

Rural Tourism and Sustainable Development: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Received: 26.10.2021 Accepted: 27.12.2021

Abstract

The main goal of this study is to investigate the relationship between tourism and sustainable development using scholarly publications and affiliations related to the themes. The data used is extracted from Scopus. VOSVIEWER and Excel are used to process the Scopus database. The data could be decoded and analysed by employing and n relying on descriptive statistics and structural analysis. The research has revealed that China plays a significant role in publishing articles related to sustainable development and rural tourism. The tourism industry has also demonstrated an increased awareness of sustainability over the last few decades. Finally, the affiliated organisations, as well as the authors, were revealed. Given the increasing importance of sustainable development, the current work, within the context of rural tourism, provides a diagnosis that allows the understanding of the current state of work in terms of tourism and development. Even better, it gives academics and institutions a clear picture of the actors in the field.

Keywords: *Tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism, rural development, bibliometric analysis.*

1. Introduction

Rural tourism (RT) is alternative tourism that has its roots in the countryside. It is part of the same context as emerging tourism practices, such as sustainable and eco-responsible tourism, and reflects a growing awareness of its deployment. The promotion of indigenous lifestyles is to its advantage. This type of tourism highlights the know-how of rural inhabitants while encouraging encounters between tourists and farmers, breeders or simply locals. The practice of travelling also favoured the proximity among rural people, which is very common in rural tourism. That allows the discovery of the daily life of farmers. RT is also linked to ecotourism, which promotes responsible tourism in natural areas while protecting the environment and local communities. Similar to ecotourism, this tourism promotes the quality of life in rural areas and the authenticity of local products. It is thus a great place to go if visitors want to escape from the crowds and the city life. In terms of geography, it is diffuse tourism, i.e. not very intensive and in rural areas. Economically, it is the work of farmers seeking extra income. Also, it is small scale, integrated into the local economy, and the habitat (Beaugeat, 2000).

However, rural tourism's primary goal is to benefit local economies by promoting handicrafts, indigenous cultures, agricultural activities, and sometimes micro-enterprises. Furthermore, rural tourism preserves and enhances the endangered traditional architectural heritage through the benefits of tourism activities converted into community projects. RT development, according to Ozçatalbaş (2017), increases household income and rural employment. It reduces rural exodus and improves product quality, as well as having a positive impact on socio-cultural life. While this demonstrates the beneficial effects of rural tourism on development, it also highlights the

critical importance of resource sustainability and efficiency. According to Bulin (2011), rural tourism is sustainable tourism because its system is made up of three components: natural (physical, geographical), local community, and tourists. It is worth noting that sustainable rural tourism is founded on the relationship between the environment, social equity, and economic efficiency. It is frequently a secondary activity that contributes significantly to the traditional rural economy (Moric, 2013).

With this background in mind, it should be noted that there are two dominant groups of thoughts in the literature. The first group of authors, such as Nagy et al. (2017), believe that tourism is an asset for sustainable rural development in non-urban areas, whereas another school of thought believes that this type of tourism has negative environmental impacts and may not even promote sustainable development (Ivolga, 2013; Ivolga, 2014; Almukhamedova, 2013).

Arguments such as the revitalization of local craft markets, the retention of young people in rural areas, and the development of local infrastructure are frequently advanced by those among the first to see rural tourism as a positive development. On the other hand, what is frequently overlooked is that as infrastructure in rural areas is gradually built up and visitors become accustomed to a destination, there is a gradual impoverishment. Young people are gradually adopting tourist clothing styles. The authenticity of the rural environment may be jeopardised in the long run. The most popular tourist destinations are undeniably becoming the most modern. Ivolga and Erokhin (2013) discuss cultural erosion and ethnographies environment because it appears to be easier to offer tourists some popular product or service than to develop and promote a new one based on local identity. A disadvantage is the scarcity of financial and labour resources for traditional agricultural production (Almukhamedova, 2013). According to Ivolga and Erokhin, such a territorial approach to rural tourism limits opportunities for sustainable development and does not reflect the genuine needs of rural communities (Ivolga and Erokhin, 2013). According to Yooshik and al. (1999), they perceive tourism to have negative environmental consequences such as resource depletion, pollution, and the erasure of cultural or historical values. Whether urban or rural, tourism activity has occasionally resulted in significant increases in traffic congestion, noise pollution, and crowding. Also, the proliferation of hotels and tourism facilities still has harmed the natural environment.

