

# SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH MAY BE ACHIEVED BY PROMOTING INNOVATIVE TOURISM

Gaurav Khurana<sup>1</sup>, Ashish Sharma<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>1,2</sup>Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo

## ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, there has been a growing interest in studying the impact of sustainable tourism development on economic growth. However, despite its recent scope, the scientific literature published so far has not evaluated the performance of the scientific activity of this relationship. Consequently, this study analyses the 668 articles published to date in the Web of Science database on the effect that sustainable tourism development has on the overall long-term progress of the economy. To this end, we carry out an analysis of the most recognized authors, regions with the highest percentage of scientific production, most influential organizations, and the co-occurrence of keywords, most prominent citations, publications, and co-authorship among the most recognized authors. The results obtained show the trend and impact of the literature published to date and the established and emerging research groups. Also, they identify key research topics in a way that provides a planning framework for further research in this field.

**Keywords:** sustainable tourism; tourism development; economic growth; bibliometric; literature review

## I. Introduction

Tourism is a constantly growing and economically important sector on a global and local level. It is of vital economic, social, and cultural importance and offers real prospects for sustainable and inclusive development. Such is the importance of this sector that the number of tourist trips made each year before the arrival of COVID-19 came to surpass the world population. International tourist arrivals exceeded 1.5 billion globally in 2019, representing an increase of 3.8% year-on-year. Likewise, this figure is expected to continue to rise, with a forecast of 1.8 billion international tourists by 2030, although this may be revised after the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. After six decades of steady growth, tourism has been established as an indispensable engine of economic growth. In this sense, it should be noted that in 2019 the travel and tourism sector experienced a growth of 3.5%, surpassing the growth of the global economy of 2.5% for the ninth consecutive year. From another perspective, we can see that the sector directly contributes 4.4% of GDP, 6.9% of employment, and 21.5% of exports of services in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. In this regard, shows the 15 countries with the highest percentage of contribution to GDP in terms of the travel and tourism sector.

## II. Conceptual Framework

The empirical literature published so far has not specified a universally accepted definition of sustainable tourism development, although recent evidence on the matter suggests that one of the most widely used

definitions of the concept is that provided by the World Trade Organization (WTO), which defines it as a “development that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future”. However, the empirical literature continues to analyse a series of fundamental questions for the development of sustainable tourism, and many relevant questions in this area remain unresolved. Without forgetting that its genesis is associated with the maintenance of environmental quality, it is of particular importance that everything done now will not harm future generations. Therefore, the assessment of long-term economic, environmental, and community health is deemed necessary. Thus, recently, researchers have examined the effects of sustainability within tourism since it is considered a paradigm that characterizes the future of this sector. For this reason, in recent years, there has been growing interest in studying this relationship, highlighting the importance and difficulty of improving sustainability in tourism but also identifying it as a fundamental tool for competitiveness. Studies on economic growth demonstrate the impact of the tourist impulse on the general progress of the economy in the long term. To this end, many governments have been involved in the development of tourism for economic growth, because it has a great capacity to distribute wealth, contribute to the development of emerging economies, and generate income through exports. However, it can also exert long-term negative impacts on the environment and damage the future economic development of tourist destination.

Therefore, tourism is a transcendental tool to promote a development proposal according to sustainability criteria. In recent decades, many researchers have tried to determine the effects of sustainable tourism development on economic growth. In general, this approach has been used to show the growing importance of this relationship by identifying research gaps and specific areas of interest. Linking of the literature between authors, topics, and research fields has been completed through content analysis and descriptive statistics. Although we can verify that this relationship has been widely studied in the previous literature, we consider it interesting to carry out a study of the size, growth, and distribution of existing scientific documents, as well as to delve into the structure of the groups that are interested in these documents. Therefore, the present study aims to recognize the various research currents in the literature on the influence of sustainable tourism development on economic growth. In this way, the results will make it possible to identify areas of interest for current research and possible directions for future research.

### **III. Research Methodology**

The main purpose of bibliometric reviews is to assess the body of existing empirical literature to determine possible research gaps and highlight the limits of knowledge. The bibliometric analysis uses quantitative methods to classify data, produces representative summaries, and is recognized as a useful approach to analysing the performance of journals, institutions, authors, and the characteristics of research topics. In our study, to quantify the influence of publications, authors, and journals, we have analysed various bibliometric indicators, including the number of publications, total citations, and citations per article, the main journals, most relevant universities, and the most influential countries in the matter.

