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Tourism planning and development of local government units: A bibliometric analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines research on tourism planning and development involving local government units (LGUs), focusing on publication trends, intellectual structure, major contributors, and emerging themes. **Methodology** – To address these aims, a bibliometric analysis was conducted on 468 Scopus-indexed journal articles published from 1976 to 2026. The analysis examined publication output, citation performance, leading countries, institutions, journals, authors, and influential papers. It also mapped collaboration patterns and thematic trends using co-authorship, keyword co-occurrence, clustering, and trend analysis. **Findings** – Research output has increased markedly since the mid-2010s, indicating growing scholarly attention to LGU-related tourism planning and development. Scholarly influence remains concentrated in a few countries and institutions. Core themes include the role of local government, stakeholder participation, and sustainability, while emerging topics involve tourism management, spatial-temporal analysis, visitor management, and recovery from disruptions. **Implications** – For LGU practitioners, these findings highlight the need for stakeholder engagement, data-driven planning, stronger institutional frameworks, and tourism policies that support sustainability and resilience. Further research may compare local government policies, governance approaches, and tourism development across contexts. However, the results should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations, including reliance on Scopus and bibliometric methods.

Keywords: tourism planning, tourism development, LGUs, stakeholder governance

JEL classification: R58, Z32, O18

Planiranje i razvoj turizma jedinica lokalne samouprave: Bibliometrijska analiza

Sažetak

Svrha – Ova studija ispituje istraživanja o planiranju i razvoju turizma koja uključuju jedinice lokalne samouprave (JLS), sa fokusom na trendove objavljivanja, intelektualnu strukturu, glavne doprinose i nove tematske oblasti. **Metodologija** – U cilju ostvarivanja ovih zadataka, sprovedena je bibliometrijska analiza 468 članaka iz naučnih časopisa indeksiranih u bazi Scopus, objavljenih od 1976. do 2026. godine. Analiza je obuhvatila obim publikacija, citiranost, vodeće zemlje, institucije, časopise, autore i uticajne radove.

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Takođe su mapirani obrasci saradnje i tematski trendovi primenom analize koautorstava, ko-pojavljivanja ključnih reči, klasterisanja i analize trendova. **Rezultati** – Obim istraživanja značajno je porastao od sredine 2010-ih, što ukazuje na rastuće naučno interesovanje za planiranje i razvoj turizma povezano sa jedinicama lokalne samouprave. Naučni uticaj i dalje je koncentrisan u malom broju zemalja i institucija. Ključne teme obuhvataju ulogu lokalne samouprave, učešće zainteresovanih strana i održivost, dok se među novim temama izdvajaju upravljanje turizmom, prostorno-vremenska analiza, upravljanje posetiocima i oporavak nakon poremećaja. **Implikacije** – Za praktičare u jedinicama lokalne samouprave, ovi nalazi ukazuju na potrebu za uključivanjem zainteresovanih strana, planiranjem zasnovanim na podacima, jačanjem institucionalnih okvira i turističkim politikama koje podržavaju održivost i otpornost. Buduća istraživanja mogu uporediti politike lokalnih vlasti, pristupe upravljanju i razvoj turizma u različitim kontekstima. Međutim, rezultate treba tumačiti u svetlu ograničenja studije, uključujući oslanjanje na bazu Scopus i bibliometrijske metode.

Ključne reči: planiranje turizma, razvoj turizma, jedinice lokalne samouprave, upravljanje zainteresovanim stranama

JEL klasifikacija: R58, Z32, O18

1. Introduction

Following the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism has regained prominence as a development and recovery strategy, particularly in destinations that rely heavily on the sector. Global travel demand has rebounded strongly, placing renewed pressure on destinations to strengthen resilience and adopt more strategic planning approaches (UN Tourism, 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). Recent UN Tourism reporting highlights continued growth in international arrivals in 2025. This reflects both recovery and intensified competition among destinations. In this environment, local government units (LGUs) are increasingly expected to translate national tourism priorities into place-based action. Specifically, LGUs are responsible for coordinating tourism planning, managing local tourism assets, enforcing sustainability regulations, developing infrastructure, facilitating stakeholder engagement, and monitoring the socio-economic and environmental impacts of tourism. They must balance economic gains with sustainability, risk management, infrastructure capacity, community welfare, and destination quality. Many governance and operational decisions that shape visitor experiences and local impacts are made at the local level (Ma & Su, 2024; Reinhold et al., 2023).

These circumstances matter because effective local tourism planning determines whether tourism becomes a long-term engine of inclusive growth or a source of congestion, environmental degradation, and social tension. Policy and research increasingly emphasize destination governance, sustainable development, stakeholder participation, resilience, and the strategic use of data and technology, including smart destination approaches (Laesser et al., 2025; Van Huy, 2021). Recent studies highlight that destination research and practice now focus on governance systems, stakeholder networks, resilience-building, and smart models integrating innovation, accessibility, sustainability, and data-driven decision-making (Reinhold et al., 2023). Given these dynamics, it is timely to examine how scholarship has evolved around LGU-centered tourism planning and development, especially as tourism research has expanded post-COVID and as destination resilience and sustainability have emerged as major strands in contemporary planning and governance scholarship (de Bruyn & Meyer, 2023; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2022; Utkarsh & Sigala, 2021).

Although tourism research and bibliometric studies cover broad areas such as sustainability and destination management, research on LGU-focused tourism planning remains

fragmented and embedded in broader themes rather than mapped as its own field (Khanra et al., 2021; Robina-Ramírez et al., 2022; Utkarsh & Sigala, 2021). As a result, key gaps persist: (1) no consolidated intellectual structure for LGU tourism planning, (2) unclear identification of the most influential authors, institutions, and outlets, (3) limited understanding of dominant and emerging themes—such as decentralization, stakeholder governance, smart tourism, sustainability tools, and risk and crisis management, and (4) little exploration of developing and decentralized contexts, where local governance capacity varies widely.

To address these gaps, this study aims to examine the bibliometric structure of research on LGU-related tourism planning and development by analyzing its publication trends, influential sources and contributors, collaboration networks, thematic evolution, and emerging research directions. By centering LGUs as the main unit of analysis, rather than treating local governance as secondary, this research provides a clearer, evidence-based overview of knowledge development and direction in this area. The following research questions are addressed:

1. How has the volume and temporal evolution of scholarly publications on tourism planning and development involving LGUs changed over time?
2. Which countries, regions, and institutions are the most influential?
3. Which journals, authors, and documents are most influential?
4. What are the collaboration patterns in this field?
5. What are the main research themes and conceptual clusters?
6. What are the emerging topics and research fronts over time?

