

Article

Creative Tourism: Two Decades of Conceptual Evolution and Characterization

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Abstract: The concept of “creative tourism”, emerging at the century’s start, responds to the “creative turn” in tourist destinations, aligning with the evolving creative class, clusters, and cities. This study employs a bibliometric analysis to examine the evolution and academic focus on creative tourism over the past two decades. Using databases like Scopus and Web of Science, we analyzed key trends, thematic developments, and the impact of creative industries on tourism. Our study reveals significant growth in creative tourism research, emphasizing creativity’s role in enhancing tourism experiences and formulating sustainable, culturally rich models. It underscores the importance of integrating creative industries into tourism and the positive impact on local economies and community development. This analysis not only maps the academic trajectory of creative tourism but also highlights its practical implications for future tourism management and sustainable community development.

Keywords: creative tourism; bibliometric analysis; Scopus; Rstudio; web of science



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1. Introduction

Creativity has long been associated with the realm of artists, thereby excluding other societal actors (Lubart et al. 2003). However, today, creativity is no longer viewed as a subject reserved for a minority of individuals: it also concerns groups, communities, and organizations (Parmentier et al. 2017), as well as the economy (Dutraive and Szostak 2021). The field of creativity is not a particularly recent area of study, as seen in the works of Michael Polanyi (Festré and Østbye 2021) or John Maynard Keynes (Arena 2021). Nonetheless, certain areas of study have not been examined through the lens of creativity, and this is the case with “tourism”.

Many authors advocate for the role of creativity and its positive externalities on territories, advancing theses on the relationships between the creative dynamism of territories and their attractiveness (Florida 2006). They demonstrate that creativity, as a source of competitive advantage, finds its place in society due to the performative demands imposed by the frenzied global competition among creative cities (Cohendet et al. 2011), creative spaces, creative classes (Florida 2003), or creative industries (Bagwell 2008). In this context, tourism is one of the important activities in territories (Lozato-Giotart et al. 2012) and well illustrates this territorial competition. Creative tourism emerges aptly to characterize both an increasingly fragmented and diverse tourist demand and a tourism offer lacking in diversification and thematic, territorial anchoring. Furthermore, creative tourism highlights the reciprocal and attractive coupling of creativity and tourism. Indeed, while tourism offers a fertile ground for creativity, with its potentialities remaining open, creativity proposes new developmental perspectives for tourism (Richards 2014).

The concept of creative tourism has evolved significantly over the past decade, transitioning through various phases and integrating with technological advancements as reflected in the notion of “Creative Tourism 4.0”. This new paradigm explores the synthesis of creative industries and tourism development through a digital lens, enhancing the interaction and cultural exchange between tourists and local communities. These developments signify a broadening scope of creative tourism, necessitating a reevaluation of traditional models and strategies. Creative Tourism 4.0 emphasizes the co-creation of experiences between tourists and locals, facilitated by digital platforms and tools. This shift is often referred to as the “curational turn”, where the focus is on curating personalized and immersive experiences that go beyond traditional tourism offerings. Researchers such as (Piqué and Richards 2022; Richards 2021) have discussed this approach, highlighting the importance of leveraging digital technologies to enhance creative tourism experiences and foster deeper connections between tourists and destinations.

The concept of creative tourism has gradually established a significant position within the community of researchers and practitioners. Creative tourism has been the subject of a series of thematic dossiers in recognized journals, conferences, networks, etc. Overall, these initiatives have greatly facilitated the flow of information, ideas, and best practices among academics, consultants, decision-makers, and project initiators around the concept of creative tourism (Gombault 2011). This proliferation has, moreover, led to a certain saturation, sufficient to delineate the contours of the concept.

In the context of globalized competition, tourist destinations seeking new segments and niches are turning to creative tourism as a promising avenue for playful promise, regeneration, and repositioning (Pagès 2014). Creative tourism is increasingly employed as a tool or strategy in public and private programming actions to reinvent and differentiate in a saturated market, fostering cooperation among stakeholders. However, as Richards and Wilson (2006a) caution, adopting a hastily considered strategy can lead to mimicry and the counterproductive banalization of experiences through their serial reproduction across different destinations. This approach is often criticized for its focus on advertising rather than being genuinely transformative.

As the debate on creative tourism’s efficacy continues, more recent studies offer a nuanced understanding of its impact on local development. For instance, one study (Richards 2020) discusses the strategic use of creativity in the placemaking of tourism destinations. Richards emphasizes the importance of integrating creative tourism strategies that enhance destination attractiveness and contribute to the socio-economic empowerment of local communities. He highlights the need for authentic engagement with local traditions and crafts to foster deeper cultural exchange and generate lasting benefits. This approach is considered essential for developing sustainable and community-focused tourism practices. Moreover, one study (Zhang and Xie 2019) illustrates how creative tourism can drive urban renewal by weaving artistic and cultural resources into tourism developments. This approach revitalizes overlooked urban spaces and promotes sustainable tourism initiatives. Their insights underscore the transformative power of creative tourism, extending beyond mere economic impacts to enhance cultural preservation and strengthen community resilience.

This article undertakes an exploratory journey to define the aspects and dynamics of creative tourism through a rigorous bibliometric analysis covering two decades of academic work. Our main objectives are to trace the evolutionary trajectory of creative tourism in academic discourse, identify key contributions and thematic groups that have shaped the field, and evaluate the conceptual and practical implications of creative tourism on destination development and stakeholder engagement. By synthesizing these results, we aim to offer a nuanced understanding of the creative tourism landscape, highlighting the interaction between creativity and tourism and providing strategic insights for future research directions and policy formulation.

To understand the rise of creative tourism, it is essential to place it within the broader changes in the global tourism industry, which increasingly values diversity, sustainability,

and cultural depth. This article argues that by thoroughly understanding the thematic evolution and key contributions in the field, stakeholders can better harness the transformative power of creative tourism. This approach not only enhances visitor experiences but also brings significant economic and social benefits to local communities. The insights garnered from this comprehensive review will serve to inform both current practices and future policy developments, emphasizing the integration of creativity into the fabric of tourism development. Ultimately, this study aims to catalyze a more strategic and thoughtful engagement with creative tourism, advocating for practices that are not only economically beneficial but also culturally enriching and environmentally sustainable.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Creative Tourism: The Seminal Definitions and Global Overview*

Creative tourism, a concept that emerged in the late 1990s, focuses on uniting visitors with local people and their daily habits and practices in genuine contexts, thereby enhancing the tourism experience (Remoaldo and Ribeiro 2022). This form of tourism involves participation in creative practices and activities inherently linked to the place of their occurrence, like creation, craftsmanship, and other embodied creative practices (Duxbury and de Castro 2022). The essence of creative tourism lies in offering opportunities for personal development, creative skill enhancement, and fostering social interactions and exchanges (Elkasrawy 2020). This approach not only sustains the local lifestyle and authenticity but also contributes positively to the economic development of local communities, impacting local economies and community development (Elkasrawy 2020).

Two seminal definitions set the foundation for understanding creative tourism. Some authors (Richards 2000) were pioneers in defining this concept, viewing creative tourism as a form of tourism that “offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences characteristic of their vacation destination”. Another significant definition comes from UNESCO, within its “Creative Cities Network”, which describes creative tourism as “a journey oriented towards an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or the special character of the visited place, providing a connection with those who reside in that place and create this living culture”.

Creative tourism transforms traditional tourism by raising new issues in the economics and management of creativity and enhancing tourist engagement in creative activities. It complements cultural tourism by offering personalized experiences that engage tourists with local creatives, contributing to the vitality of local cultural and heritage resources (Safaa and Szostak 2023).

Some authors (Richards and Wilson 2007) further elaborated on this by introducing the concept of a “creative turn” in contemporary tourism (Richards 2011; Richards and Wilson 2007). This shift moves away from mass tourism focused on mere holidaying and cultural tourism based on must-see sights (Gombault 2011). Creative tourism is often linked to the everyday creativity of host populations, involving practices in fields like artisan crafts, gastronomy, perfumery, porcelain painting, and dance (Richards and Wilson 2007). This connection highlights the intrinsic link between local cultural practices and the creative experience offered to tourists.

