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DETERMINANTS OF RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW

Sergii Iaromenko¹
Łukasz Kryszak²

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the current hotspots and research directions in rural tourism development with a focus on its influencing factors, access to resources, the role of public goods, and spatial aspects of rural tourism activities. We collected 933 journal articles from the Scopus database and analyzed them using VOSviewer and Bibliometrix tools. The results indicate an increasing trend for research in rural tourism sustainability, community-based rural tourism, and constraints in rural tourism value chains. This study identified factors that affect rural tourism, and the role of public goods and the infrastructure in tourism development. The perspective research directions are the systematization of determinants from a demand-supply perspective, to specify the role of infrastructure for access to rural tourism destinations, spatial dependencies and their impact on tourism-policy decisions.

KEYWORDS

rural tourism, public goods, infrastructure, spatial effects, bibliometric analysis

INTRODUCTION

Theory in rural tourism can be distinguished in two strands: geographical and socio-economic approaches (Getz, 1986). The geographical approach opens a discussion about the evolution of rural areas in time and space (Butler, 1980) with main factors of tourism development (e.g. external factors, tourism resources and physical access, location) (Streimikiene, Bilan, 2015). Spatial effects in the geographical approach can be assigned to the development theories with the dependency paradigm and disparities (Oppermann, 1993) or diffusion (Panyik, 2015, Cucari et al., 2019) in respect to the governance and community-based rural tourism.

Socio-economic approach is based on motivation theories and economic factors in tourism development and the role of consumer's behavior, marketing and managing drivers influencing rural tourism development (demand-supply equilibrium, destination-choice models, psychographic models) (Fletcher et al., 2017, Lohmann, Panosso Netto, 2016). The majority of tourism research is concerned with studies of economic, cultural and social impacts, external and internal challenges, and aspects of sustainable development (Rosalina et al., 2021). In their investigation, Rosalina et al. (2021) noticed gaps in spatial

¹ Poznan University of Economics and Business, Poznań, Poland, sergii.iaromenko@phd.ue.poznan.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-3750-825X

² Poznan University of Economics and Business, Poznań, Poland, lukasz.kryszak@ue.poznan.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-8660-9236



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effects of rural tourism development, and the role of local communities in developing tourism and the use of tourism resources in value chain.

Integrated approach is blended in a concept of tourism destination which is described from the spatial perspective (location, accessibility, infrastructure) (Žemla, 2016), the availability of tourism resources and delivering processing due to producers and intermediaries, and economic, social, environmental factors (Candela, Figini, 2012, Fletcher et al., 2018) with marketing and governance tools (Lohmann, Panosso, Netto, 2016, Morrison 2019).

Given the multiplicity and diversity of factors influencing rural tourism, there is an emerging need to investigate trends in rural tourism development in last decades with focus on determinants of tourism development, the role of public goods, and spatial effects that can be assumed by policy-makers in rural tourism planning. For this objective we used a bibliographic analysis (Donthu et al., 2021) to identify the key areas of study on rural tourism development. In this chapter we will focus on scientific production, most influential journals in the field, international scientific cooperation and the thematic map evolution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors that have a direct impact on rural tourism development can be distinguished into those related to tourism resources and socio-economic conditions (Fletcher et al., 2018, Morrison, 2019, Q Yang et al., 2021, Kumar, Valeri, 2022). Q Yang et al. (2021) noticed that the availability of public goods is raised in areas with well-developed infrastructure (Kumar, Valeri, 2022). For more sustainable rural development, it is better if rural areas have more diversified economic activity than if it only relies on agriculture. Such diversified areas are better prepared for economic shocks and market fluctuations (Sánchez-Zamora et al., 2014). Based on the Butler's concept of TALC (Tourism Area Life Cycle Model) (Butler, 2006) on every stage of rural destination development, the key drivers are changing in relation to socio-economic condition, structural changes (increasing non-agricultural activities) with a leading role of local government (Yang J. et al., 2021).