**IV. Discussion**

This research presents a structured review of the literature that studies the influence of sustainable tourism on economic growth. Bibliometric studies on sustainable tourism and the impact of tourism on the economy are found in the previous literature. However, bibliometric analysis has not been completed that relates sustainable tourism and economic growth and identifies analytically and objectively emerging works, authors, and research groups. The results of our bibliometric analysis on sustainable tourism and economic growth indicate that there is a relative concentration of the most influential works among a certain number of researchers. Authors Zaman K., Croes R., and Kumar R.R. are the ones with the highest number of publications. Other authors also have a high number of publications, such as Sharif A., Hall C.M., Nijkamp P., and Romao J. However, as the field continues to mature, numerous authors are joining this line of research, expanding the work in a variety of areas (for example, “Green and sustainable science and technology” and “Environmental science”). As a consequence, the number of citations is progressing upwards, having increased by 28% in the last five years, which shows the current significance of the analysed relationship. These results are in line with those obtained by previous studies on sustainable tourism. Furthermore, our analysis of the geographical dispersion of publications showed that China has the highest number of works (25%), followed by the United States (20%). These results are similar to those of Yoopetch and Nimsai on sustainable tourism since they indicate that this research is located in emerging regions of the world (e.g., Asia). However, our results are different from those obtained by other bibliometric studies also in the exclusive field of sustainable tourism, by indicating that the United States is the country that contributes the most literature. This difference may be because our study also considers aspects of economic growth, which is attracting organizations, research centres, and researchers from the vast majority of countries, mainly in Asia and Europe.

Our study also indicates that a growing interest in the study of the influence of sustainable tourism development on economic growth began in 2005, similar to that suggested by other previous studies on economic research and on sustainable tourism, which confirms that there is a recent and successful period of related academic literature, specifically from 2005 to date. On the other hand, our results detect the breadth of methodologies and disciplines used, even among the most prolific academics, which exemplifies the interdisciplinary nature of research on the influence of sustainable tourism development on economic growth. Also, it is possible that only the work of one or two researchers is necessary for an organization to be classified as high performance, and that the influence of the analyzed relationship may be due to co-authorship between published works. These results coincide with those obtained by previous studies on economic research, indicating that co-authorship analysis shows that the associations between countries/regions are relatively fixed and limited. Finally, the results obtained also suggest future lines of research. We have found that research on the impact of sustainable tourism on economic growth has mainly focused on the areas of hospitality, green and sustainable technology, and environmental sciences. Therefore, it would be interesting to address new areas of study that extend the results obtained. For example, the economic impact of sustainable events, sustainable tourist destinations, and sustainable maritime tourism remains to be studied. Likewise, given that current experience is concentrated in a certain number of countries, it would be necessary to expand the number of investigations into a broad set of experiences that offer a multicultural and globally relevant points of view.

## V. Conclusions

Research on sustainable tourism development and economic growth is increasing and maturing. However, there is still a significant gap, given the small number of influential articles. The evidence emerging from this study suggests that sustainable tourism development is indispensable for economic growth. Countries like China and the United States have developed this relationship, but for European countries, it is still an issue that needs further research. Likewise, and in the context of the current crisis derived from COVID-19, our findings suggest that measures to promote the development of sustainable tourism and thus improve economic growth, currently slowed by the pandemic, and should be investigated. Additionally, we have also found that this relationship should be promoted from the point of view of environmental sciences. On the other hand, an expansion of the results that we developed in this study seems necessary. The number of keywords could be expanded to include trade openness, pollution, energy consumption, globalization, and a wide variety of other relevant terms that could contribute to a more comprehensive review of the analysed relationship. For example, pollution and globalization were the first precursors to the field of sustainable tourism development and economic growth. Expanding future research in this direction would identify many other contributions and potentially change core research areas even further. However, the inclusion of additional keywords will result in a broader set of articles that will later require innovative bibliometric analysis tools and approaches. Therefore, future research should consider that there are opportunities for further content analysis of specific and influential studies to more concretely identify research gaps and directions. From an empirical perspective, the results of this study have implications for research that promotes policies to stimulate the development of sustainable tourism. This can be a solution to the scenarios of economic slowdowns, such as those caused by COVID-19 today. In this sense, there is a need to use more effective statistical models that allow for adequate decision-making with high impact on final results.

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