Creative tourism, defined by its capacity to engage visitors deeply with local cultures and practices, sets the stage for a transformative impact on tourist destinations and local economies. This form is linked closely to the integration of self-image with destination branding, significantly influencing Destination Brand Self-Congruence (DBSC) (Shahabi et al. 2022). As this form of tourism evolves, it continuously impacts the economic and social fabrics of local communities.

In addition, the concept of creative tourism encompasses a blend of visitor engagement in local culture and creativity, going beyond the traditional tourism models. It emphasizes the role of tourists as active participants in their travel experiences, engaging with and contributing to the local cultural and creative landscape. This expanded understanding of

creative tourism showcases its capacity to foster more meaningful, authentic, and sustainable tourism practices, enriching both the visitor experience and the local community.

In summary, the concept of creative tourism not only transcends traditional tourism models by promoting deep engagement in local culture and creativity, but it also positions tourists as key contributors to the local cultural and creative landscape. This expanded framework underscores creative tourism's potential to foster meaningful, authentic, and sustainable practices that enrich both visitor experiences and local communities. In this context, Table 1: Related Work provides an essential academic synthesis that complements our narrative by mapping out the seminal works in the field.

Table 1. Key studies in creative tourism.

Author(s) and Year	Focus of Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Relevance to Our Study
(Shaw and Bagozzi 2018)	Theoretical foundations of creative tourism	Theoretical analysis	Explores theoretical underpinnings and motivational factors in creative tourism.	Provides foundational theories that underpin our bibliometric analysis and help in understanding the evolution of creative tourism research themes.
(Akdemir et al. 2023)	Systematic review of creative tourism	Systematic review	Summarizes empirical research in creative tourism.	Our study extends by providing a bibliometric analysis, adding depth to the systematic review.
(Álvarez-García et al. 2019)	Impact analysis in creative tourism	Bibliometric analysis	Analyzes academic output in creative tourism.	Our study builds on this by analyzing thematic trends over time, not just outputs.
(Galvagno and Giaccone 2019)	Mapping creative tourism research	Literature review	Reviews the field and proposes future directions.	We provide a detailed temporal and geographical analysis, offering new insights.
(Maldonado-Eraza et al. 2016)	Academic research in creative tourism	Literature review	Provides a snapshot of academic publications in creative tourism.	Our analysis is more comprehensive, covering methodological shifts and thematic evolution.
(Moleiro 2023)	Critical review of creative tourism literature	Literature review	Identifies gaps in the creative tourism literature.	We address some of these gaps by highlighting emerging themes and methodological innovations.

Table 1 serves as a crucial element in our discussion, succinctly capturing the progression of themes within the creative tourism research landscape. This table not only corroborates the narrative of creative tourism as a transformative practice but also emphasizes its potential to drive sustainable and culturally enriching initiatives. It serves as a foundational reference, articulating the evolving priorities of the field and providing a clear context for the discussions that follow in subsequent sections of this study. It reaffirms the importance of integrating cultural depth and community engagement into tourism practices, promising a richer, more meaningful interaction for all stakeholders involved.

2.2. Creative Tourism and Its Experiential Dimensions

Creative tourists are motivated by a human desire to transform through action and interaction (Gombault 2013). They prefer to experience destinations in “slow tourism” mode, embodying a posture of “doing” and “sharing” rather than just “seeing” and “contemplating. Recent studies (Huang et al. 2023) emphasize that “slow tourism” not only allows for deeper cultural immersion but also promotes sustainable travel practices that are becoming increasingly important in the global tourism context.

There are as many creative motivations as there are tourists. To understand the breadth of this spectrum, some authors (Khomsî and Safaa 2015) attempted to create an ascending continuum of creative experience intensity, ranging from a simple desire for diversion to deeper aspirations like creative self-expression, learning, personal development, and seeking restorative or even therapeutic experiences.

In pursuit of interactive and participative experiences, or what some authors (Richards and Wilson 2007) termed “creative hardware”, the creative tourist engages in an active journey involving “doing” and “sharing”. This approach transcends the passive “seeing” and “contemplating” characteristic of mass recreational tourism. Creative tourism signals a “creative turn” in contemporary tourism, breaking away from mass tourism focused on “having holidays” and cultural tourism based on “must-see sights” (Gombault 2011). Creative tourism is often linked to the everyday creativity of host communities through practices in fields such as artisan crafts, gastronomy, perfumery, porcelain painting, and dance (Richards and Wilson 2006a). One study (Mouco 2023) discusses how these creative activities contribute significantly to local economic sustainability and foster a deeper appreciation for indigenous crafts and traditions.

As creative tourism develops, festivals and events are increasingly recognized for their crucial role in stimulating commercial activities and creating creative spaces within tourist destinations (Gennadievna Sarafanova and Alexandrovitch Sarafanov 2022). These events enhance the experiential dimensions of tourism, where visitors are not merely passive observers but active participants in cultural and creative practices.

However, access to creative, multisensory in situ experiences is neither obvious nor systematic. It requires skills and abilities that vary from one tourist to another and from one context to another. This ties back to the definition of creativity, which refers to the capacity or power of an individual to imagine, create, and realize something new (CNRS Online Lexicography). One study (Wang et al. 2020) further elaborated on the challenges and requirements for facilitating such immersive experiences, underscoring the need for supportive infrastructures that accommodate diverse creative engagements.

In this context, one study (Richards 2009) alludes to “skilled consumers”. These are talented and autonomous tourists who involve themselves in what the authors (Richards and Wilson 2007) call “creative hardware” or the production of their own stays with thematic and affinity partners. The “soft hardware” is the actual participation in creative workshops and escapades. The notion of “skilled consumers” is expanded in another study (Shaw and Bagozzi 2018), whose authors highlight their role in shaping the tourism landscape through their choices and interactions with local cultures.

The autonomous participation of increasingly active, participative, and competent tourists is no longer confined to standardized and repetitive automata. The client/tourist gains freedom of action, co-conception, co-design, and co-creation in both CtoC and CtoB contexts. Creative tourism is at the forefront of capitalizing on recent reflections on the theme of co-creation, notably in marketing, where value co-creation is primarily attributed to the evolving role of the consumer over time (Pralhad and Ramaswamy 2004). This aspect of co-creation within tourism is further validated by some authors (Choi et al. 2020), who explore how the collaborative nature of creative tourism enhances both the visitor experience and the socioeconomic fabric of the destination.

2.3. The Destination as a Territorial Context and Crucible of Idiosyncratic Creative Resources

Tourist destinations are depicted in the literature as a crucible and incubator of creativity. In turn, this incubated creativity fosters the renewal of these places while respecting their history, cultural and artistic anchorage, and their art and heritage communities (Dechamp and Szostak 2016). More recent studies (Thompson 2018) have further emphasized how destinations can harness this creativity to enhance their appeal and competitiveness in the global tourism market.

Creative tourism significantly highlights the idiosyncratic nature of territorial resources. In each destination, the themes explored are different. Often, these themes are

drawn from other sectors or creative industries before being integrated by the creative tourist to propose their delivery forms (Gombault 2011). This integration is pivotal in creating unique, location-specific experiences that cater to a diverse array of tourist preferences, as explored in depth (Luo et al. 2019) in a study on the adaptation of local cultural elements into tourism products.

The management of creative tourism requires effective coordination and development of local resources. Local destination management organizations play a pivotal role in enhancing creative tourism by prioritizing organizational culture and resource development (Gato et al. 2022). This strategic management helps in harnessing the creative potential of local resources, making destinations more vibrant and appealing.

The creative demand of tourists is multi-thematic, encompassing art, heritage, lifestyle of the visited place, its living culture, and its inhabitants. It is also multifaceted in that it can be either residential or itinerant. Some authors (Richards and Wilson 2006a, 2006b) cite examples of heritage and artistic workshops that have been adapted into workshops offered to tourists, involving crafts, art, gastronomy, perfumery, porcelain painting, dance, etc. (Richards and Wilson 2006b).

