism,” “information,” and “consumption.” This first group reflects the growing importance and appeal of heritage in destination choices worldwide. Heritage significantly contributes to a destination’s image and competitiveness relative to its competitors. The cultural and heritage aspect of tourism has given rise to a distinct subfield known as ‘heritage tourism.’

The second group, shown in orange in **Figure 7**, has “satisfaction” as its central node. Within this group, we find keywords such as “antecedents,” “involvement,” “place attachment,” “behavioral intention,” and “customer satisfaction.” This group underscores the strong role of culture in creating tourist satisfaction. It also highlights the capacity of culture to foster attachment to visited sites, a desire to engage in cultural activities, and behavioral attentiveness from tourists towards the places they visit.

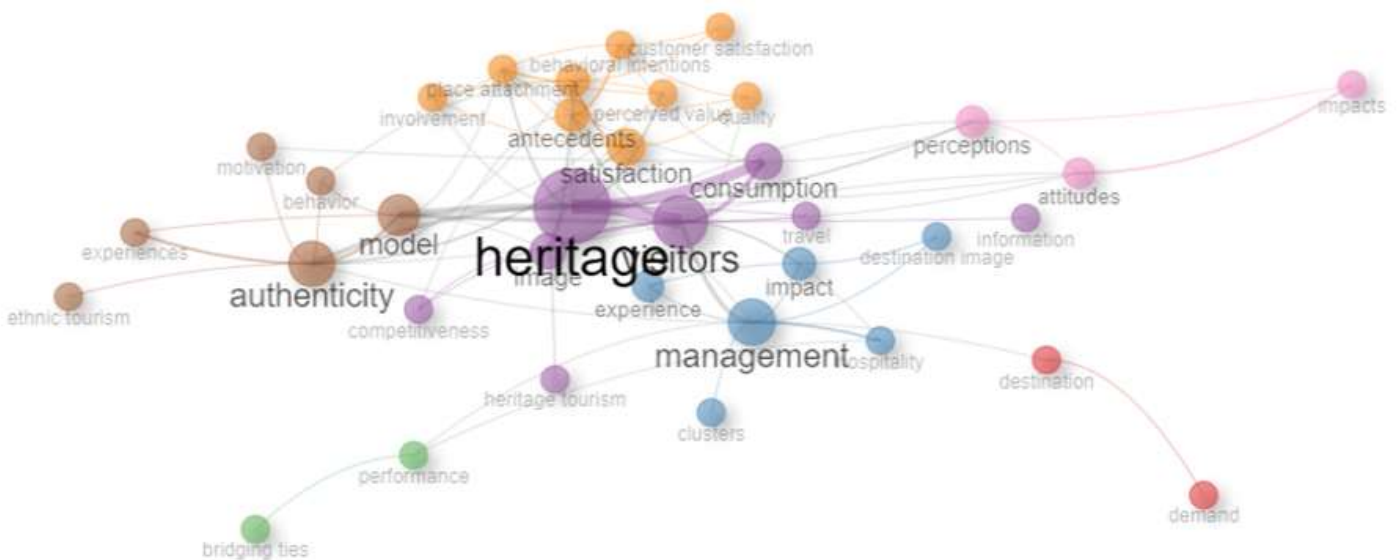


Figure 7. Co-occurrence network.

The third group, shown in brown, revolves around the term “authenticity.” Keywords like “Ethnic tourism,” “experiences,” “motivation,” “behavior,” and

“model” form the network of this group. With these keywords, authenticity becomes central in decision-making when planning a tourist trip. Tourists are seeking authentic experiences, motivation, and ethnic tourism, necessitating strategies for studying tourist behavior to foster their loyalty and motivation to return.

A fourth group, depicted in blue, centers around the term “management.” In this group, keywords like “impact,” “clusters,” “hospitality,” “experiences,” and “image destination” affirm the pivotal role that culture is expected to play in destination management and image.

The co-occurrence network analysis provides a multifaceted view of cultural tourism, highlighting the interconnected nature of various themes. From the emphasis on ‘heritage’ and ‘sustainability’ to the rising significance of ‘technology’ and ‘cultural exchange,’ each group reveals a different dimension of how culture influences and shapes the tourism experience. This network not only reflects current trends but also anticipates future shifts in the cultural tourism landscape. The diversity of themes underscores the complexity of cultural tourism as a field, demonstrating how it spans across various aspects like management, authenticity, sustainability, and technological integration. These findings encourage a holistic approach to cultural tourism research and practice, where the interdependence of these themes is acknowledged and integrated into strategies for sustainable and culturally rich tourism development.