The significance of this study is twofold. First, it maps a dispersed body of literature, helping scholars position new studies, avoid duplication, and target high-impact themes and outlets. Second, it provides practical value to those who benefit from stronger local tourism governance, including LGUs, local tourism offices, urban and regional planners, destination managers, national tourism agencies, and community and industry partners.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The second section provides the literature review focused on prior studies related to the present research. The third section outlines the study's methodology. Results are presented in the fourth section, aligning with the research questions. The fifth section discusses the findings and their implications. The final section presents the study's conclusion.

2. Literature review

LGUs have long played a central role in tourism planning, sitting at the crossroads of public policy, place-based development, and stakeholder coordination. Early research shows that changing governance philosophies shape tourism development at local and regional levels. For example, Shone and Ali Memon (2008) note that tourism is increasingly used as a tool for regional development. They highlight a move toward more strategic, collaborative approaches, where local and regional governments are expected to take a proactive role in guiding tourism for community well-being. Timur and Getz (2008) add that destination development is relational: local governments and destination marketing organizations often have high legitimacy and power, but collaboration breaks down when links between government, community, and industry are weak. These studies show that LGU-related tourism planning is both a governance challenge (policy direction, mandates, institutional roles) and a coordination challenge (network structures, stakeholder influence, and collaboration gaps).

Recent studies illustrate how LGU-related tourism planning varies across development contexts. Municipalities and local authorities shape tourism outcomes through regulation, planning, and development priorities. For protected areas, Pérez-Calderón et al. (2024) find that municipal representatives perceive sustainability outcomes differently depending on the protection regime: strict legal limits can constrain tourism growth and local quality of life, while models such as geoparks may better support socio-economic development. In heritage- and place-based development, Hew et al. (2014) highlight tensions in Ipoh, a city in Malaysia, between tourism-led regeneration and resident-centered development. Tourism-led regeneration offers economic gains but can conflict with local needs; thus, they recommend government-led revitalization that aligns more closely with residents' interests and involves empowered stakeholder partnerships. Similarly, Vojnović (2023) shows how municipalities can use heritage assets for memorial tourism by mapping their locations and proposing thematic routes—an example of planning that turns cultural resources into structured local tourism products.

LGU influence is clear in destination types where tourism growth depends on local programming, infrastructure, and coordination between municipalities. Varga et al. (2025) show that villages and small towns can use festivals to strengthen identity and traditions. They also note that to unlock tourism potential, towns must deliberately develop events and support infrastructure. Investment and planning in these areas are typically the responsibility of municipalities. In cross-border contexts, Tóth et al. (2020) highlight opportunities for tourism development along the Serbian–Hungarian border. They emphasize that cooperation among municipal and local actors is central to turning shared resources and attractions into viable tourism paths. Vujadinović et al. (2023) offer a broader theoretical perspective, linking tourism research to regional and endogenous development theories. They argue that these theories can inform tourism planning at the regional and local government levels. This reinforces the point that LGU capacity, local assets, and coordination are decisive for tourism's role in development.

Despite these contributions, the existing literature remains fragmented across topics—protected areas, events, heritage, cross-border development, and urban regeneration. Approaches also differ, including policy critique, stakeholder-network analysis, case-based planning, and theoretical synthesis. This fragmentation obscures the fact that research on tourism planning and development involving LGUs has formed a coherent field. Many studies offer useful local insights but target specific destinations, governance, or problems. This limits comparability and conceals broader trends, such as which outlets, authors, countries, and institutions drive the conversation. It also clouds the conceptual structure: which themes dominate, which clusters are emerging, and how topics shift over time. By systematically mapping productivity, influence, collaboration, and thematic evolution, this study seeks to examine three key dimensions of the field: (1) whether research remains localized or becomes more interconnected at the field level, (2) how influential contributions are distributed across countries and authors, and (3) how emerging themes connect context-specific cases with broader scholarly debates. The study consolidates scattered evidence into a field-level view, clarifies the intellectual foundations shaped by governance and stakeholder perspectives, connects these to applied LGU contexts, and highlights where future research can advance theory and policy for LGUs.

3. Methods

This study employs a bibliometric research design to systematically map the body of knowledge on tourism planning and development in LGUs, following the PRISMA protocol (Page et al., 2021). The bibliometric process involves data sourcing and specifications, data screening, and data analysis.

Bibliographic data for the study were retrieved from Scopus using a structured search strategy applied to the article title, abstract, and keywords to capture publications linking tourism planning and development with local-level governance. The search was conducted using the following query:

((“tourism planning” OR “tourism development” OR “tourism policy” OR “destination planning” OR “destination development” OR “sustainable tourism development”) AND (“local government unit*” OR “local government” OR “local authority” OR “local authorities” OR “municipality” OR “municipalities” OR “municipal government” OR “city government” OR “provincial government” OR “local council*” OR “local administration”))

The search query was constructed from the study’s central concepts: tourism planning and development, and local governance. Keywords related to tourism (e.g., “tourism planning,” “destination development,” and “sustainable tourism development”) were combined with local governance terms (e.g., “local government unit*,” “local government,” “municipality/municipalities,” “city government,” “provincial government,” “local council*,” and “local administration”) to capture studies focusing on the role of LGUs. These terms were selected based on their relevance to the study objectives, their use in related literature, and their refinement through preliminary exploratory searching to improve coverage and specificity.