Creativity is presented as essential to address economic, ecological, and social challenges (Gay and Szostak 2019). Many authors advocate for its role and positive externalities on territories, proposing theses on the relationships between the creative dynamism of territories and their attractiveness (Liefoghe 2010). They show that creativity, as a source of competitive advantage, finds its place in society due to the performative demand imposed by globalized and frenzied competition among creative cities (Cohendet et al. 2011), creative spaces, creative classes (Florida 2002), or creative industries (Bagwell 2008). In this sense, tourism is one of the important activities in territories (Lozato-Giotart et al. 2012) and illustrates well this territorial competition.

2.4. Creative Tourism and the Cultural and Artistic Components of Destinations

Creative tourism has indeed given heritage and culture a new “look”, opening them up to innovative approaches (Saidi 2016). Often, the term “creative” appears to update or extend the concept of “cultural” tourism (Pagès 2014). However, unlike cultural tourism, creative tourism relies more on intangible resources (Richards 2016). In the same vein, Richards and Marques (2012) note that creativity can be nourished by and can nourish encounters with heritage communities, rather than just the tangible or monumental forms of heritage (Richards and Marques 2012).

The world of arts remains a preferred realm for creative tourism. To emphasize the clear touristic-artistic character in many practices of creative tourism, we use the term “Artouristicity” to represent the interaction between curious tourists and creative artists, united in their pursuit of genuine and immersive experiences set against the backdrop of global or local artistic activities (Saidi 2016).

According to some authors (Safaa and Saddou 2023), the reconciliation of economic and creative logics during co-creation workshops between artists and tourists in various destinations is crucial. Artists succeed in integrating these two aspects complementarily, illustrating the entrepreneurial role in the creative economy. The artists’ prior professional practice and their approach are key elements for this harmonization, fostering the development of extra-artistic skills and the personalization of tourist experiences.

For example, creative tourism facilitates encounters between artists and tourists. Indeed, the world of arts is particularly concerned with this form of tourism, which can be defined as offering “visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in courses and learning experiences characteristic of their holiday destination” (Richards and Raymond 2000). In this regard, and to underline the clearly touristic-artistic nature of this economic activity, one study (Saidi 2016) discusses “Artouristicity”, highlighting how this concept bridges the gap between tourists and artists by fostering an environment where both can pursue genuine and immersive experiences. This is particularly evident in co-creation workshops, where tourists, in exchange for

financial compensation, engage with the work of artists while learning artistic techniques and practices.

These workshops require artists to reconcile their creative logic with an economic logic to justify the financial compensation, which is not straightforward. This situation involves two distinct actors interacting: the autonomous tourist, engaged in creating and co-creating their own experience (Richards and Wilson 2006b; Richards 2000), and the artist, who shares their work experience but also engages in more commercial and entrepreneurial activities to meet the expectations of tourists, playing the role of facilitator and educator in the arts, heritage, and creativity during a stay. This role challenges the stereotypical perception of artists as bohemian and introverted. The complexity of defining the artist's profession stems from a multi-century history of evolving professional organization and identity recognition, leading to a divergence in definitions and an increase in contradictions, leaving self-definition based on vocation as the main criterion (Moulin 1983). This self-definition is disrupted in the context of co-creation workshops due to the need to balance economic and creative logics.

Lastly, creative tourism promotes creative industries and fosters significant economic contributions through experiential service design. Activities such as workshops, guided tours, and gourmet dining not only promote local creative industries but also enhance the cultural and artistic components of destinations (Chang 2022). This strategy supports a sustainable tourism model that values creativity and interaction, enriching both the visitor experience and the local community.

The field of creative tourism has evolved markedly over the recent years, underscored by diverse methodological approaches and thematic explorations as evident in recent studies. In aligning our research with the current academic discourse, we have integrated seminal works that offer both foundational insights and novel perspectives.

Moreover, the personal engagement and satisfaction derived from immersive creative activities play a crucial role in the economic and image benefits for destinations. This is exemplified in the work of other authors (Safaa and Bédard 2016), who explored how creative workshops in Marrakech's riads significantly enhance visitor satisfaction and their commitment to the destination. These activities not only improve the perceived image of the destination but also foster a deeper, more meaningful connection to the locale, thereby supporting sustainable tourism practices. Their findings underscore the importance of integrating culturally enriching experiences into creative tourism offerings to maximize economic and social benefits.

Notably, the studies by some authors (Akdemir et al. 2023; Álvarez-García et al. 2019) provide comprehensive systematic reviews that have mapped out the trajectory and thematic concentration within creative tourism research, highlighting significant shifts towards sustainability and community engagement. These works not only echo the methodological framework employed in our study but also enrich the comparative analysis, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the evolution in research focus over the past decades.

Further enriching our literature review, the contributions of other authors (Álvarez-García et al. 2019; Galvagno and Giaccone 2019) are instrumental in delineating the impacts of creative tourism from a socio-economic perspective. An analysis (Álvarez-García et al. 2018) through Scopus and WoS databases sheds light on the pervasive influence of creative tourism in regional development, which complements our findings and supports our arguments regarding the economic potentials of creative tourism. Similarly, Galvagno and Giaccone's (2019) review synthesizes previous works to propose future directions, emphasizing the need for integrating creative tourism within broader tourism and economic strategies, which our research corroborates and builds upon.

Figure 1 illustrates the connections between creative tourism, cultural/heritage tourism, and other related forms of tourism. It highlights the integration of creative and cultural/heritage tourism, the role of creativity and innovation, and the impact on sustainable and community development. This framework helps in understanding the relationships

and interactions within creative tourism, aligning with our discussion on the evolution of creative tourism and its components.

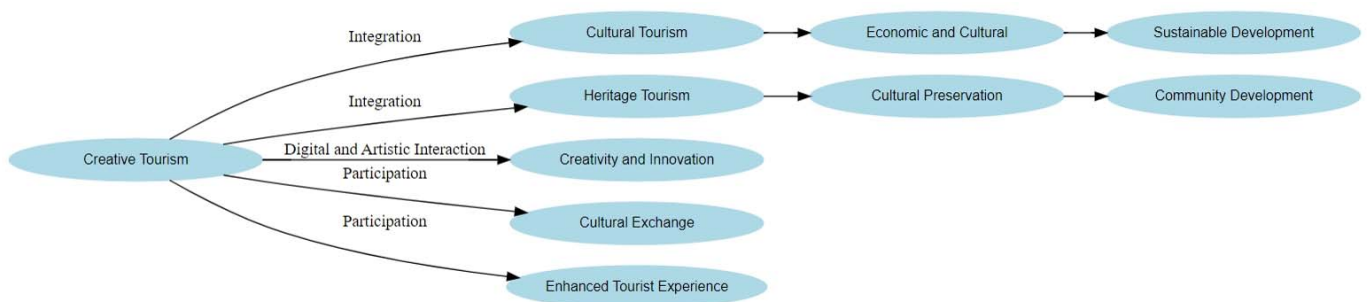


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for creative tourism.

3. Results

The bibliometric analysis conducted explored various dimensions of creative tourism, with a particular focus on publications from 2002 to 2024. A significant trend observed is the marked increase in research publications, particularly in areas emphasizing economic and sustainable impacts of creative tourism, as depicted in Figures 1 and 2. These trends highlight the sector’s dynamic evolution and its increasing alignment with sustainable development goals.