The insights garnered from our co-occurrence network analysis have substantial implications for both theoretical understanding and practical applications in cultural tourism. Academically, it prompts a broader and more integrative research perspective that encompasses various elements like sustainability, technology, and cultural exchange. For industry practitioners, these themes highlight key areas for innovation and development, such as enhancing tourist satisfaction through authentic experiences and leveraging technology for better engagement and marketing. Looking forward, this analysis paves the way for future research to delve deeper into these themes, examining their interrelations and impacts on tourist behaviors, destination development, and policy formulation. As cultural tourism continues to evolve, understanding these dynamic themes will be crucial in navigating the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in this vibrant field.

Certainly, it’s fascinating to observe the dynamic shifts in research focus within cultural tourism over the years. This evolution underscores the field’s responsiveness to changing societal and environmental factors. From community engagement to performance measurement, and from the emphasis on heritage to the quest for authentic experiences, cultural tourism research has adapted to reflect the evolving priorities of tourists and destinations alike. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 appears to have redirected attention towards understanding the repercussions of the crisis and enhancing visitor experiences, emphasizing the resilience of cultural tourism as it navigates through challenging times. These trends reflect the field’s ability to stay relevant and address the evolving needs and interests of both tourists and the industry. **Figure 8** depicts this evolution graphically, showcasing the shifting research focus over time.

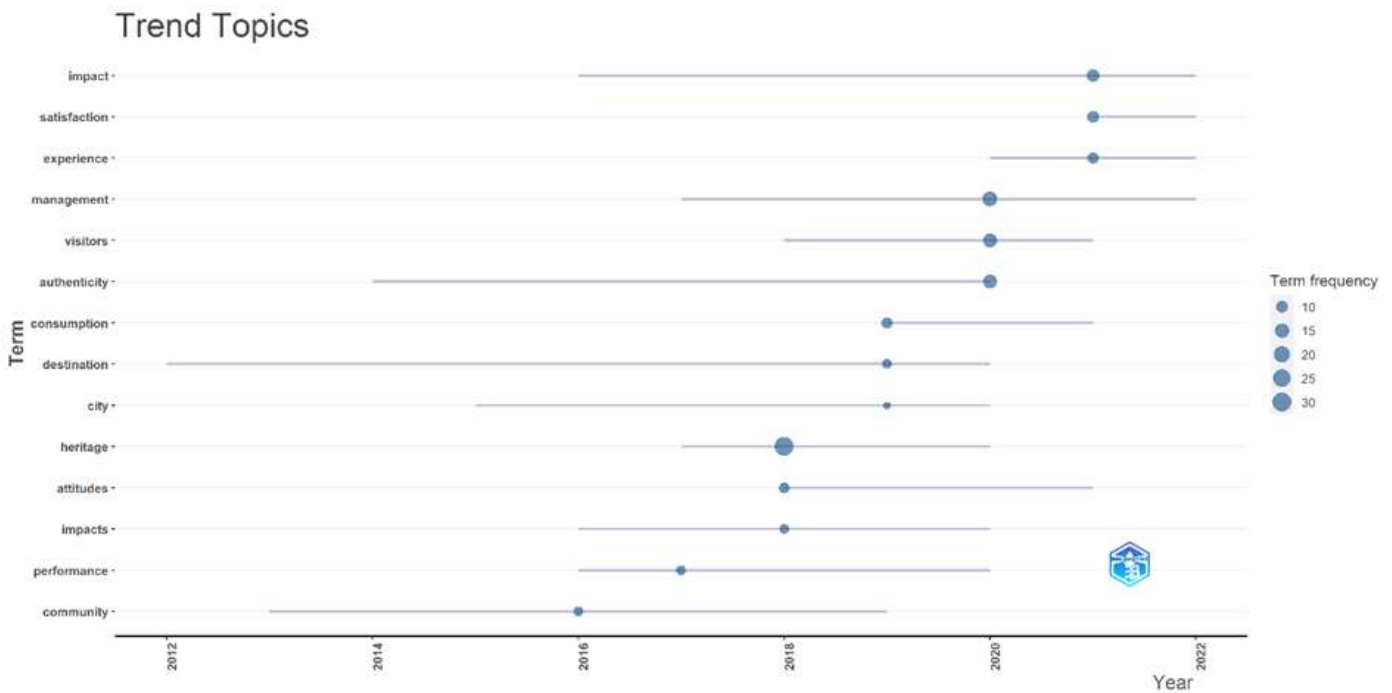


Figure 8. Trend topics.