Indeed, rural tourism must be consistent with the SDG concept, particularly with "SDG 12" (sustainable consumption and production) and "SDG 16" (sustainable societies). This implies observing environmental, economic, social, and cultural criteria (Blancas, 2011; Addinsall, 2017; Ozçatalbaş, 2017; Risti'c 2019, Ernesto 2017; Atun, 2019; Petrovi'c, 2018; Tomej 2019; Radosavljevi'c, 2019; Randelli, 2019; Dax, 2019; Ibanescu, 2018). Thus, tourism forward sustainable development in rural areas must consider the environmental impact, as sustainability requires a healthy and well-preserved living environment. Hall (1998) emphasized the importance of preserving biodiversity, rational resource use, and natural resource conservation for future generations. It is critical to promote a local economy that is compatible with endogenous reality. This entails ensuring the viability of tourism businesses and tourism activity in destination, and the economic offers to meet demand. From a social equity perspective, tourism should benefit the local community by providing jobs and income, promoting personal development, and improving the local populace's quality of life. Holistically, it required a combination of the above conditions for tourism to be sustainable. This way, sustainable development will be a foregone conclusion.

Thus, the existing literature included a comprehensive list of requirements for promoting sustainable tourism via rural or mass tourism. However, there are relatively few publications in the fields of tourism and management that utilise structural analysis and focus on rural tourism and sustainable development. To close this gap, this study uses scientific mapping techniques and bibliometric analysis to conduct a cross-regional and cross-country examination of the literature on the theme of sustainability and rural tourism (D'Amato et al. 2017).It examines the quality of

publications within the field. In fact, why conduct a bibliometric analysis of research output? For a long time, peer review has been and continues to be the primary procedure for evaluating the quality of scientific production. However, it may have significant flaws and disadvantages. Subjectivity in peer review resides in the reliance on the outcomes of individual committee members' selections, which is a significant issue. This reliance may manifest itself in shady dealings, a lack of awareness quality, or a negative prejudice toward youngsters or novices in the field. Therefore, advanced bibliometric methods help to improve the objectivity and transparency of peer review (Van Raan 2014). Furthermore, by using the bibliometric analysis, Rather than relying exclusively on peer review, bibliometric analysis is advantageous for determining the impact of scientific papers, which can be interpreted in a variety of ways. This trend is complicated further by the growth of non-traditional publishing and the proliferation of scholarly publishing platforms serving as aggregate data sources (Ellegaard and Wallin.2015; Meho 2006). There has been an increased emphasis on qualitative aspects, such as the repercussions of bibliometric analysis for research evaluation (Herther 2009; Ellegaard and Wallin.2015). Clearly, the use of bibliometric analysis is motivated by the desire to evaluate scientific output and make the results accessible to policymakers, scientists, and other stakeholders. Additionally, in bibliometric analysis, the most cited article is recurrent analysis. That's why rather than describing the most frequently cited articles in the field, the manuscript focused on patterns and scientific collaborations related to 'rural tourism and sustainable development.' Meanwhile, some reviews identified only a handful of the most frequently cited publications in the fields of rural tourism management and administration (Castanho and al.2021; Katstenholz and al.2018; Nair and al.2015). Nevertheless, a thorough examination of the most influential publications in the field is necessary.

2. Methods

Using the Scopus database, the string (TITLE (rural tourism) AND TITLE (sustainable development)) was first used. This resulted in 1736 results. To avoid omitting interesting topics, a search string attempt under the (TITLE ("rural tourism*") AND TITLE ("sustainable development")) was launched. This generated 396 results that formed our final database for the analyses. A csv file of 953 number of authors in provenance of 198 sources has been generated over the period of 1998 to 2021. Although there are publications on tourism prior to 1998, this article focuses exclusively on the last two decades in order to understand the most recent trends, as the 2017 United Nations report calls for rural tourism to be a driver of sustainable development. The types of manuscripts consulted were Articles (263), Review (11), Conference Paper (92)), Book Chapter (24) conference review (2) retracted (2) Book (1), undefine (1). During the analysis, Excel and VOSviewer were used to generate tables and graphical representations of networks, respectively. The analytical process resulted in the determination of the following: a) the annual scientific output worldwide; b) the annual scientific output per country; c) the major journals devoted to rural tourism and sustainable development; and d) the most frequently cited authors.