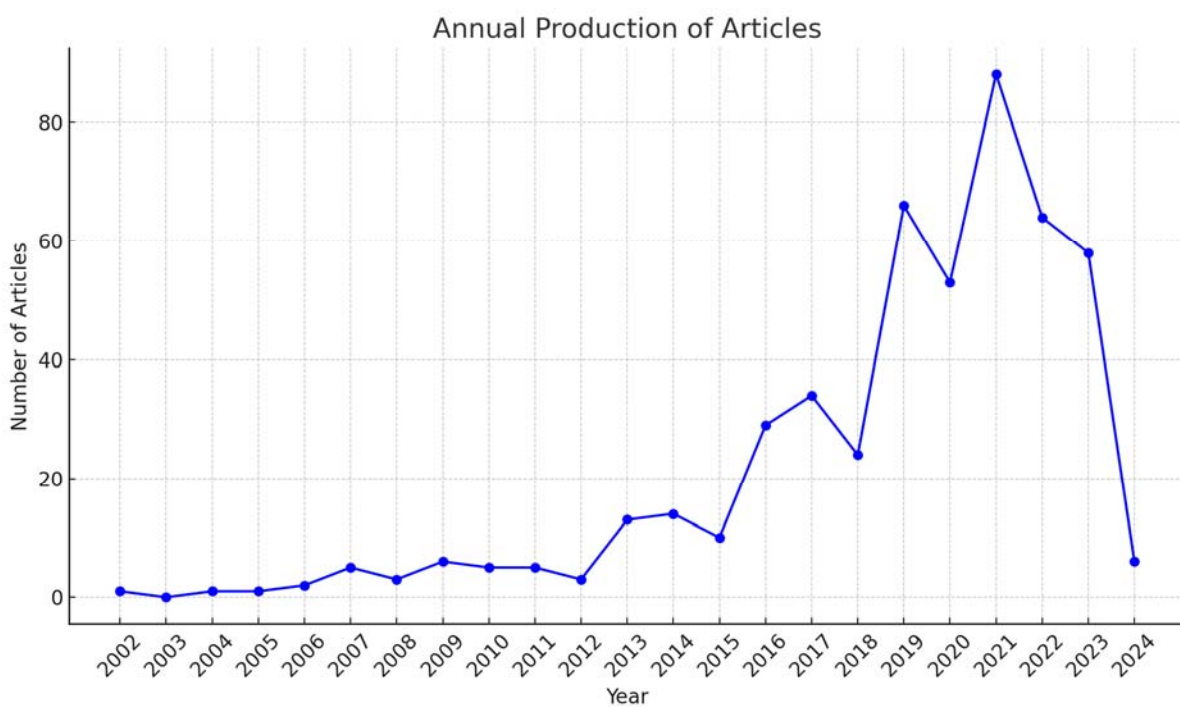


Figure 2. Annual scientific production.

3.1. Performance Analysis

Here, we delve into the performance metrics of the field, examining the growth patterns, citation impacts, and overall contributions of various authors, institutions, and publications. This analysis not only illuminates the field’s development trajectory but also highlights the key players and pivotal works that have shaped the discourse in creative tourism.

In our performance analysis, we found that several seminal studies have significantly contributed to the theoretical and empirical foundations of creative tourism. One study

(Shaw and Bagozzi 2018) explored the theoretical underpinnings and motivational factors in creative tourism, providing a foundation for understanding the evolution of research themes in the field. Some authors (Álvarez-García et al. 2019) conducted a systematic review summarizing empirical research in creative tourism, which our study extends by offering a bibliometric analysis that adds depth to their findings. Additionally, they (Álvarez-García et al. 2019) performed an impact analysis using bibliometric methods to examine academic output, which our study builds upon by analyzing thematic trends over time.

From 2002 to 2024, Figure 1 traces the trajectory of scientific publications on creative tourism, thus illustrating the ebb and flow of academic production in this field. In the early years, interest in creative tourism was nascent but continually growing, reflecting the establishment of the foundations of the field and the initial commitment of the scientific community.

Our analysis further aligns with the work of other authors (Galvagno and Giaccone 2019), who mapped creative tourism research and proposed future directions. We provide a detailed temporal and geographical analysis, offering new insights that complement their review. One study (Maldonado-Erazo et al. 2016) provided a snapshot of academic publications in creative tourism, which our comprehensive analysis expands by covering methodological shifts and thematic evolution over the years.

As the graph progresses, it reflects periods of increased research activity, with notable peaks suggesting periods of heightened attention and perhaps the introduction of new theories or practices within the discipline.

A marked peak in the frequency of publications around 2021 could imply a key development in the field or a growing global interest in research on creative tourism. The graph also reveals a significant increase in 2022, which could correspond to the field's response to evolving tourism trends or the integration of emerging technologies. This rise could also signify the sector's adaptability to changing socio-economic conditions or the influence of significant global events on research priorities. Overall, the graph indicates robust and dynamic growth in the body of literature on creative tourism, highlighting its importance and relevance in contemporary research discourse.

Consequently, the trends described in Figure 1 testify to the vitality and evolution of the research landscape in creative tourism. This initial steady growth, followed by fluctuating periods of intense activity, reflects the field's responsiveness to new developments and its significance in the broader tourism and academic discourse. The publication peaks correspond to the dynamic interaction between creative tourism and global influences, underscoring the field's relevance and adaptability. As creative tourism continues to gain ground, it remains fertile ground for scientific exploration, and future research will likely be as varied and rich as the factors shaping it.

Figure 3 presents a comparative view of the annual scientific production of articles on creative tourism and their average number of citations between 2002 and 2024. The blue line representing the number of articles shows a general upward trend in publications with some variability from year to year and a notable peak in recent years. The dotted red line, which indicates the average number of citations per article, gives an idea of the impact and recognition of the published works within the academic community.

One critical review (Moleiro 2023) identified gaps in the creative tourism literature, which we address by highlighting emerging themes and methodological innovations. This addition enriches the understanding of citation trends and the impact of influential studies within the field. The fluctuations in the average number of citations per article in the field of creative tourism, illustrated in Figure 3, reflect the introduction and subsequent influence of essential scientific contributions over time. A significant peak is observed in the graph in 2006, likely due to the publication of a fundamental article by Richards G., which has since accumulated 495 citations, an average of 2605 citations per year. This significant peak suggests that the article resonated deeply within the academic community, triggering a wave of discourse and subsequent research that continued to refer extensively to this work.

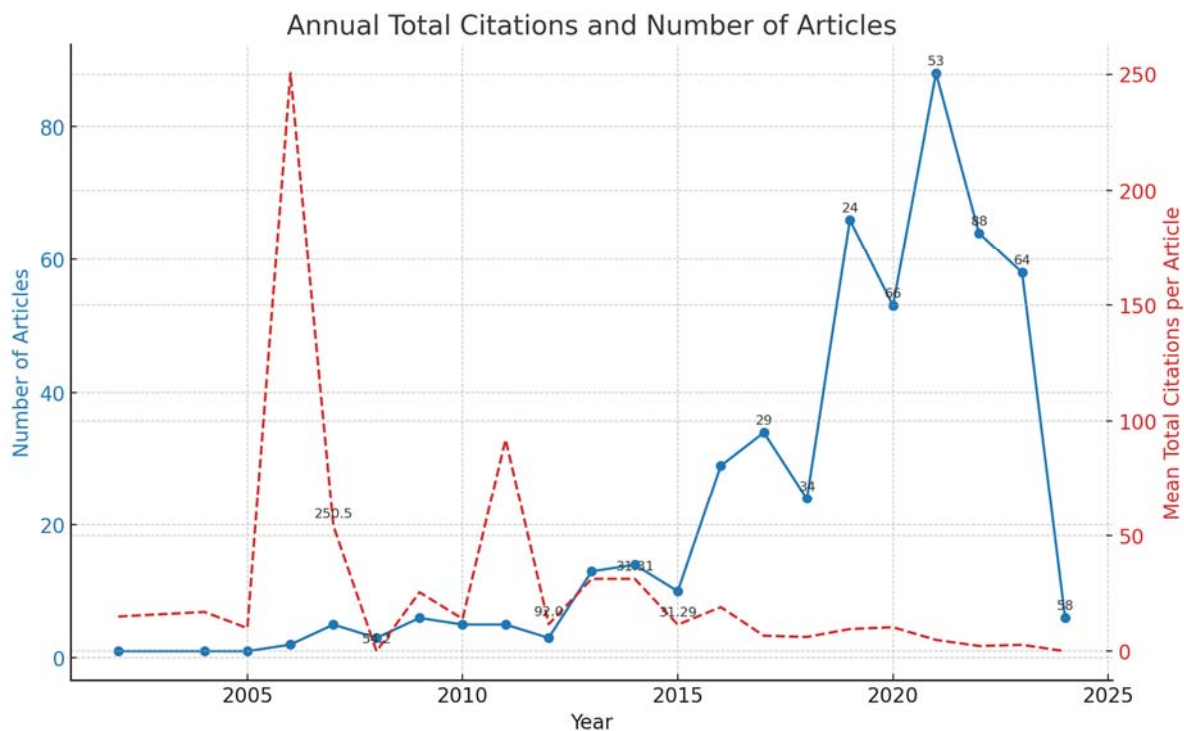


Figure 3. Comparative analysis of annual scientific production and citation trends in creative tourism (2002–2024).