Chen et al. (2023) found that factors such as tourism resources, their access for stakeholders, location of a particular destination have significant positive effects on rural tourism development. Among socio-economic factors, an annual income of rural households and a number of local residents play significant role (Chen et al., 2022). A transport accessibility to rural destination is a key factor for increasing number of tourist flows (Xie et al. 2022). In addition, the great role plays policy factor (Chen et al., 2022). The positive business climate for rural tourism directly impacts on intensification of tourism development, and it is necessary to establish Destination Management Organization (DMO) for involving local business and implementing policies in similar local environments (Shin et al., 2017). Further, it is important to take into account local residents' attitude to develop rural destinations (Muresan et al., 2016, Huo et al., 2023) and a positive image of destination for tourists (Kastenholz et al., 2012, Murray, Kline, 2015).

Another important aspect of rural tourism development is the presence of public goods, which can become tourist attractions. Wang et al. (2013) noticed there were differences in developed and developing countries in the study for the role of public goods in the rural development. Public goods play the main role based on one of models of rural tourism development (resources, products, promotion, market). Natural resources such as climate conditions, water access, and environmental quality as a part of public or common goods have significant impact on tourism development (Abellán, García Martínez 2021, Xie et al., 2022). The assessment of tourism resources alike public goods which are used for rural



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tourism is a prior for planning and implication of rural tourism policy (Sánchez Rivero et al., 2014). The important issue is to deliver public goods, i.e. tourism resources, to tourists ensuring the quality of service where the mature rural destination has advantages when comparing to emerging ones (Kim, 2018).

The study of rural tourism development from a perspective of spatial effects uses, at least, a question of distance decay (Truchet et al., 2016, Tan et al., 2023, Yee, Ismail, 2020), location of destination (Cai et al., 2008) and its positioning to other areas (Xi et al., 2015, Khanal et al., 2020), and its aftermath for land use functions and policy implications (Gao, Cheng, 2020, Li et al., 2024). The problem of distance decay in rural tourism was examined in a context of its effects on trip characteristics including time distance to destination, an accessibility to rural destination due to infrastructure, accommodation hubs, and price attributions based on distance to tourism resources (Cai, Li, 2009) and tourism infrastructure (Tan et al., 2023), and land cover changes (Olaniyi et al., 2020). A particular location next to well-developed resorts demonstrated spillover benefits as increasing of the tourist flow from resorts to the neighboring rural destinations (Huang et al., 2016). Rural regions which have positive impact of drivers as a favorable environment, traffic network and tourism policy are characterized by higher spatial effects because strong relations among them (Xie et al., 2022, Yang Q. et al., 2021). The rural tourism can have spillover effects for socio-economic development of particular area because of structural changes in rural economy, reducing poverty, and creating flavor environment for local business (Mahadevan et al., 2021). Truchet et al. (2016) emphasized the distance to natural attractive areas had significant effects for accommodations: spillover effect for situating close to natural attractions, and backwash effects for hotels more than 25 km in radius reducing occupancy rates.

The literature above shows that the issue of rural tourism development is a complex phenomenon and can be viewed from many different perspectives. Therefore, this indicates the need to systematize the emerging themes. We will do so using bibliometric techniques.

DATA AND METHODS

Traditional literature reviews are often qualitative and subjective (Guo et al. 2019). Bibliometric analysis allows to analyze the literature in quantitative and objective way. It includes investigation of conceptual, intellectual and social structure (Aria, Cucurello, 2017). For the systematic bibliometric review of rural tourism, our study consisted of following stages (Herra-Franco et al. 2021):

1. Turn search criteria and source identification (topic, criteria for searching, dataset selection);
2. Selection software and data extraction (bibliometrix in R programming environment);
3. Bibliometric analysis of data and interpretation of results.