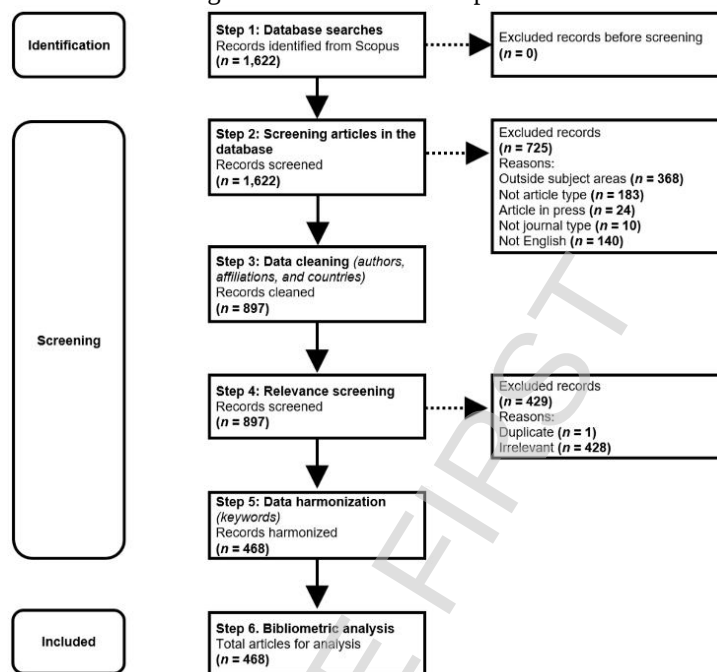
The dataset was limited to English-language records and included only journal articles at the final publication stage, with the journal specified as the source type. To align the corpus with relevant disciplinary perspectives, the search was further refined to the following Scopus subject areas: social sciences, business, management and accounting, economics, econometrics and finance, and decision sciences. Publications indexed up to February 26, 2026 were included, and all eligible records were exported from Scopus in CSV format for subsequent data cleaning, standardization, and bibliometric analysis.

Figure 1 details the multi-stage process used to construct the final dataset for the bibliometric analysis. A total of 1,622 records were identified from Scopus, with none excluded prior to screening. All 1,622 records were screened using the predefined database-based eligibility criteria, resulting in the exclusion of 725 records due to being outside the specified subject areas (n = 368), not an article type (n = 183), an article in press/not yet final (n = 24), not a journal source type (n = 10), or not in English (n = 140). This initial filtering ensured that the retained corpus aligned with the study’s scope, quality thresholds, and disciplinary coverage before proceeding to deeper processing.

After filtering, 897 records were verified and corrected for author names, institutions, and countries using biblioMagika (Ahmi, 2024) to ensure data integrity. Duplicates were then removed. The remaining records were screened for relevance by reviewing titles, abstracts, and, when necessary, full texts. Records that met the search terms but did not address the intersection of tourism planning, development, and local governance were excluded. Studies were also excluded if they did not substantially discuss the role or function of LGUs or similar local government structures in tourism planning or development. For example, records that mentioned LGUs or local governance only as background, without analyzing their involvement or discussing policy, planning, or administrative impacts, were excluded. Many of these included only incidental keyword mentions without examining their connection to tourism planning and local governance. In total, one duplicate and 428 irrelevant records were excluded. Keywords were then harmonized and standardized through manual term cleaning and the construction of a thesaurus file to merge synonyms, abbreviations, spelling variants, and closely related terms, thereby improving the consistency and interpretability of the co-occurrence analysis. These steps establish a solid base for

investigating themes and collaborations in local government tourism planning and development. As a result, 468 articles remained for final bibliometric analysis.

Figure 1: The bibliometric process



Source: Authors' elaboration of the PRISMA framework

The review employs performance analysis and science mapping to describe productivity patterns and to reveal the field's intellectual and conceptual structure. It uses bibliometric tools such as Bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) in the R package (RStudio Team, 2024) and VOSviewer version 1.6.20 (Van Eck & Waltman, 2024). First, performance indicators were computed to profile the dataset and assess research output and impact over time, including annual scientific production, annual citations/average citations per year, and overall dataset characteristics (e.g., timespan, sources, documents, citation averages, and collaboration indicators). Descriptive and evaluative metrics were then used to identify the most influential contributors and outlets, including the most productive and cited countries and institutions, leading journals, highly cited articles, and influential authors, based on citation counts and bibliometric indices (e.g., h-index, g-index, and m-index).

Second, science mapping was used to examine collaboration structures and thematic patterns in the literature. Collaboration networks were visualized with country-level co-authorship maps and world maps. These maps highlighted international partnerships and corresponding-author linkages. To uncover the conceptual structure, author keywords were analyzed through co-occurrence networks. These were complemented by a thematic map positioning themes by centrality and density. A three-field plot (sources–authors–keywords) illustrated links among publication outlets, key contributors, and dominant topics. Temporal analyses captured emerging topics and research fronts. Trending topics over time and a thematic evolution diagram tracked how themes developed and shifted.

4. Results

4.1. Productivity and growth

The scholarship on tourism planning and development involving LGUs has expanded considerably between 1976 and 2026 (see Table 1). The central focus is the pivotal role of LGUs in directing local tourism initiatives under devolved governance. Evidence of this is seen in the publication of 468 journal articles across 215 sources, signifying strong, sustained interest and diverse scholarship. The annual publication growth rate of 4.49% and an average document age of 8.2 years indicate that the field is moderately mature, with a mix of older foundational papers and newer contributions. This growth reflects increasing attention to LGUs' roles as debates on governance, sustainability, and destination management intensify. Moreover, the high citation rate (22.62 per document), extensive reference base (3,825), and broad author participation (1,141 authors) confirm that this is a robust, mature research area. Modest collaboration levels (2.66 co-authors per document) and low international co-authorship (16.03%) emphasize a strong domestic focus, suggesting that local contexts principally drive publication growth.

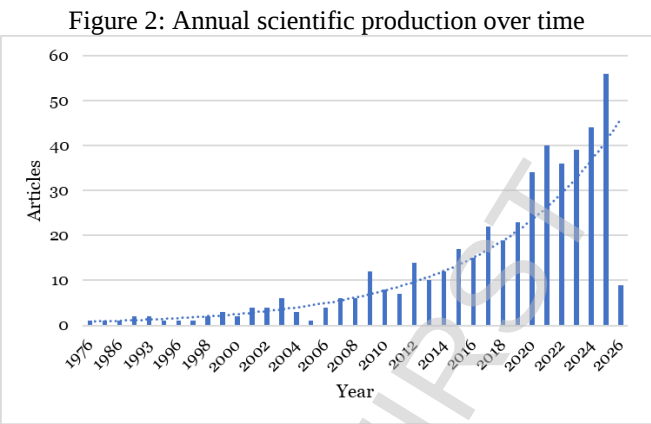
Table 1: Main characteristics of the bibliometric dataset

Description	Results
<i>Main information about data</i>	
Timespan	1976-2026
Sources	215
Documents	468
Annual growth rate %	4.49
Document average age	8.2
Average citations per document	22.62
References	3825
<i>Document contents</i>	
Keywords plus	812
Author's keywords	1457
<i>Authors</i>	
Authors	1141
Authors of single-authored documents	95
<i>Authors collaboration</i>	
Single-authored documents	110
Co-authors per document	2.66
International co-authorships %	16.03
<i>Document types</i>	
Article	468