Such fluctuations in citation rates are indicative of the dynamic nature of the field. While some years have a more significant impact with a higher number of citations per article, probably due to the publication of influential studies, other years show a relative decline. This trend reflects the natural cycle of academic influence, where the introduction of innovative concepts or methodologies initially attracts the interest of the research community, leading to high citation rates, which may decrease as the concepts become integrated into the broader understanding of the field.

The variation in the impact of citations not only highlights the importance of innovative research in the field of creative tourism but also suggests a broader trend of academic engagement. As new discoveries spread within the field, they stimulate research, debate, and exploration, thus contributing to the peaks of influence observed in the citation data. This dynamic interaction between research findings and their academic reception underscores the evolution of dialogue within creative tourism, highlighting the field's responsiveness to innovative ideas and its progression through examination and academic discourse.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of the most relevant sources contributing to the literature on creative tourism. The source titled "CREATIVE TOURISM: ACTIVATING CULTURAL RESOURCES AND ENGAGING CREATIVE TRAVELLERS" leads with the highest number of articles, indicating that it is a central repository of knowledge and research in this field.

Table 1 provides a critical academic synthesis that complements our narrative by mapping out seminal works in the field of creative tourism. This table not only corroborates the portrayal of creative tourism as a transformative practice but also emphasizes its potential to drive sustainable and culturally enriching initiatives. By examining the contributions of key authors and their methodologies, we establish a solid foundation for the discussions that follow in subsequent sections of this study.

The journal "SUSTAINABILITY" emerges as the second most prolific source, reflecting the growing importance of sustainable practices in creative tourism. Other notable sources include "A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR CREATIVE TOURISM: ELGAR RESEARCH

AGENDAS” and “CURRENT ISSUES IN TOURISM”, which contribute significantly to the research corpus with 11 and 10 articles, respectively.

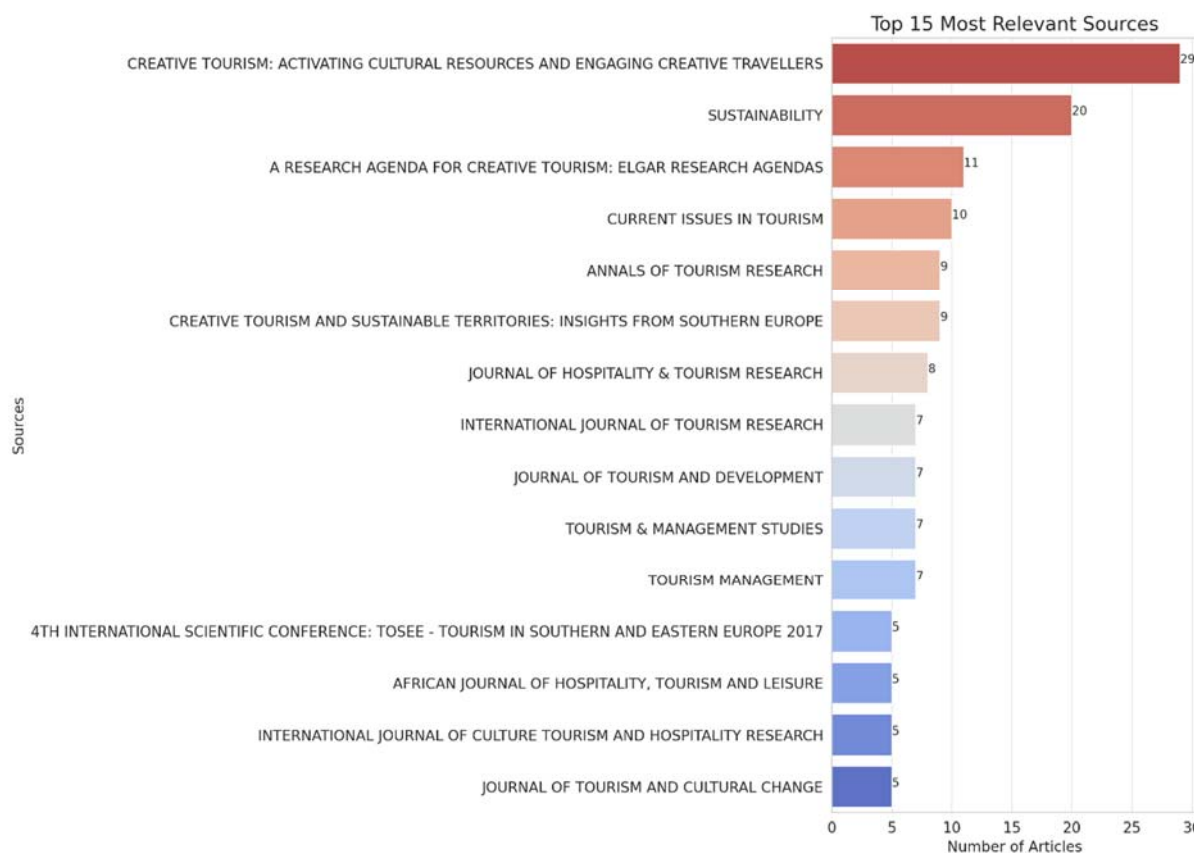


Figure 4. Most relevant sources in creative tourism research.

The publications range from those dedicated to tourism and hospitality to broader themes such as sustainability and cultural studies. The presence of specific conference proceedings like the “4TH INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE: TOSEE—TOURISM IN SOUTHERN AND EASTERN EUROPE 2017” underscores the dynamic nature of the field and the ongoing conversation in academic and professional circles. Thus, Figure 4 not only highlights the prolific nature of certain sources but also suggests the interdisciplinary scope of creative tourism as a subject that intersects various academic disciplines and industry discussions.

In summary, the diverse range of sources illustrated in Figure 4 not only underscores the multifaceted and evolving nature of creative tourism but also emphasizes its growing significance in both academic and professional spheres. The intersection of various disciplines in this field highlights the complex and rich tapestry of creative tourism research, pointing to a vibrant and continually expanding area of study that is increasingly relevant to contemporary challenges and trends in tourism.

The map in Figure 5 illustrates the global distribution of scientific production in the field of creative tourism, offering a visual representation of research outcomes in various countries. Portugal emerges as one of the main contributors, which could reflect the importance it places on creative tourism in its national policy or the marked interest of academics in this field. The substantial contribution of China indicates a significant level of attention from researchers, perhaps linked to the rapid development of tourism and the growth of the cultural sector in this country.

Other notable contributions come from a range of countries, including Indonesia, Spain, Croatia, and Iran, each having published a considerable number of articles. This

diversity illustrates the global interest in creative tourism and highlights that it is a field of widespread academic engagement and transcends geographical boundaries.

Country Scientific Production

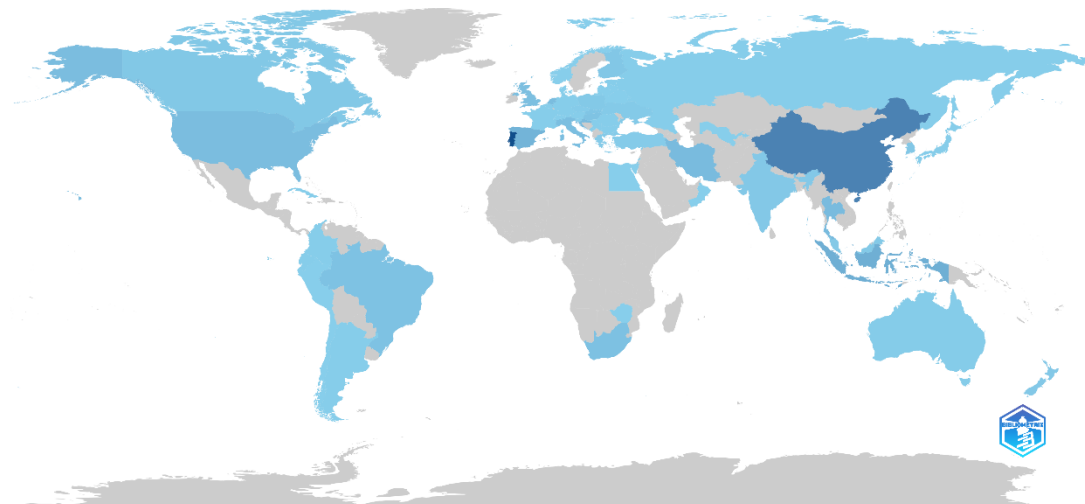


Figure 5. Country contributions to creative tourism research.