To collect the data for bibliometric analysis we used Scopus database. We use following keywords including three searching fields: 1) TITLE-ABS-KEY("rural tourism" OR agritourism AND "spatial effect*" OR spillover OR backwash OR spatiotemporal) OR 2) TITLE-ABS-KEY("rural tourism" OR agritourism AND "public good*" OR "tourism resource*" OR attraction*) OR 3) TITLE-ABS-KEY("rural tourism" OR agritourism AND factor* OR determinant*). We first obtained 1279 record. Then we limited our search only to articles written in English and used 1082 records for abstract screening. We needed to excluded 116 studies because of thematic irrelevance and further 20 studies because of incomplete bibliographic information. 946 records were sought for retrieval but 13 could not be retrieved. Therefore, our final database included 933 articles.

In this chapter, the bibliometric analysis will be used to answer three main research questions:



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- RQ1 – what is the dynamic of scientific articles on rural tourism, its influencing factors, public goods and spatial effects and what are the main causes of changes in this dynamic?
- RQ2 – what are the most influential journals in the field under study?
- RQ3 – what is the intensity of international scientific cooperation in the field?
- RQ4 – what is the thematic evolution of the research field under study?

To answer RQ1 and RQ2 we used descriptive statistics of the sample and citation analysis. Answering to RQ3 is possible by analysis of the proportion of articles that were prepared in international cooperation. When it comes to thematic evolution (RQ4), it is analyzed by establishing emerging, niche, basic and motor themes in two-dimensional strategic diagram (Cobo et al. 2011). Each theme in the diagram is characterized by “centrality” and “density”. Motor themes (upper-right quadrant) are well developed (high density) and highly relevant to the field (strong centrality). Basic themes (lower-right quadrant) are relevant (high centrality) topics but not yet well developed. In upper-left we have niche topics which do not have strong ties with other topics in the studied field. This is why their meaning to the field under study is rather marginal. However, they may have strong international impact. One can say that niche themes cover more specialized topic. The lower-left quadrant represents not well-developed topics with marginal meaning to the field. These are emerging (or declining) topics.

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the annual production of documents in the topic of influencing factors, public goods and spatial effects in rural tourism. Tendency of scientific production in this topic highlights roughly three stages of research: the embryonic period (1996-2008) in which the total number of studies amounted to 59. After 2008, the financial crisis influenced national economies specialized in international tourism (Davidmac et al., 2021, Li et al., 2010) causing decline of 4% in international tourist arrivals and 6% in international tourism receipts in 2009 (UNWTO 2013).

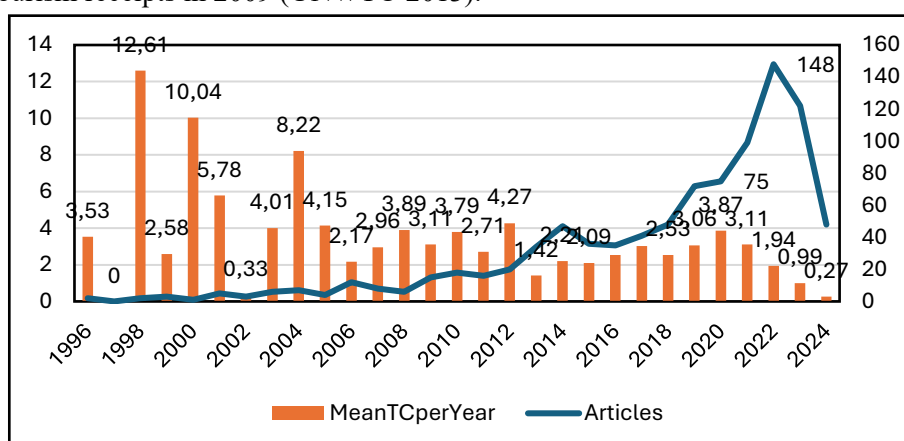


Figure 1. Annual article production and mean total citations per year of articles in the topic of rural tourism, its influencing factors, public goods and spatial effects

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Scopus.

The second stage (2009-2018) counts 295 publication which shows the high increase in volume of research on the topic in comparison with previous period. This rapid increase is a consequence of fast-



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growing tourist flow, especially in a region of Asia and Pacific (UNWTO 2024). However, the rapid tourist flow required new solutions and studies for conservation of public goods and tourism attractions, tourism planning and spatial effects on local and regional governance because of its impact on environment and socioeconomic development of emerging and mature destinations.