In conclusion, the landscape of cultural tourism research is a testament to the adaptability and resilience of the field in the face of ever-changing global trends and challenges. The diversification of research themes, from the integration of technology to the focus on sustainable and responsible tourism, highlights the sector’s commitment to innovation and relevance. This ongoing evolution is not just a response to external changes but also a proactive effort to shape and influence the future trajectory of the tourism industry. As we look ahead, it is clear that cultural tourism will continue to play a pivotal role in fostering cultural exchange, understanding, and preservation. The field is poised to address new challenges and harness emerging opportunities, ensuring that it remains at the forefront of offering enriching and meaningful experiences to tourists worldwide. In doing so, cultural tourism research will undoubtedly contribute significantly to the broader discourse on global tourism, cultural preservation, and sustainable development in the years to come.

4.8. Collaboration analysis

It’s intriguing to note the prominent institutional collaborations that have emerged in the field of cultural tourism research. These collaborations often span across geographical boundaries, underlining the global nature of research in this area. The partnerships between institutions from Botswana and Johannesburg, Hong Kong Polytechnic and Wuhan, and the collaboration between the University of Queensland and Shanghai Jiao Tong University, all illustrate the interconnectedness of academia in advancing the study of cultural tourism, as visually captured in **Figure 9**. These alliances likely bring together diverse perspectives and expertise, enriching the quality of research in this multidisciplinary field.



Figure 9. Mapping of institution's collaboration network.

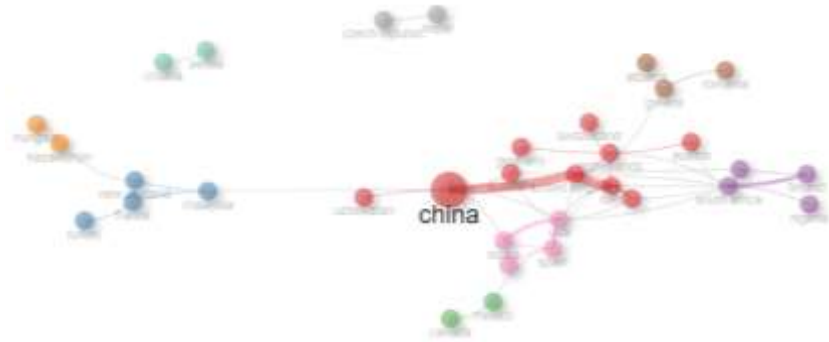


Figure 10. Mapping of countries collaboration network.

The intricate network of international collaborations among countries in the realm of cultural tourism research is a testament to the global significance of this field. The dominant network led by China, which includes European countries like Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, as well as Uzbekistan in Asia, highlights the cross-continental nature of research in this area. Furthermore, the presence of multiple networks comprising countries from different regions, such as France, Turkey, Malaysia, and New Zealand, or Spain, the United States, and South Korea, demonstrates the diverse and inclusive approach taken in advancing cultural tourism studies, as visually captured in **Figure 10**. These international partnerships likely contribute to the broadening of perspectives and the enrichment of research in this multidisciplinary domain.

5. Discussion

Globally acknowledged as a thriving industry and one of the emerging service sectors, cultural tourism has become a worldwide quest for the development of the tourism industry. Progress in this field hinges on identifying heritage and cultural resources and leveraging them to shape and maintain the destination's brand image. To this end, a plethora of targeted assets encompassing a wide range of culture-related products or services are mobilized within the tourism industry, including museums, historical heritage, art and crafts, festivals, folklore, and more. Bibliometric analysis reveals that research in cultural tourism presents a dynamic and evolving context. The growth of this field from its inception in the 1990s to its recent peak in publication activity underscores the increasing significance of cultural tourism within the broader tourism domain.

The prolific production of articles, even though the majority of authors have contributed to only one work, attests to the diversity of engagement in this area. The global distribution of research, with China, Croatia, and the United States at the