Overall, the map shows the importance of creative tourism as a research field with global resonance, underlining the potential of international collaborations that can enrich the field with intercultural perspectives and shared experiences. The varying intensities of blue on the map illustrate not only the quantity of research but also suggest regions where creative tourism might be particularly relevant for local economies and cultural heritage initiatives.

In conclusion, the geographical spread and diversity of contributions highlighted in Figure 5 demonstrate the universal appeal and relevance of creative tourism. This worldwide engagement reflects the adaptability and significance of creative tourism in addressing local and global challenges in tourism, culture, and economic development. The map not only showcases the current state of research but also invites further exploration into how different cultural and geographical contexts influence and are influenced by the principles and practices of creative tourism. This global perspective reinforces the potential for creative tourism to be a unifying and innovative force in the evolving landscape of international tourism.

3.2. Science Mapping

Scientific mapping in bibliometric analysis, as explained in a previous work (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017), offers a panoramic and relational view of the evolution of a research field over time (Bota-Avram 2023). It allows researchers and academics to obtain a complete and comparative image of the past, present, and future of their field.

A systemic review (Akdemir et al. 2023) of creative tourism was conducted, summarizing empirical research and highlighting the sector's key developments. Our bibliometric analysis builds on their findings by providing a deeper examination of the thematic trends over time, which enriches the systematic review with a more nuanced understanding of the field's evolution.

One study (Álvarez-García et al. 2019) analyzed the academic output in creative tourism using bibliometric methods. Their work identified significant trends and patterns in research publications. By extending their analysis, we offer a comprehensive look at how thematic trends have developed over the years, providing insights into the broader impacts and directions of creative tourism research.

Figure 5, which presents the scientific contributions of the ten most active authors in the field of creative tourism, is an exemplary illustration of this approach. By delineating the production of these key researchers, the figure helps stakeholders identify potential collaborators, understand emerging patterns, and determine potential trajectories of new research. The prominence of authors such as DUXBURY N, REMOALDO P, and RICHARDS G attests to the central role they play in this scientific landscape, shaping the discourse and potentially guiding the direction of future studies on creative tourism.

Indeed, Figure 6 shows that DUXBURY N is leading by a significant margin, having written 21 articles, followed by REMOALDO P with 20 articles, and RICHARDS G with 18 articles. These numbers reflect not only the authors' prolificacy but also their potential influence on the trajectory of research in creative tourism. The table also lists other notable contributors, with ALVES J producing 11 articles and a group of authors, BAKAS F, COUTO G, GONÇALVES A, and SANTOS C, each contributing 9 articles. The visualization underscores the depth and breadth of scientific engagement in the field and serves as a guide for emerging researchers to navigate the landscape of studies on creative tourism.

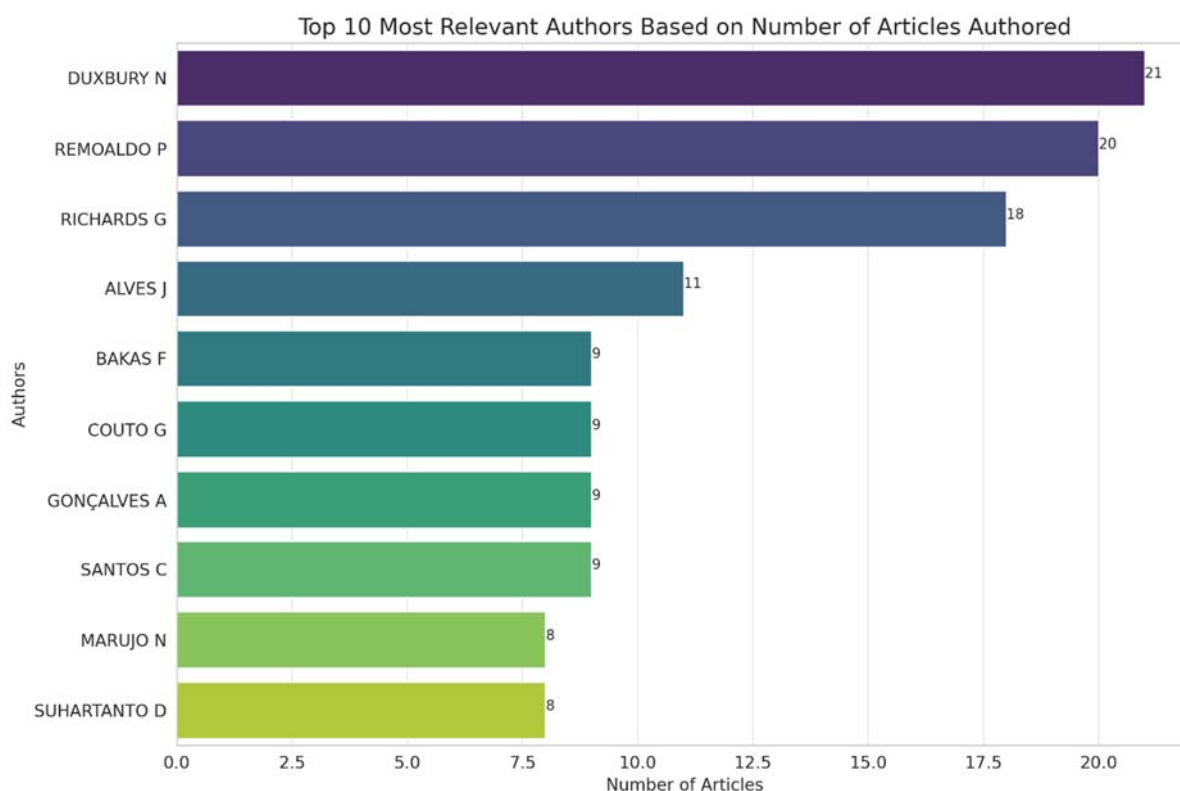


Figure 6. Contributions of the top ten most active authors in creative tourism research.

By highlighting the quantifiable impact of scientific contributions, we turn to Table 2, which assesses the influence of authors through the H-index. This index, introduced by Jorge E. Hirsch and has been discussed by various researchers (Hirsch and Donovan 1976; Bornmann and Daniel 2005). It represents the confluence of an author's number of publications and the frequency of citation of each publication. It is a measure that succinctly summarizes the dual achievement of productivity and peer recognition.

Table 2 aims to present researchers in the field of creative tourism whose work has moved beyond prolific publication to penetrate the academic community to such an extent that they generate a high and sustained number of citations. This analysis is essential for understanding who, among the community of authors, has contributed not only to the expansion of the field but also to the enhancement of its depth, quality, and position in academic discourse. The H-index thus reveals the authors whose contributions to research

have been the most fundamental and significant in the current evolution of studies on creative tourism.

Table 2. The most cited authors.

Element	h_Index	TC	NP	PY_Start
RICHARDS G	10	1478	18	2002
DUXBURY N	6	165	21	2018
BAKAS F	5	125	9	2018
REMOALDO P	5	93	20	2019
TAN S	5	494	5	2013
ALVES J	4	47	11	2020
DIAS A	4	135	6	2021
KUNG S	4	467	4	2013
LUH D	4	467	4	2013
MATOS O	4	37	5	2019

Having explored the influential authors in the field of creative tourism through a bibliometric perspective, we now turn to a thematic analysis to uncover the dominant research themes and the complex tapestry of topics they have woven. This next phase of our investigation will dissect the content of the literature, identifying and categorizing the recurring themes underpinning the field. As we progress in this analysis, we anticipate uncovering how different concepts intersect and evolve, how they are differently treated by individual authors, and what topics emerge as frontiers in creative tourism research. This thematic analysis will offer a richer and more textured understanding of the scientific dialogue on creative tourism, providing insights into the central questions and innovative ideas that are advancing the field.