The third stage (2019-2024) shows another rapid increase of annual scientific production in the field of rural tourism – 564 documents were published in this stage. This period faced COVID-19 pandemic crisis and its consequences for international tourism and regional economies, as well as continuing factors of Russian invasion in Ukraine and its impact on tourism in Central and Eastern Europe.

The five most influential sources (sorted by H-index) for studies in the analyzed topic are presented in Table 1. These journals are characterized by the highest values of H-index. For example, the value for Tourism Management means that each of 22 articles published in this journal was cited at least 22 times. Sustainability journal also published a lot of publication in the topic (112) and it has even higher H-index than Tourism Management but the total number of citations is much lower. It suggests that relatively many articles from this journal were not cited such frequently. Among other impactful sources, one may mention journals such as Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Land and Tourism Economics.

Table 1. The most influential sources for publications in the topic of rural tourism, its influencing factors, public goods and spatial effects

Source title	Total publications	Total citations	H index	CiteScore, 2022	Publisher
Sustainability	112	1976	24	5.8	MDPI
Tourism Management	22	3742	22	22.9	Elsevier Ltd.
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	17	662	13	18.9	Taylor and Francis
Land	24	207	9	3.7	MDPI
Tourism Economics	11	272	9	7.7	SAGE

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Scopus.

Figure 2 shows in which countries the corresponding authors of articles in the topic are affiliated. It also shows the intensity of international cooperation. In most countries (except for Austria), single country publications dominate suggesting that most of papers are written by authors affiliated in institutions from the only one country. This tendency is also true for countries that have a long tradition of international cooperation in science, such as the USA.

Interestingly, the clear leader in terms of the number of publications in the analyzed topic is China. Approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ of articles in our sample has Chinese corresponding author. On the second and third place, there are Spain and Italy. Both these countries are characterized by a large share of tourism in the economy. The topic of rural tourism is also relatively extensively studied in the USA and in Iran.

In the next step, we can tackle the RQ4 to see what is the thematic evolution of the field. Figures 3 demonstrates four quadrants with clusters of topics in the field which can be categorized in emerging, niche, basic, and motor themes. Among emerging topics, one may find cultural tourism, community participation and heritage tourism which are included in the same cluster. Basic themes include 5 clusters as 'conceptual themes' with specific words (rural tourism, spatial distribution etc.). Niche themes presented 5 cluster with two more expanded ones (rural accommodation, tourism potential; and tourism

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resources, rural destination). Motors themes present 3 clusters with topics relating to poverty alleviation, farm tourism and cluster analysis, and GIS with spatial econometrics.

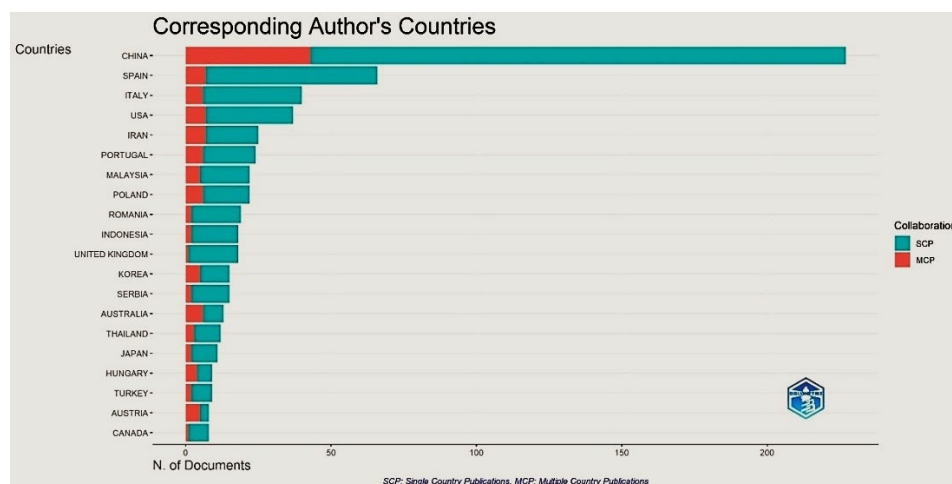


Figure 2. Corresponding author's countries and international cooperation in the topic of rural tourism, its influencing factors, public goods and spatial effects

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Scopus.