Source: Scopus data analyzed using Bibliometrix

Figure 2 shows a steady, long-term rise in annual scientific output on tourism planning and development involving LGUs. Output was very small and sporadic from the late 1970s

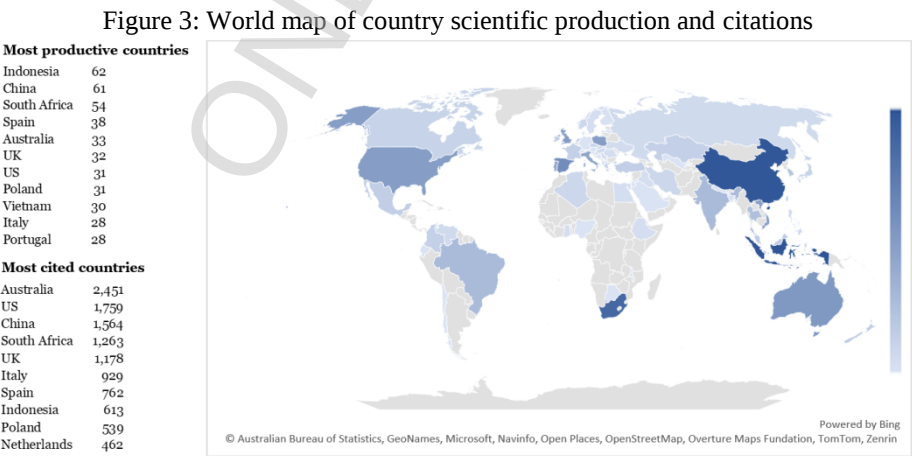
through the 1990s, then increased in the 2000s. Growth appears after the early 2010s and accelerates from the mid-2010s onward. Yearly publications reach double digits and surge to their highest levels in the early 2020s. The dotted trend line confirms this rapid upward trajectory. The peak is around 2025, marked by the highest bar. The lower 2026 count likely reflects only partial-year indexing, not a true decline, underscoring the strongest expansion in the last decade.



Source: Scopus data analyzed using Bibliometrix

4.2. Geographical and institutional landscape

Figure 3 shows an uneven but international landscape of influence in tourism planning and development research involving LGUs. It maps the origins of studies and the clustering of citations. Indonesia (62), China (61), and South Africa (54) lead in publications, followed by Spain (38), Australia (33), the UK (32), and the US (31). This reveals strong output from Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Africa. Instead, citation counts are highest for Australia (2,451), the US (1,759), and China (1,564). South Africa (1,263) and the UK (1,178) also score high. Thus, the countries publishing the most are not always those with the greatest impact.



Source: Scopus data analyzed using Bibliometrix

On the other hand, Figure 4 identifies the institutions that drive influence in this research area by separating citation impact (Panel a) from publication productivity (Panel b). In terms

4.3. Influential journals, articles, and authors

Table 2 lists the journals that most strongly shape the literature on tourism planning and development involving LGUs by combining productivity (articles and share of publications) with influence (h-index, g-index, and total citations). Sustainability (Switzerland) is the most prolific outlet (29 articles; 6.20%), indicating that LGU-related tourism planning is frequently framed within sustainability and governance discussions, while Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites also contributes substantial volume (24 articles; 5.13%). However, influence is most concentrated in top-tier tourism journals: Tourism Management and the Journal of Sustainable Tourism show the strongest impact profiles, reflected in the highest total citations (1,817 and 1,444, respectively) and the highest h-/g-index values, suggesting that foundational and widely cited LGU-focused tourism studies are disproportionately published in these journals. The remaining outlets—such as Tourism Geographies, Tourism Planning and Development, and regionally oriented journals—contribute smaller but meaningful shares, indicating a field distributed across both high-impact international journals and specialized/regionally anchored venues.

Table 2: Most influential journals

Rank	Journal	Articles	%	h-index	g-index	TC
1	Sustainability (Switzerland)	29 ^a	6.20% ^a	12	23 ^a	531
2	Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites	24	5.13%	11	17	327
3	Tourism Management	20	4.27%	16 ^a	20	1817 ^a
4	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	17	3.63%	15	17	1444
5	African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure	16	3.42%	5	8	88
6	Tourism Geographies	11	2.35%	6	11	219
7	Tourism Planning and Development	10	2.14%	7	10	179
8	Tourism	10	2.14%	6	10	150
9	International Journal of Tourism Policy	8	1.71%	3	6	44
10	Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	7	1.50%	6	7	99

^a Top; TC = Total citations

Source: Scopus data analyzed using Bibliometrix

Meanwhile, Table 3 pinpoints the documents that have most strongly shaped scholarly thinking on tourism planning and development involving LGUs. The influence of these works is shown by total citations (TC, the cumulative number of times a work is cited), citations per year (the average number a work receives annually), and normalized citations (citations adjusted for year of publication). Governance- and network-oriented works lead the list: Dredge's (2006a) paper holds the highest total citations (452), followed by Beaumont and Dredge (2010) on local tourism governance (339), and Ruhanen (2013), who examines whether local government facilitates or inhibits sustainable tourism development (252). High normalized and annual citation rates highlight recent agenda-setting topics. Notable examples are regulatory and urban governance challenges, such as short-term rentals (Nieuwland & van Melik, 2020; 43 citations/year; Norm. TC 9.88), and government roles in rural tourism development (Liu et al., 2020; 41.43 citations/year; Norm. TC 9.52). These works show strong contemporary influence, despite less time to accumulate citations. Classic works on residents–government relations (Madrigal, 1995) and local development strategies (Binns & Nel, 2002) also appear, illustrating how the field is grounded in longstanding debates about governance legitimacy, community perceptions, and development outcomes.