The thematic analysis also reveals the significant contributions of other influential studies that have shaped the discourse in creative tourism. For instance, one study (Raymond 2007) introduced the concept of creative tourism, emphasizing the importance of authentic and participatory cultural experiences. These pioneering ideas have influenced many subsequent studies and are evident in the thematic developments we observe today.

Figure 7 presents a thematic map categorizing research themes in creative tourism into four quadrants based on their centrality (degree of relevance) and density (degree of development). Central themes, such as “Creativity”, “Tourism”, and “Culture”, are located in the upper right quadrant, indicating they are widely debated, integral to the research field, and well supported by a robust body of literature. These “Driving Themes” reflect extensive exploration and development, underscoring their foundational role in the field.

In the upper left quadrant, “Creative City” is identified as a “Niche Theme”. Though not as central, it is densely developed within its niche, indicating significant research focusing on the intersection of urban development and creative tourism.

The lower right quadrant is empty, suggesting a lack of “Emerging or Declining Themes” that are considered central but not yet well developed. This indicates potential research opportunities for new and significant subjects yet to be explored in depth.

In the bottom left quadrant, “Sustainable Tourism” straddles between “Niche” and “Emerging or Declining Themes”. While sustainable tourism is an increasingly relevant area, it may not have undergone research as comprehensive as the “Driving Themes”.

The positioning of “Creative Tourism”, “Cultural Tourism”, and “Co-creation” in the “Basic Themes” section underscores these as foundational concepts likely to give rise to various research streams. These themes exhibit high centrality and density, indicating their significant role in the ongoing development of the field.

Overall, this thematic map provides a strategic overview of the research landscape in creative tourism, identifying well-studied areas and those offering opportunities for future research. It serves as a navigational aid for researchers, allowing for strategic targeting of research efforts through the complex interplay of topics.

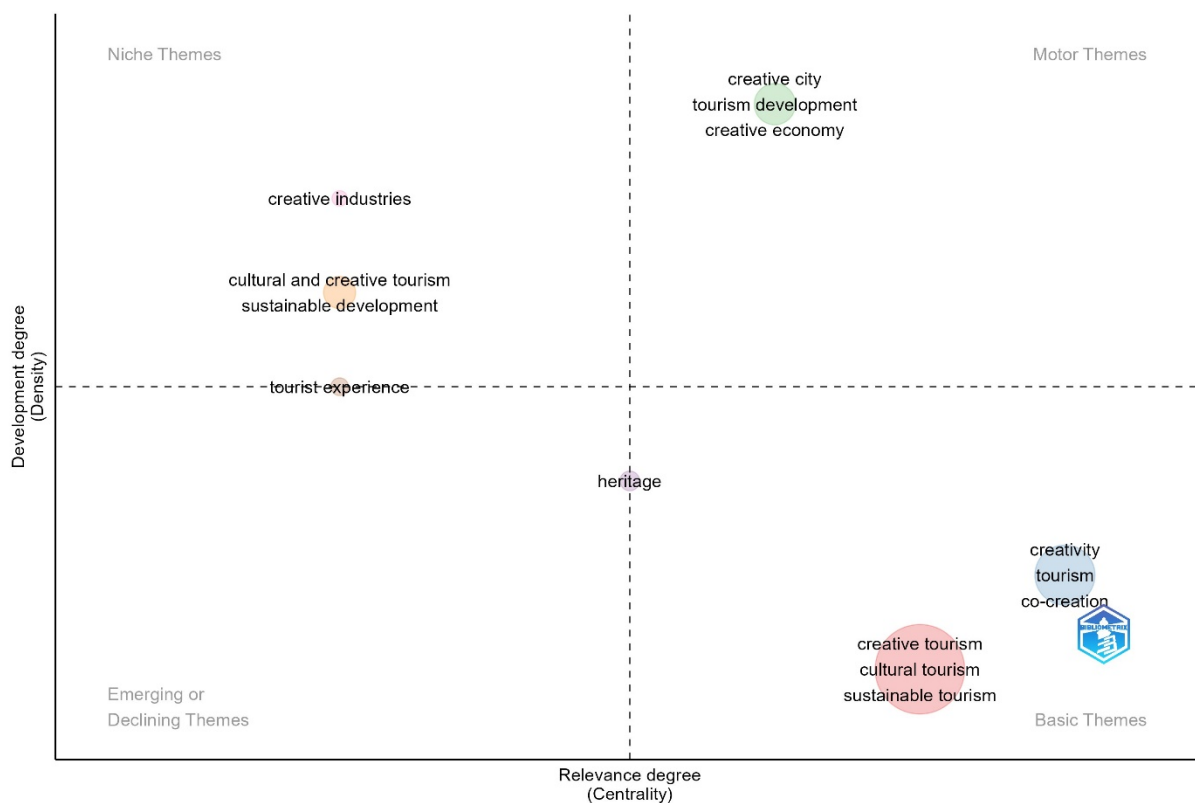


Figure 7. Thematic map.

As we delve into the intricate context of creative tourism research, we approach the network map, a visualization revealing theme co-occurrence in academic dialogue. This map acts as a compass, guiding us through the terrain of keywords underpinning the wide array of studies in this field. It enables the exploration of the links between different concepts, highlighting how frequently certain topics are discussed in tandem. By analyzing these co-occurrences, we gain a deeper understanding of the relationships shaping the discourse of creative tourism. This reveals naturally converging themes in the literature and paints a picture of the field's thematic structure. The network map is not just a representation of viewpoints but reflects the collective scholarly inquiry into creative tourism, highlighting the most significant and emerging topics at the heart of current research and practice.

In addition to the dominant themes identified through our bibliometric analysis, the co-occurrence network analysis highlights several niche and emerging themes. For example, the integration of sustainable tourism practices into creative tourism is increasingly gaining attention. Studies (Richards and Wilson 2006a; Tan et al. 2013) by Richards and Wilson (2006a, 2006b) and Tan et al. (2013) have emphasized the importance of sustainability and its impact on both tourist satisfaction and destination management. These insights are crucial for understanding the current and future directions of creative tourism research.

In Figure 8, we present a co-occurrence network derived from a bibliometric study. This visualization represents the frequency with which terms are mentioned together in the literature on creative tourism. In this network, each node represents a keyword, with the size of each node indicating the keyword's frequency of occurrence in the research. The lines, or edges, represent the co-occurrence connections between these terms, illustrating how topics are interconnected within the field.

The dominant term "creative tourism" forms the network's core, with substantial links to "tourism development", "culture", "tourism", and "sustainable tourism". This indicates that these are central concepts in the literature. The size and centrality of "creative tourism" suggest that it is the field's pivotal axis, around which other research topics revolve.

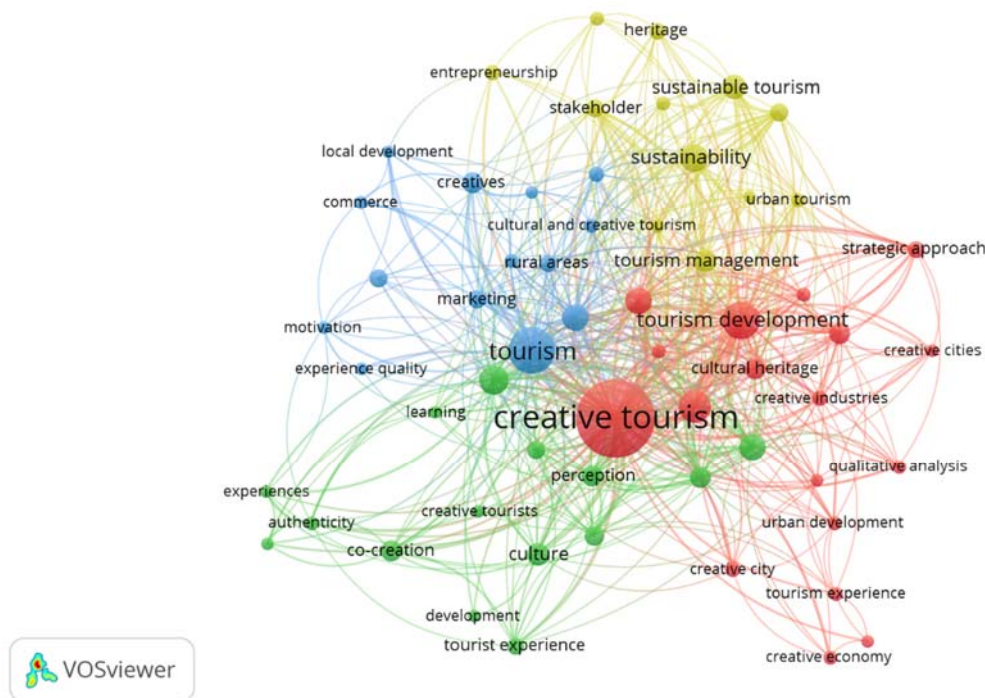


Figure 8. Co-occurrences network analysis.