forefront, reflects widespread interest in the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of cultural tourism. Collaboration among these countries, despite geographical distances, signifies the global conversation enriching discourse on the subject. Influential authors, including Chen H and Richards G, have advanced the dialogue by emphasizing the role of cultural tourism in addressing environmental concerns and proposing alternative approaches to tourism management. Keyword analysis has identified “cultural tourism” as the primary term, followed by related terms such as “tourism” and “cultural heritage.” Themes related to heritage, authenticity, and management have emerged as crucial and have shaped the landscape of cultural tourism. The co-occurrence network revealed key thematic clusters, with “management” taking the forefront and “competitiveness” and “industry” representing niche themes. Thematic analysis, highlighting “cultural tourism” as the central point along with themes of heritage, authenticity, and management, underscores the multidimensional nature of cultural tourism research. These themes emphasize the analysis of keyword co-occurrence in cultural tourism research illuminates several key trends. “Heritage” emerges as a central theme, underlining its pivotal role in destination competitiveness. Meanwhile, the strong association between keywords like “satisfaction,” “place attachment,” and “customer satisfaction” highlights culture’s influence on tourist contentment and loyalty. Furthermore, the focus on “authenticity” reflects tourists’ growing interest in genuine cultural experiences. Lastly, the group around “management” emphasizes culture’s impact on destination image and management. In summary, these co-occurrence patterns signify the increasing significance of cultural heritage, satisfaction, authenticity, and effective management in cultural tourism, guiding future research and industry practices. complex interplay between culture, economy, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement.

The evolution of thematic trends indicates a shift in interest over time, with themes like “community,” “performance,” and “impact” gaining prominence. As trends evolve with changing contexts and challenges, it is evident that research in cultural tourism remains responsive and adaptable to emerging needs. The visualization of the research network has unveiled interactions among authors, research institutions, and keywords, highlighting the global interest in cultural tourism research and its multidimensional orientation.

Furthermore, this bibliometric analysis has provided valuable insights into the trajectory of cultural tourism research. The ongoing growth of the field, its interdisciplinary nature, and the emphasis on authenticity, management, and heritage underscore its significance in promoting sustainable and enriching travel experiences. By delving into this intricate interplay, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners can continue to shape the future of cultural tourism in ways that benefit both destinations and travelers.

Looking ahead, the field of cultural tourism faces both opportunities and challenges. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, cultural tourism stands at the crossroads of globalization and local identity. Future research should explore how cultural tourism can balance these forces, preserving local heritage while embracing global tourists. Additionally, the rise of digital technology offers new avenues for enhancing tourist experiences and destination marketing, yet also poses

challenges in terms of authenticity and digital divides. The integration of virtual reality, augmented reality, and other digital tools in cultural tourism is an emerging trend that warrants further investigation, particularly in how they can enrich the tourist experience while maintaining the essence of cultural authenticity.

Furthermore, the environmental impact of tourism is an ever-pressing concern. Sustainable practices in cultural tourism not only protect the environment but also ensure the long-term preservation of cultural heritage. Future research should therefore focus on sustainable models of cultural tourism that prioritize environmental stewardship and socio-cultural integrity. This includes studies on eco-friendly tourism practices, community-based tourism models, and the role of cultural tourism in sustainable development. By addressing these upcoming challenges and leveraging emerging trends, cultural tourism research can contribute significantly to the development of responsible and sustainable tourism practices, ensuring that the cultural richness of destinations is preserved and cherished for generations to come.

6. Conclusion

“In conclusion, the bibliometric analysis in this study sheds light on the intricate landscape of research in cultural tourism. The examination of its evolution, thematic focus, and global distribution provides a comprehensive understanding of the field. The substantial number of scholarly contributions spanning multiple disciplines and countries attests to the enduring appeal and significance of cultural tourism as a research subject. Exploring its evolution, themes, and global presence highlights the depth and breadth of research dedicated to comprehending and enhancing this integral facet of tourism.

Through bibliometrics, we’ve gained valuable insights into the body of work across various disciplines and continents. This study underscores not only the enduring relevance of cultural tourism but also its enduring allure as a subject of academic inquiry and practical exploration. This analysis contributes not only to the scholarly discourse but also informs practitioners and policymakers navigating the ever-evolving landscape of cultural tourism with a more enlightened perspective.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study to provide a balanced perspective. Primarily, our bibliometric analysis was confined to the Web of Science database, which, while comprehensive, does not encompass all available literature in the field. This limitation potentially excludes relevant research published in other databases or in languages other than English. Additionally, the focus on peer-reviewed articles and proceeding papers might have omitted insights from other forms of scholarly communication, such as books, grey literature, and conference presentations. Moreover, the evolving nature of cultural tourism research means that newer trends and themes may not be fully captured in our analysis. Recognizing these limitations is essential for contextualizing our findings and suggests avenues for future research to build upon and expand the understanding of cultural tourism.

Author contributions: Conceptualization, SB and HS; methodology, SB; software, SB; validation, LS and VL; formal analysis, HS and DP; resources, DP; data curation, HS; writing—original draft preparation, SB; writing—review and editing, HS and VL;

visualization, HS; supervision, DP and LS; project administration, HS. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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