On the other hand, an analysis of the networks based on keywords was conducted to determine the most common themes that are linked to the theme of the research. To this end, it should be remembered that there are several network techniques. Among these, researchers generally use methodologies based on distance, graphs, and timelines (van Eck and Waltman, 2014). All these methods have two key components on the visualization map: the "nodes" represented by circles and the "edges" represented by connections between nodes. The explanation of the networks varies according to the physical characteristics of the nodes and edges of each of the three techniques. The proximity or closeness of nodes indicates the strength of the association between two entities in the distance-based method. In the graphical method, the distance between nodes does not affect their relationship. Rather than this, these interactions are represented by edges,

i.e., when no edges are exposed, there is no relationship between the two (van Eck and Waltman, 2014). In the final approach to visualization based on the timeline [Also called temporal analysis (Cobo et al. 2012)], nodes are positioned vertically over certain periods, but their horizontal distance represents the link between entities (van Eck and Waltman, 2014). For this survey, basic distance methods (van Eck and Waltman., 2014, Fabrikant et al., 2010) are used. In addition, when analysing the bibliometric network, three points must be taken into account: (a) the size of the nodes which shows how frequently an event occurs (frequency); (b) neighbouring nodes which suggest a stronger link between the entities; (c) the thickness of the lines connecting any two nodes which reflect their coexistence; and (d) the colour of nodes which denotes their categorization. The colours symbolize a collection of entities that are closely associated (Van Eck and Waltman, 2017).

3. Results and discussion

Descriptive analysis

a) the global annual scientific production

From yearly publication perspective (see figure 1), there has been a slight increase in the number of publications on the topic since the first decade. And in the last decade, a clear increase has occurred. 69 publications on "rural tourism" and "sustainable development" were published in 2021, the most ever recorded.

This decade's analysis focused on the millenniums development goals (MDGs), not the SDGs (2000-2015). After the UN General Assembly adopted the "Transforming Our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals" in September 2015, the SDGs were implemented (UN, 2015). Then, to achieve the SDGs, a broad range of interrelated challenges must be overcome _including environmental destruction, social exclusion and inequality, economic transformation, and governance._ (Fukuda-Parr and Muchhala, 2020).

The European Commission will adopt the first circular economy action plan in December 2015, after the UN launched the SDGs in September 2015. The European Commission, after, adopted the European Green Deal on May 11, 2020. As a result, it's no surprise that researchers and policymakers are suddenly interested in sustainable development, including rural tourism, thanks to these European institutions' initiatives.

