




Article

Using Bibliometric Methods to Shed Light on the Concept of Sustainable Tourism

Laura Serrano ¹, Antonio Sianes ^{2,*} and Antonio Ariza-Montes ^{1,3}

¹ Faculty of Economics and Business, Dept. Business Management, Universidad Loyola Andalucía Escritor Castilla Aguayo, 4, 14004 Córdoba, Spain; lserrano@uloyola.es (L.S.); ariza@uloyola.es (A.A.-M.)

² Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Dept. International Studies, Universidad Loyola Andalucía, Escritor Castilla Aguayo, 4, 14004 Córdoba, Spain

³ Facultad de Administración y Negocios, Universidad Autónoma de Chile, 425 Santiago, Chile

* Correspondence: asianes@uloyola.es; Tel.: +34-97-222-100 (ext. 2200)

Received: 12 November 2019; Accepted: 4 December 2019; Published: 6 December 2019



Abstract: The publication of the Brundtland report in 1987 introduced the concept of sustainable development, placing “sustainability” as a unifying idea for all academic disciplines. Consequently, in the tourism sector, sustainable tourism emerged as a new approach to research in the field. Since then, the body of literature on sustainable tourism has only increased, as has the discussion around the conceptual structure of sustainable tourism among academics and professionals. The aim of the study is to complement this theoretical discussion with an inductive approach to the limits of the conceptual structure of sustainable tourism. To do so, we identify the main research topics in the field and their evolution in the past 32 years through bibliometric methods such as evaluative techniques, relational techniques, and visualization of bibliometric data techniques using the VOSviewer program. The results of the study reflect that the sustainable tourism has reached a complexity that is reflected in its current polyhedral content to function as a conceptual umbrella. In addition, it demonstrates that the bibliometric analysis is an adequate and useful methodology for academics and professionals involved in the academic debate around this field of knowledge.

Keywords: sustainable tourism; bibliometric analysis; tourism research; conceptual structure; VOSviewer

1. Introduction

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) report “*Travel and Tourism: Economic Impact 2019*”, the tourism sector accounted for 10.4% of the world GDP and 10% of the global employment in 2018. In addition, money spent by foreign visitors represents 7% of the total world exports as international tourist arrivals grew for the eighth consecutive year to reach the figure of 1.323 million in 2017. In 2018, the travel and tourism industry experienced 3.9% growth, higher than that of the global economy (3.2%) [1]. This uninterrupted growth of the tourism sector has made it one of the main industries of the world economy, thus generating much attention from researchers.

Parallel to the growth of tourism activity as an economic sector, tourism began to develop as a research topic in the academic world [2], until it was finally established as a recognized discipline. Two facts reflected this consolidation: schools of hospitality and tourism management were founded at universities, and the first scientific journals that addressed the subject of tourism as a research discipline were founded [2]: in 1968, the *Journal of Travel Research*; in 1973, *Annals of Tourism Research*; and in 1980, *Tourism Management*. Currently, the number of journals that publish or have published an article related to the subject of tourism exceeds 200 titles [2].

83. Lane, B. Sustainable rural tourism strategies: A tool for development and conservation. *J. Sustain. Tour.* **1994**, *2*, 102–111. [[CrossRef](#)]
84. Román, C. *Turismo Sostenible: Un Debate Abierto Todavía la Discusión*; Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad: Madrid, Spain, 2017.



© 2019 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).