Table 3: Most globally cited articles

Rank	Authors	Article title	Journal	TC	TC per year	Norm. TC
1	Dredge (2006a)	Policy networks and the local organization of tourism	Tourism Management	452	21.52	2.47
2	Beaumont and Dredge (2010)	Local tourism governance: A comparison of three network approaches	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	339	19.94	4.33
3	Nieuwland and van Melik (2020)	Regulating Airbnb: how cities deal with perceived negative externalities of short-term rentals	Current Issues in Tourism	301	43.00	9.88
4	Komppula (2014)	The role of individual entrepreneurs in the development of competitiveness for a rural tourism destination-A case study	Tourism Management	300	23.08	6.87
5	Liu et al. (2020)	Analyzing government role in rural tourism development: An empirical investigation from China	Journal of Rural Studies	290	41.43	9.52
6	Ruhanen (2013)	Local government: Facilitator or inhibitor of sustainable tourism development?	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	252	18.00	6.01
7	Madrigal (1995)	Residents' perceptions and the role of government	Annals of Tourism Research	241	7.53	1.00
8	Nunkoo (2015)	Tourism development and trust in local government	Tourism Management	232	19.33	9.30
9	Binns and Nel (2002)	Tourism as a local development strategy in South Africa	Geographical Journal	222	8.88	2.76
10	Dredge (2006b)	Networks, conflict and collaborative communities	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	212	10.10	1.16

TC = Total citations

Source: Scopus data analyzed using Bibliometrix

Table 4 identifies the most influential authors by combining productivity (articles and share of publications) with impact indicators (h-index, g-index, m-index, and total citations). Rogerson, C. M. emerges as the most consistently influential overall, leading in productivity (11 articles; 2.35%) and with the highest h-index (10) and g-index (11), indicating sustained, highly cited contributions across multiple publications. In contrast, Dredge, D. stands out for exceptional citation impact (TC = 1,100) despite fewer articles (5; 1.07%), suggesting that a smaller number of foundational works—particularly on policy networks and local governance—have had outsized influence on the field. Ramaano, A. I., shows a strong m-index (1.167), implying rapid or recent citation momentum relative to career length in this dataset, while authors such as Hanrahan and McLoughlin combine steady productivity (8 articles each) with moderate citation impact.

Table 4: Most influential authors

Author	h-index	g-index	m-index	TC	Articles	%
Rogerson, C. M.	10 ^a	11 ^a	0.4	442	11 ^a	2.35% ^a
Ramaano, A. I.	7	7	1.167 ^a	149	7	1.50%
Hanrahan, J.	6	8	0.5	121	8	1.71%
Mcloughlin, E.	6	8	0.5	121	8	1.71%
Dredge, D.	5	5	0.192	1,100 ^a	5	1.07%
Rogerson, J. M.	4	4	0.444	105	4	0.85%
Fernandes, D.	3	5	0.273	60	5	1.07%
Li, J.	3	3	0.429	321	3	0.64%
Vieira, I.	3	5	0.273	60	5	1.07%
Xu, H.	3	4	0.2	137	4	0.85%

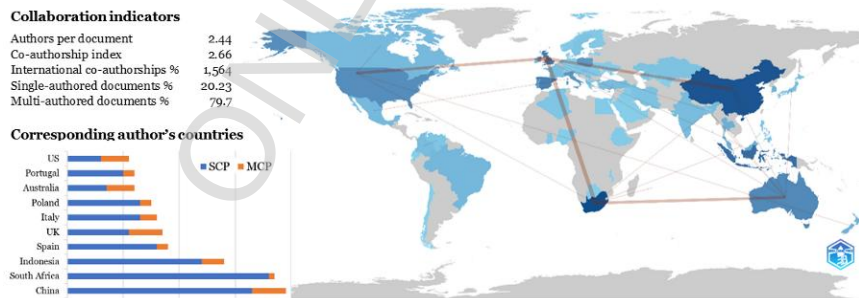
^a Top; TC = Total citations

Source: Scopus data analyzed using Bibliometrix

4.4. Collaboration patterns

The LGU-related tourism planning and development research is largely team-based but only moderately international in scope (see Figure 6). Collaboration averages 2.44 authors per document, with a co-authorship index of 2.66. Multi-authored papers (79.7%) far outnumber single-authored ones (20.23%), highlighting the field's preference for teamwork. However, international co-authorship stands at only ~16%, indicating that most collaboration occurs within national borders, often in domestic teams focused on local LGU and governance issues. At the country level, the chart showing the main authors and global cooperation shows that work is centered on hubs that produce a lot and connect regions. China, South Africa, and Indonesia lead in total input, while Spain, the UK, Italy, Australia, Portugal, Poland, and the US also have major roles. The split between single-country and multi-country papers shows most nations still publish mainly within their own borders, with fewer joint papers with other countries, especially in those more connected worldwide.

Figure 6: Collaboration world map including collaboration indicators and corresponding author's countries



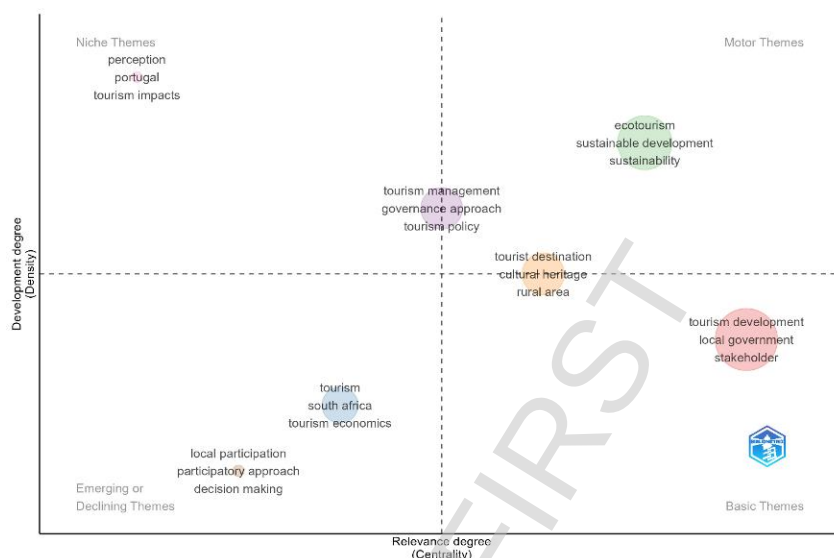
Source: Scopus data analyzed using Bibliometrix

4.5. Conceptual and thematic structure

Figure 7 summarizes the field's main research themes by positioning keyword clusters according to centrality (importance) and density (development level). The basic themes – high in centrality but low in density – center on a cluster combining tourism development, local government, and stakeholders. This shows that LGU roles, stakeholder engagement, and development outcomes are the foundation of the field. [Vieira et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Siti-Nabiha and Md Saad \(2015\)](#) exemplify this foundation by showing that tourism development

is often framed through the joint roles of local government and stakeholders. This highlights that governance and cooperation shape how the literature views development outcomes.