Documents by year

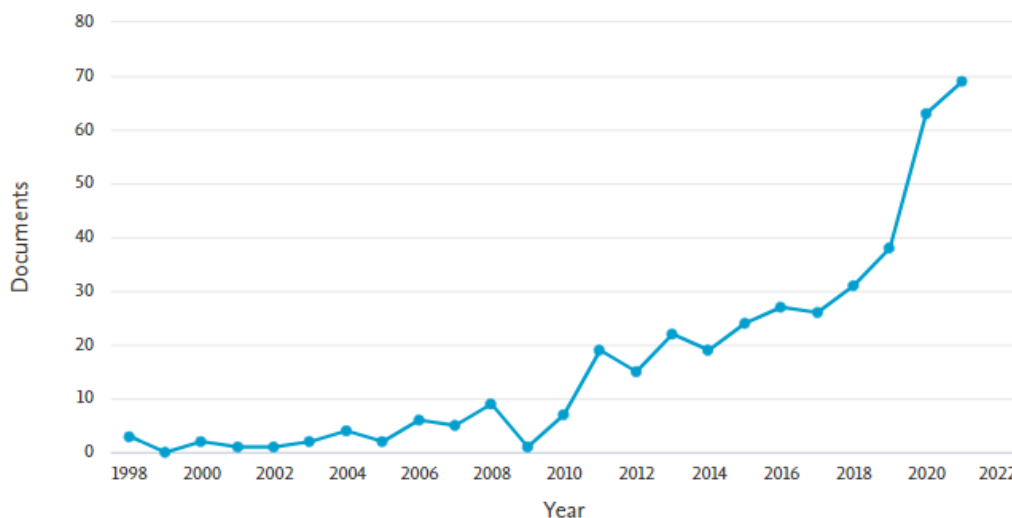


Figure 1: Related publication per year for 1998 - 2021

b) Scientific production per country

When examining publication efforts by country (see figure 2), a careful investigation reveals that the top ten nations involved in the scientific publication of rural tourism and development in the period considered are China, Romania, Spain, Russia, Malaysia, Serbia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Iran, and Italy. China (101) appeared to contribute the most to scientific production related to sustainable tourism. In fact, Prieto-Sandoval et al. (2018) state that academic interest increased significantly in 2003 when China began promoting a circular economy. Additionally, when the circular economy was included in the European Community Agenda, a significant increase in production was observed between 2014 and 2022. But this could also result from China's policy for rural tourism because, according to Baoren (2011), Wang et al. (2013), the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) promotes rural tourism in China by providing financial incentives and government policy support. According to the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA 2011), rural tourism generated over a hundred and twenty billion yuan in revenue and employed over 15 million farmers (Wang et al., 2013). In this context, the country's interest in rural tourism and sustainable development is undeniable. The absence of low-income countries in this ranking is remarkable. Adams (2019, p. 1) will note that "research in developing countries remains relatively limited."

Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.

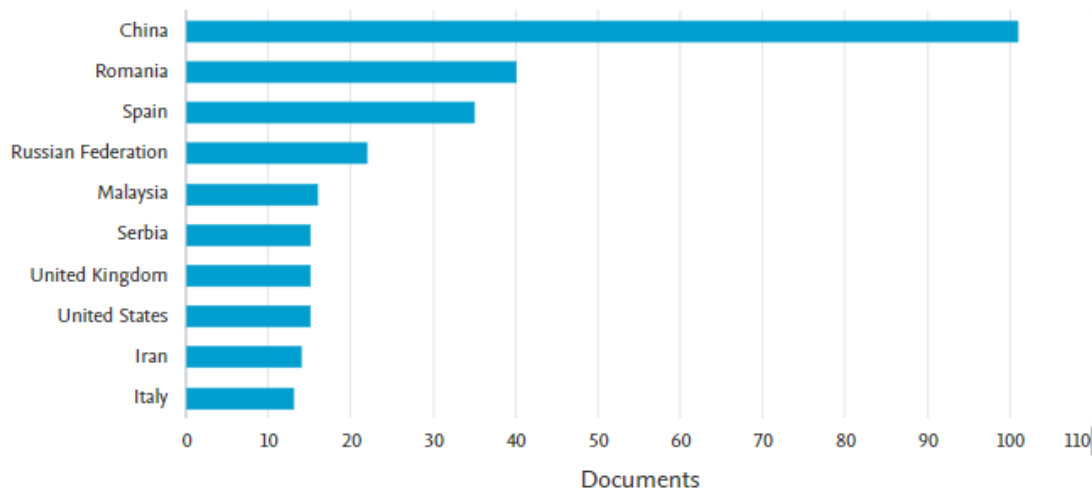


Figure 2: Documents by country

Countries collaboration

The identification of pioneer nations in the publications related to the theme under investigation has led to the analysis of academic collaborations between countries. VOSviewer was used to analyse country collaborations on the most-cited papers in the fields of Rt and sustainable development. As illustrated (Figure 3), four out of the thirty-six countries contributing to the most-cited publications emerged as collaborators. China has collaborated with most states, with the highest link strength of 14 for 101 manuscripts. Apart from China, the most frequent global co-authors of publications are Romania, Spain, Russia, Malaysia, and the United States. When the strength of collaboration is considered, Romania moves into the top-two position (link strength = 10). Whereas the United States and Poland rank third, respectively, in terms of link strength (link strength = 8). Additionally, Austria is connected to seven countries with a link

strength of seven, followed by Serbia and the United Kingdom (link strength of six). China is not the only Asian country to have collaborated with other nations. At the international level, countries such as Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, and Vietnam have all contributed to at least one highly cited article. European countries such as Germany, Finland, and Middle Eastern and Central European countries (Iran, Bahamas, Iraq, Pakistan, and Turkey), have collaborated. Even though they are not among the top international collaborators, some African countries are on the list of international collaborations: South Africa (link strength =3), Mauritius (link strength=2), Ethiopia (link strength= 1). These findings emphasise the critical nature of international collaborations between countries spanning multiple continents to generate highly cited publications on the subject. This study corroborates previous findings by Moosa and Shareefa (2020), who discovered a positive correlation between international collaborations and the number of highly cited publications in a similar analysis.