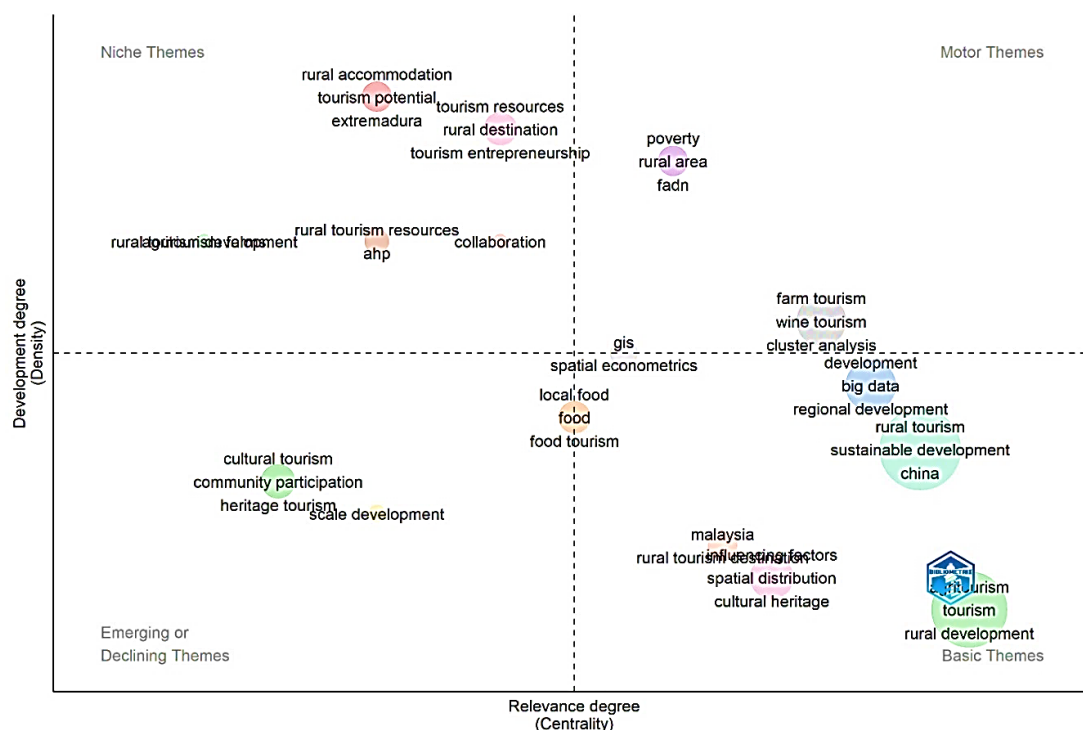


Figure 3. Thematic map in the field of rural tourism, its influencing factors, public goods and spatial effects

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Scopus.



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Basic themes are related to competitive aspects of rural destinations, marketing and management tools, the role of local communities in strategic planning of rural areas and tourism industry. Rural tourism enhances the competitiveness of rural destinations by promoting sustainability, pro-ecological practices, and cultural exchanges that strengthen community-tourist relationships (Sharpley, 2007, Villanueva-Álvaro et al., 2017, Park, Yoon, 2009; Priatmoko, 2021). Strategic planning and collaboration among stakeholders contribute to resilience and sustainable growth by addressing seasonality and emphasizing community involvement (Kastenholz et al., 2012, Martín Martín et al., 2019, Liu, 2006; Law, Lo, 2016). Networking and clustering among stakeholders improve competitive advantage through sustainability, environmental protection, and managing socio-economic pressures (Pejanović et al., 2017, King, Nair 2013, Reid et al., 2004).