Figure 7: Thematic map



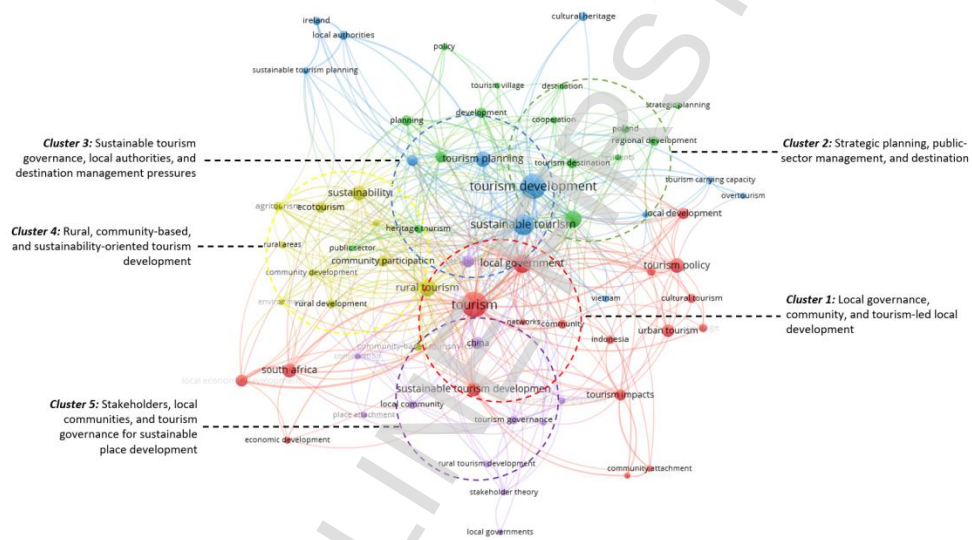
Source: Scopus data analyzed using Bibliometrix

In the motor themes quadrant (high centrality and density), themes of ecotourism, sustainable development, and sustainability stand out as strong, influential streams, indicating that sustainability-based governance and planning drive recent research. [Rahaju et al. \(2026\)](#) and [Khaledi Koure et al. \(2023\)](#) illustrate this by showing that these topics are now well developed and central, reinforcing the importance of governance, planning, and community strategies. Near the center, tourism management, governance approaches, and tourism policy serve as bridges from basic LGU development topics to specialties such as tourist destinations, heritage, and rural areas. [Petrova and Hristov \(2016\)](#) and [Liu et al. \(2020\)](#) show how these bridging themes connect public authority and development discussions to specialized tourism areas. Niche themes, such as perception, tourism impacts, and Portugal, offer context-specific lines of research. [Vieira et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Remoaldo et al. \(2017\)](#) highlight these by focusing on perception and impacts in Portugal, illustrating how specialized studies develop from focused case analyses. Emerging or declining themes, such as local participation and decision-making, indicate which topics are gaining or losing attention as governance shifts. [Hasse and Milne \(2005\)](#) and [Richins and Pearce \(2000\)](#) show these themes are linked to particular governance processes in tourism planning. Their relevance may change over time.

Meanwhile, Figure 8 displays the conceptual structure of the field through author keyword co-occurrence, revealing five thematic clusters within LGU tourism planning and development. The first cluster centers on local governance, community, and tourism-led development, anchored by issues such as local government, tourism policy, community attachment and involvement, tourism impacts, and local economic development (e.g., [Mpofu & Van der Merwe, 2025](#); [Woosnam et al., 2024](#)). The second cluster addresses strategic planning, public-sector management, and destination development, reflecting institutional approaches like planning, cooperation, regional development, and destination management, with an emphasis on sustainability and coordination in governance (e.g., [Chili & Xulu, 2015](#);

Vieira et al., 2016). The third cluster summarizes sustainable tourism governance by highlighting local authorities, governance, sustainable planning, overtourism, and carrying capacity, portraying LGUs as promoters and regulators of tourism sustainability (e.g., Rahaju et al., 2026; Zahra, 2010). The fourth cluster focuses on rural, community-based, and sustainability-driven tourism, including rural tourism, rural development, ecotourism, agritourism, participation, and entrepreneurship, and illustrates an environmentally conscious, place-specific approach (e.g., Liu et al., 2020; Petrova & Hristov, 2016). The fifth cluster emphasizes stakeholders, local communities, and tourism governance for sustainable development, highlighting engagement, theory, conservation, environmental sustainability, and place attachment, and spans diverse geographic contexts like China, South Africa, Ireland, Indonesia, Poland, and Vietnam (e.g., Liu et al., 2020; McLoughlin & Hanrahan, 2019).

Figure 8: Keyword co-occurrence network by authors keywords



Source: Scopus data analyzed using VOSviewer

4.6. Emerging topics and research fronts

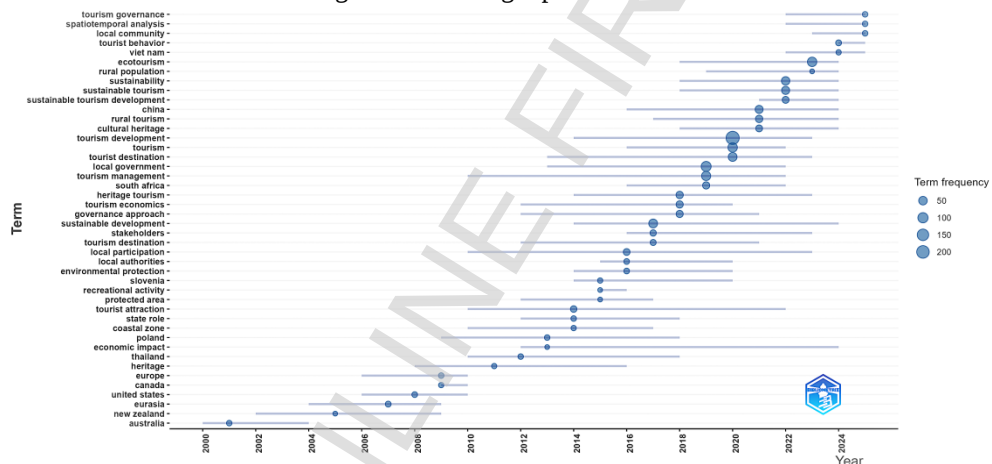
Earlier trending topics (roughly the 2000s to early 2010s) are more place- and context-oriented (see Figure 9). These feature country or region markers (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, Eurasia, the US/Canada) and development-impact concerns such as heritage, economic impact, and protected or coastal areas, suggesting that initial scholarship was often grounded in specific destinations and development outcomes. For example, Connell et al. (2009) reflect this earlier, place- and context-oriented tendency, as their analysis is anchored in New Zealand's institutional and regulatory environment and foregrounds geographically specific governance and sustainability concerns. Similarly, Hefner et al. (2001) reflect the development-impact orientation of earlier scholarship; their analysis of tourism development in South Carolina, USA, emphasizes economic costs and benefits within a destination-specific development framework.