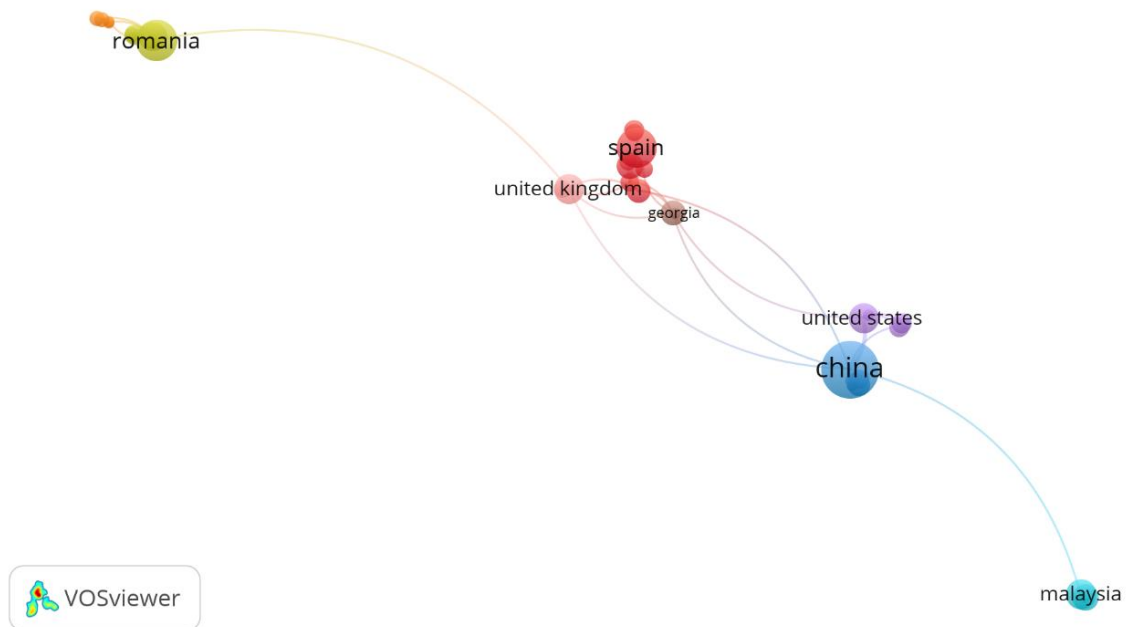


Figure 3: Countries co-authorship

c) The leading journals

The systematic literature review highlights the academic leading journals on rural tourism and development (Table 1). Out of 396 results from Scopus data base, 198 items of journals were found distributed in 31 clusters among the clusters two have the highest connected item. And among them the most sustainability (switzerland) with 41 publications and 457 citations, 10p conference series: earth and environmental science (19 publications), e3s web of conferences (17publications) journal of sustainable tourism (12), worldwide hospitality and tourism themes (10). The table 1 below give the list of the top 10 journal leading publication in the field.

Table 1: Top 10 journal leading publication in the field.

Source	Documents Published	citations	H index
Sustainability (switzerland)	41	457	9
Iop conference series: earth and environmental science	19	14	26
E3s web of conferences	17	8	22
Journal of sustainable tourism	12	392	103
Worldwide hospitality and tourism themes	10	86	20
It transactions on ecology and the environment	10	16	21
Land use policy	9	303	115
Journal of environmental management and tourism	7	22	14
Quality - access to success	7	13	21
Tourism management	5	376	199
Tourism geographies	5	122	61

H – index extracted from <https://www.scimagojr.com>

By analysing the table, it appears that, most of the top journal belong to the field of environment science and tourism. Given that, the sustainable development concept is a transdisciplinary concept which involved many journals, not exclusively tourism journal since sustainability integrated and consider a lot of factors.

d) **The most frequently cited authors were identified**

The most cited authors is Kastenholtz (2004) with the most quoted work “Management of demand’ as a tool in sustainable tourist destination development”. This paper suggests ‘management of demand’ in the context of a careful target-marketing approach as an important instrument for the sustainable development of a tourist destination. Moreover, the author emphasize that a careful selection of the target-market and its eventual differentiation in space and time may help a destination pursue its main development goals, which should further depend on the interests of all local stakeholders and consider preservation priorities. In another works, Kastenholtz et al., (2018) have suggested that Rural tourism may contribute to sustainable destination development but the realisation of this potential depends largely on the type and behaviour of the tourists attracted. Therefore, market knowledge, segmentation studies and management of demand, in accordance with sustainability-yielding territorial development goals, are needed. Moreover, Katstenholtz et al., (2016) have emphasized that tourism lead to local sustainable development stated, that, in particular, demand for local products may stimulate local economy and is simultaneously an important part of the tourist experience.