Agritourism focuses on entrepreneurial networking, farm tourism, and revitalization's role in local development (Broccardo et al., 2017, Veeck et al., 2006, Yang et al., 2021), while rural accommodation studies highlight natural attractions and their impact on tourism (Sánchez Rivero et al., 2016; Sánchez-Martin, 2023). Factors such as technology, infrastructure, and socio-economic determinants shape rural tourism's role in regional development (Fu et al., 2024, Di Gregorio, 2017, San Martín, Herrero, 2012, Ma et al., 2020). An access to rural destinations is determined by developed basic infrastructure, and it could be counted in rural tourism planning with spatial approach (Zhang et al., 2023, Yin, Zhao, 2024, Zou et al., 2023, Nouza et al., 2013).

Niche themes is blended basic topics as marketing tools, spatial approach for planning of rural development (González-Ramiro et al., 2016), cluster creation for increasing local entrepreneurial activity (Tamrin et al., 2024, Stoddart et al., 2019), and a crucial role of public goods as tourism resources (natural and cultural attractions) for rural tourism development (Kim, 2018, Guo et al., 2022). Engagement of public goods in value chains in rural tourism can impact on growth of rural economies (Contini et al., 2009) in regards with local collaboration among stakeholders (Utami et al., 2023).

Emerging themes exploring by researchers are focused on community-based tourism (Huang et al., 2016, Castellano-Álvarez et al., 2023) and community's participation in rural tourism (Fisher, 2006, Wu et al., 2022), and authentic heritage of rural destinations (Lontai-Szilágyi, et al., 2019), social dimension in business activity and relationships with tourists and local suppliers (Ohe, Kurihara, 2013).

Motor themes analyze multifunctionality impact on social, economic, and environmental changes in rural areas in terms of rural tourism and agritourism (Cardillo et al., 2023, Henke et al., 2022, Singh et al., 2022), possibility to reduce of rural poverty due to diversification of agricultural entities and households (Ćirić et al., 2021, Martini et al., 2022). Rising topic in motor themes is spatial approach in assessing tourism potential of rural areas: the availability of rural destinations in terms of distance and time (Chhetri et al., 2016, Santana-Jiménez et al., 2015), location factor (Peña et al., 2013, Jiang, Wang, 2018), spillover effects on neighboring areas (Qi et al., 2022), and spatial planning with sustainable concept for rural areas (Kulczyk, Woźniak, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Our study presents structural changes in rural tourism investigation, with a focus on public goods, factors and spatial approach of its development. We emphasis that the majority of publications use economic and marketing theoretical background with, at least, three points: resources, tourist, and stakeholders as producers and managerial staff. It is a grounded concept related to the competitiveness of tourism destination, tourist's perception and decision-making process, with a stress on visitor management and



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revisited marketing tools. Spatial approach is investigating by developing countries last decade. It shows structural changes in agriculture, need to establish cohesion policy in rural development, agriculture, and local governance.

Basic themes presented in the results part explore marketing tools and competitive advantages for rural destinations using new approaches in tourism planning of rural areas. These investigations will be probably continued in terms of challenges of climate changes, tendencies of sustainable practices in agriculture with reducing job positions in this industry, and findings to solve crisis with labor force, stimulating business activity of local communities.

Niche themes emphasize a crucial role of public goods, their access for consumers and suppliers in developing rural tourism. Future study can develop a sustainable approach in using resources for rural tourism, importance of horizontal relationships among stakeholders, and growing role of technologies, new technologies for tourism planning, including deeper study of tourists' behavior.

Further research could investigate the integration of sophisticated digital marketing tools and data-driven strategies to enhance the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations. This should include an evaluation of the accessibility and attractiveness of rural areas, with a focus on how location factors and spillover effects influence rural tourism development. Such an approach should concentrate on the manner in which these instruments can successfully engage local communities and advance sustainability. Furthermore, an investigation into the development and impact of stakeholder networks and clusters in rural tourism could provide insights into optimising collaboration for sustainable growth, while addressing socio-economic problems and environmental protection.

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