From the mid-2010s onward, the field consolidates around governance and sustainability themes. Local government acts as coordinator of tourism growth, engaging stakeholders—including community members and planners—in planning and management. Sustainable development and tourism efforts depend on such collaboration and community participation.

Chili and Xulu (2015) foreground the facilitating role of local government in sustainable tourism development. Siti-Nabiha and Saad (2015) similarly highlight the governance shift by focusing on stakeholder engagement and local actor coordination to promote more participatory tourism.

In the most recent period, from the late 2010s to 2024, newer or intensifying fronts have emerged. These include tourism governance, spatiotemporal analysis, tourist behavior, and community-focused terms, including the local community. These trends coincide with the ongoing emphasis on ecotourism and sustainability. Together, they suggest both methodological modernization and a stronger policy- and governance-oriented direction in the field. Confente et al. (2024) reflect the field's recent methodological modernization. They advance an approach to track and analyze tourists' actual behavior. This highlights the growing prominence of behavior-focused, spatially sensitive analytical tools. Such tools support more sustainable destination management. Draçi and Demi (2023) similarly illustrate the stronger policy- and governance-oriented direction of recent scholarship. They foreground residents' perceptions of sustainable tourism governance and development, reflecting the increasing prominence of community-centered perspectives in the field.

Figure 9: Trending topics over time

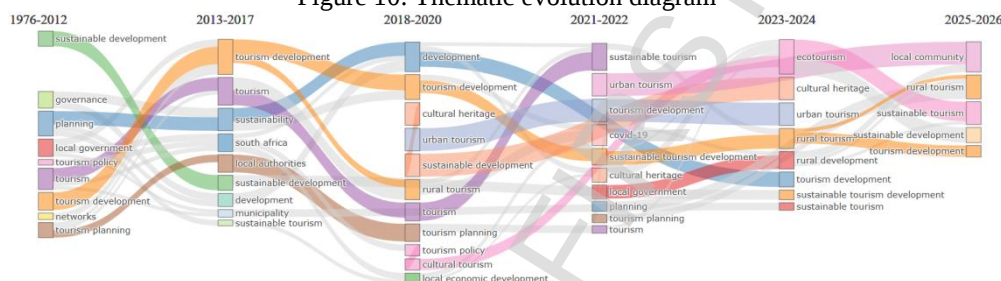


Source: Scopus data analyzed using Bibliometrix

Meanwhile, the thematic development of LGU-related tourism planning research has moved from broad governance-and-planning foundations to more specialized, sustainability- and community-centered agendas (see Figure 10). In the earliest period (1976–2012), the field focused on planning, governance, tourism policy, local government, and tourism development, suggesting that public authorities initially focused on organizing and regulating tourism growth. Dredge (2001) reflects this early focus by examining tourism planning and policy-making in New South Wales, emphasizing how initial scholarship centered on the institutional role of public authorities. Zahra (2010) similarly illustrates this policy-oriented foundation by analyzing local government tourism policy implementation, showing that early work was mainly concerned with public-sector organization and regulation of tourism growth.

From 2013 to 2017, these foundations consolidated around tourism development, sustainability, and local authorities, reflecting a clearer linkage between governance structures and sustainable development priorities. Chili and Xulu (2015) emphasize the role of local government in facilitating sustainable tourism, indicating a stronger alignment

Figure 10: Thematic evolution diagram



In 2021–2022, the diagram highlights three trends: the rise of sustainable tourism as a dominant stream, the integration of disruptive concerns such as COVID-19, and a continued focus on planning and local government. Zhai and Shi (2022) show how sustainable tourism is dominated and highlight COVID-19 as a disruptive policy concern, indicating that crisis-responsive planning is increasingly incorporated into tourism debates. Meanwhile, Bulilan (2021) demonstrates the ongoing emphasis on planning and local government by showing how local authorities' roles in tourism were redefined. This underscores that governance concerns persisted even as the field responded to new disruptions.

5. Discussion and implications

First, publication growth within the retrieved corpus suggests increasing research interest in the role of LGUs in tourism planning and development. Once a small field, it has quickly

grown and become mainstream, especially since the mid-2010s. These trends show that LGUs are now seen as key players in debates on tourism governance, sustainability, and destination management (Chili & Xulu, 2015; Rahaju et al., 2026). Also, the field's long publication history and document average age of 8.2 years indicate that the literature includes both established and relatively recent contributions. This provides opportunities to pull together ideas, refine theories, and set clear research goals as the field grows. The uneven number of citations shows that a few important works have sometimes led research in the field. Future work can build more consciously on these key studies to avoid splitting the field as more articles are published (Dredge, 2001; Zahra, 2010). The low rate of international co-authorship shows that most work has come from local or national studies (Liu et al., 2020; McLoughlin & Hanrahan, 2019). A logical next step to grow the field is to add more studies that compare countries. These can test whether LGU planning models work elsewhere and create general findings for the world.

Second, LGU-related tourism planning and development research is shaped by a split between where knowledge is produced and where it becomes most visible. Indonesia, China, and South Africa lead in publication volume, but citations concentrate in Australia, the United States, and China. This means that theories, methods, or cases most often referenced come from these highly cited contexts (Dredge, 2001; Liu et al., 2020). At the institutional level, Australian universities (such as Griffith University and the University of Queensland) dominate among the most-cited organizations, showing that a small group of institutions act as intellectual anchors. In contrast, many universities – like the University of Johannesburg and Sun Yat-Sen University – spread productivity more widely. The co-authorship network shows that international knowledge circulation relies on “gateway” countries like the UK, South Africa, China, Spain, and Portugal. These countries connect regional clusters and foster cross-border collaboration (Remoaldo et al., 2017; Rogerson, 2020). Strengthening the field's global influence will require more balanced regional partnerships, greater inclusion of under-connected regions, and more comparative multi-country studies. Such efforts could help high-output countries and institutions become higher-impact contributors.