Kayat et al. (2015) also is among the most cited author with the community based tourism (CBT) to promote a sustainable development in rural area. They recommended that in rural area for CBT leading to sustainable development, mainly it must reflect the characteristics of a rural community

Figure 5: Keywords Network (VOSviewer by authors)

Documents by funding sponsor

Compare the document counts for up to 15 funding sponsors.

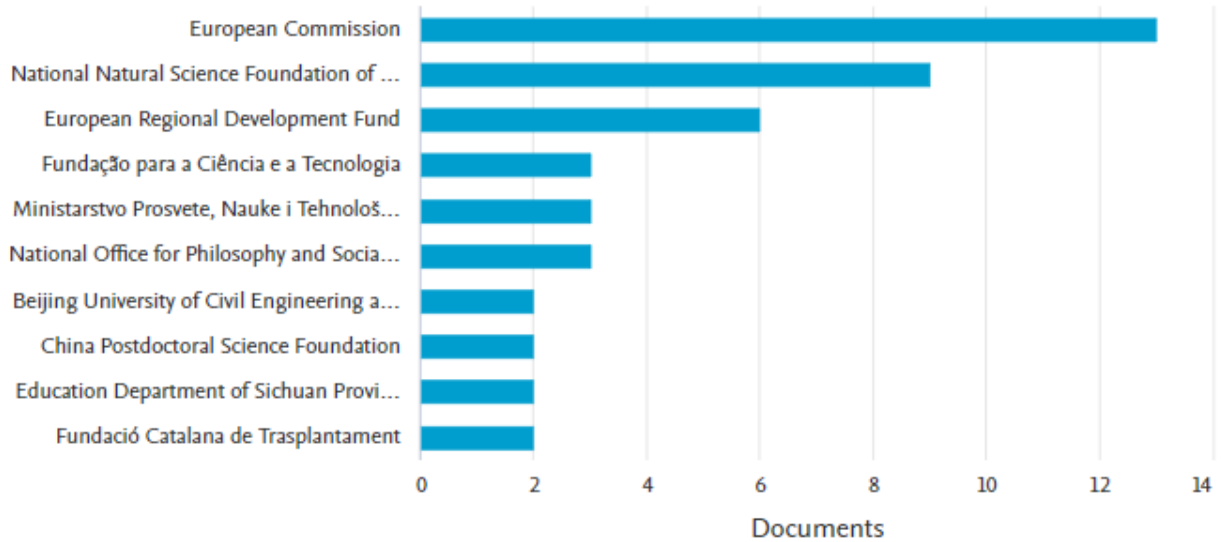


Figure 6: Affiliation chart

Limitations and Future Research

In contrast to previously published bibliometric reviews, which included all publications from all regions of the world, the bibliometric metadata used in this paper is limited to the field's top 396 publications. As a result, previous studies that used the science map database to analyse entire publications in the field may have produced results that differed from those of this study. Despite this limitation, the study does provide thoughtful insights and robust lines of inquiry into sustainable development and rural tourism, as evidenced by the study's cited publications. Another limitation of this study is the study's reliance on a single database (Scopus) for bibliometric data identification. While other databases such as Web of Science, PubMed, and Dimensions are all credible sources, Scopus contains a larger number of articles necessary for this bibliometric analysis. It is recognised that combining two or more databases for data extraction will produce somewhat different results. Additionally, this study's scope was constrained by language and publication type. The publications chosen for inclusion were all in English. Additionally, this analysis included only articles, Reviews, Conference Paper, Book Chapter, conference review, retracted, Book, undefined paper. For future research, it is necessary to combine bibliometric and content analysis of articles in order to gain a thorough understanding of these publications. Additionally, bibliometric analyses of the various schools of thought identified in this study can be conducted in the future.

4. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the academic trend related to "rural tourism" and "sustainable development". The investigations revealed that, at the institutional level, the European Commission (figure 6) collaborates with many researchers on this topic. Therefore, the leadership of the European Union concerning the concept of the green economy, which seeks to safeguard the future ecosystem by taking great care and responsibility for current actions, may have a significant impact on research development.

Whatever the brainstorming that comes with it, one point that appears to emerge from this observation is that European countries impose themselves on scientific publications related to the concepts of sustainable development. Even though China leads practically the head in terms of scientific production, the European Commission leads under the table, the implied organizations in rural tourism by funding them. Thus, unless researchers and institutions in each region take responsibility for rural tourism development that fits their regional vision, the world may accept a Eurocentric perspective of sustainability that promotes healthy and sustainable tourism on a global scale.

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