Third, scholarly influence in LGU-related tourism planning is centered in a defined set of high-impact journals, foundational texts, and agenda-setting authors – these shape how the field frames questions and theory. *Sustainability* (Switzerland) and *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites* publish the most articles, but the greatest citation impact lies with elite journals, especially *Tourism Management* and the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. Thus, the field's key frameworks and reference points are solidified and amplified in these outlets. The most cited articles focus on policy networks, local governance, trust, regulation, and government roles. Recent studies with high citation rates, such as those on Airbnb regulation or rural tourism governance, underscore a pivot toward new local governance and regulatory challenges (Dredge, 2006a; Liu et al., 2020). Author metrics reveal dual influence: some scholars shape the field through sustained output (e.g., Rogerson, 2020), others via landmark works (e.g., Dredge, 2001). Consequently, future research can build impact by engaging these governance foundations, extending them to understudied LGU contexts or comparative settings, and aiming for high-impact journals to shape field dialogue.

Fourth, collaborative research teams strongly support knowledge production in this field. Still, most work remains based in single countries, which can limit the applicability of findings about LGU roles to other places and contexts. Many papers are multi-authored, indicating that LGU-driven tourism planning benefits from input from disciplines such as planning, policy, geography, and sustainability. Yet, only about 16% of papers have international authors, so most insights come from within a single country rather than cross-national learning (Liu et al., 2020; Rogerson, 2020). Collaboration hubs such as China, South Africa, Indonesia, and countries like the UK, Spain, Portugal, Australia, and the US show

that some international connections exist, though mostly around a few 'gateway' countries (McLoughlin & Hanrahan, 2019; Remoaldo et al., 2017). Expanding multi-country collaboration and comparisons – such as shared frameworks, common measures, or multi-site case studies – could help build stronger theory, make findings more robust, and move the field from location-specific to broader models of how LGUs guide tourism development.

Fifth, the conceptual core in this domain is now well established. It revolves around an LGU-centered nexus of tourism development, planning, and stakeholder governance. Sustainability and ecotourism are the most mature and field-defining research streams (Rahaju et al., 2026; Vieira et al., 2016). There is a clear opportunity for scholars to deepen this foundational area, as "local government–tourism development–stakeholders" appears as a highly central yet less dense basic theme. Scholars can move beyond descriptive accounts toward stronger explanatory models, such as specifying mechanisms, institutional capacities, and governance instruments through which LGUs shape outcomes (Siti-Nabiha & Md Saad, 2015; Vieira et al., 2016). The bridging position of tourism management, governance approaches, and tourism policy suggests that future work can make strong theoretical contributions. This can be achieved by explicitly linking policy and management tools to context-specific applications such as heritage, rural destinations, and community-based development (Liu et al., 2020; Petrova & Hristov, 2016). At the same time, niche, country-anchored clusters show that knowledge remains fragmented across local contexts. Comparative and theory-building studies could integrate these specialized insights into more generalizable frameworks (McLoughlin & Hanrahan, 2019; Remoaldo et al., 2017). Finally, newer concerns such as COVID-19, overtourism, smart tourism, and halal tourism signal an expanding thematic frontier. LGU-focused tourism research is increasingly being called to address contemporary shocks, digital transitions, and visitor management challenges. In these areas, coherent conceptual integration with the sustainability/governance core will be especially valuable (Cavalheiro et al., 2021; Zhai & Shi, 2022).

Lastly, the research frontier in LGU-related tourism planning is shifting from place-specific, impact-focused studies to a governance-centered, sustainability-driven, and more advanced agenda (Confente et al., 2024; Connell et al., 2009). Since the mid-2010s, attention has focused on local government, stakeholders, and sustainable tourism. Future contributions will be most valuable when they show how LGUs coordinate actors, design policy tools, and manage trade-offs between development, community well-being, and environmental limits (Chili & Xulu, 2015; Siti-Nabiha & Md Saad, 2015). Emerging areas – tourism governance, tourist behavior, and spatiotemporal analysis—reflect demand for detailed evidence. Spatial analytics, temporal tracking, and behavior data inform responsive local decisions rather than broad planning (Confente et al., 2024; Draçi & Demi, 2023). Thematic shifts show that shocks and system transitions – COVID-19 recovery, overtourism, and digital tourism—are now central to the field. LGUs are key agents of resilience and sustainability in both rural and urban destinations (Cavalheiro et al., 2021; Zhai & Shi, 2022).

6. Conclusions

This study shows that literature about tourism planning and development involving LGUs has grown in the retrieved corpus, focusing on governance, sustainability, stakeholder engagement, destination management, and local and regional development. Five related themes define its conceptual structure: local governance and community-linked development; strategic planning and public-sector destination management; sustainable tourism governance and destination pressures; rural and community-based tourism development; and stakeholder-oriented place stewardship. These findings align with earlier bibliometric studies, which also identified sustainability- and stakeholder-centered themes,

but this study emphasizes the greater roles of local government, tourism policy, and place-based development. In practice, these findings suggest that LGU tourism planning should move beyond growth-only approaches by adopting participatory, evidence-based, and sustainability-oriented planning that better integrates community interests, strengthens regulatory capacity, and promotes long-term destination stewardship. For LGU practitioners, this means prioritizing engagement with local stakeholders in planning processes, utilizing data-driven decision-making, building up institutional and regulatory frameworks, and ensuring tourism policies enhance the sustainability and resilience of destinations.

This study has several limitations. It relied solely on Scopus, possibly missing studies indexed elsewhere. The keyword strategy may have omitted studies with different terminology. Manual record exclusion, though guided by criteria, still involved judgment. Bibliometric methods have limitations: citation indicators favor older, English-language publications, while metadata analyses may not fully capture context or methods. Future research should use multiple databases, broaden coverage, and report search strategies transparently. Studies should also use comparative and cross-regional designs, assess the impacts of governance and institutional capacity, and focus on overtourism, post-disruption planning, and smart tourism in underrepresented contexts.

CRedit author statement

Ingrid Uy: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Melvin Sarsale:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of generative AI in the writing process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors complementarily used Grammarly and ChatGPT to improve the fluency, clarity, and quality of the manuscript. After using the service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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