We observe that “sustainable tourism” and “sustainability” form a prominent cluster, indicating a strong focus on integrating tourism with sustainable practices. The terms “heritage” and “cultural heritage” also emerge as interconnected nodes, highlighting the importance of cultural considerations in discussions on creative tourism.

Additionally, terms such as “co-creation”, “experiences”, “authenticity”, and “tourist experience” are positioned closer to the periphery, indicating specialized but significant areas of research that focus on the experiential and participative aspects of creative tourism.

The proximity of terms like “creative city”, “urban development”, and “creative economy” reflects ongoing discussions on the role of cities and urban spaces in fostering creative tourism. This network underscores the multidisciplinary nature of the field, encompassing urban planning, cultural studies, economics, and environmental sustainability.

With a comprehensive understanding of the thematic currents in creative tourism research, we now proceed to a critical assessment of the most impactful scholarly works, as shown in Table 3. This table not only presents the total number of citations of key papers but also provides a nuanced view through measures such as citations per year and normalized total citations, offering a multifaceted picture of academic resonance.

Table 3. The most cited documents.

Paper	Total Citations	TC per Year	Normalized TC
(Richards and Wilson 2006a, 2006b)	495	26.05	1.98
(Richards 2011)	456	32.57	4.96
(Ali et al. 2016)	228	25.33	11.96
(Tan et al. 2013)	189	15.75	6.04
(Richards 2014)	173	15.73	5.53
(Richards and Wilson 2007)	166	9.22	3.06
(Tan et al. 2014)	150	12.50	4.79
(Hung et al. 2016)	148	16.44	7.76
(Chang et al. 2014)	129	11.73	4.12
(Suhartanto et al. 2020)	111	22.20	10.70

In the evolving landscape of creative tourism, scholarly research plays a pivotal role in shaping our understanding of its dynamics and influence. Pioneering studies have not only defined the core concepts but have also pushed the boundaries of how we perceive the interaction between tourism, culture, and creativity. As we delve into the most influential works in this domain, we uncover insights and trends that have been instrumental in guiding the field. The following analysis highlights the contributions of key research papers, shedding light on their impact and the themes they have introduced or expanded in the realm of creative tourism.

Richards' 2006 article, boasting an impressive total of 495 citations and an average of 26.05 citations per year, leads the table, emphasizing its crucial role in shaping discussions within the realm of creative tourism. It is closely followed by another influential work from the same author dating back to 2011, which has amassed 456 citations, reflecting the ongoing relevance and impact of his contributions over time. Additional noteworthy works, such as those by Ali F in 2016 and Tan SK in 2013, are also prominently featured, signifying their substantial contributions to the development of key themes in creative tourism.

The most cited document, titled "Developing Creativity in Tourist Experiences: A Solution to the Serial Reproduction of Culture" by Richards and Wilson, focuses on the transformation of the cultural tourism landscape. They address the challenges posed by the serial reproduction of culture, where tourist destinations often replicate similar cultural attractions, leading to a homogenization of the experience. To counter this trend, the authors suggest integrating creativity into tourist experiences, highlighting the development of creative spaces, performances, and activities that foster active participation and personal growth beyond passive consumption. They stress the need for destinations to innovate and differentiate by nurturing creativity, thereby creating unique and sustainable tourism offerings that contribute to economic growth while enhancing the tourist experience. The paper critically examines traditional cultural tourism models and explores the potential of creativity-focused tourism to add value and authenticity to the cultural tourism market.

The second most cited document, according to the provided information, delves into the complex relationship between creativity and tourism. It explores how creativity is increasingly becoming central in tourism, shifting the focus from traditional cultural experiences to more participative and engaging ones, thereby coining the term "creative tourism". The document examines the evolution of this concept and its manifestation in various forms such as creative performances, spaces, and participative activities that allow tourists to immerse themselves in local culture and creativity. It posits that creative tourism is an extension of cultural tourism, offering more flexible and authentic experiences that cater to tourists' evolving desires for uniqueness and self-expression. This document makes a significant contribution by providing a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of creativity on tourism and suggesting new directions for research and practice in this domain.

The third most cited document in creative tourism explores the influence of creative tourist experiences on memory, satisfaction, and subsequent behavioral intentions. Conducted with creative tourists in Malaysia, the study uses structural equation modeling to understand how creative tourist experiences shape lasting memories and satisfaction, which in turn influence future behaviors such as revisiting and recommending. The study reveals that creative experiences encompass escapism, recognition, peace of mind, unique involvement, interactivity, and learning. These experiences significantly predict how tourists remember their stay, their overall satisfaction with the experience, and their intention to further engage with or recommend the location. The paper underscores the importance of the creative aspect in tourism, suggesting that offering tourists unique, interactive, and educational experiences can enhance their engagement and satisfaction, fostering a stronger emotional connection with the destination.

The thematic analysis of the most cited documents in creative tourism highlights key themes such as integrating creativity into tourist experiences, the impact of these

experiences on tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions, and the shift towards more participative and immersive cultural engagement forms. These themes reflect a broader academic discourse emphasizing the need for tourist practices to evolve beyond traditional models, focusing instead on promoting authentic and meaningful interactions between tourists and destinations through creative engagement. This synthesis underlines the dynamic nature of the field and its potential for future research directions.

The evolution of creative tourism research also reflects broader trends in the tourism industry. Studies focusing on the role of digital technologies (Chang et al. 2014; Ali et al. 2016) highlight how technological advancements are reshaping tourist experiences and expectations. These themes are becoming increasingly central to the discourse, as researchers explore the intersection of technology, creativity, and cultural engagement.

In conclusion, the thematic analysis of seminal research in creative tourism reveals a rich tapestry of insights and developments. These studies collectively underscore the transformative power of creativity in reshaping the tourism experience. By integrating creativity into tourism, these works propose innovative pathways for enriching tourist experiences, fostering sustainable tourism practices, and enhancing cultural engagement. The recurring themes of creativity's role in personalizing tourism experiences, the evolution of cultural engagement, and the pursuit of authenticity in tourist interactions signify a paradigm shift in the tourism industry. As the field continues to evolve, these themes offer a foundation for future research, pointing towards unexplored avenues and potential innovations. The significant impact of these studies not only reflects their academic resonance but also underscores their practical implications in redefining the contours of creative tourism.

3.3. Evolutionary Trajectories in Creative Tourism: Identifying Strategic and Integrative Themes

The thematic framework of creative tourism research illustrates its adaptive nature, responding to the intersection of cultural, economic, and environmental imperatives (Richards and Wilson 2006a, 2006b). Our analysis describes this evolution, highlighting the shift from early explorations to a nuanced focus on sustainability and community-centered models. It reveals an industry in flux, gradually adopting holistic practices essential for future exploration and application. These emerging themes reflect the sector's collective movement towards inclusive and sustainable development—principles now deeply embedded in the strategic framework of creative tourism. By tracing the progression of these themes, we provide an insight into the sector's historical dialogues, current commitments, and future directions.

Furthermore, our analysis methodologically synthesizes the field's thematic development by scrutinizing the keywords selected by authors, a process that reveals the intellectual progression from 2002 to 2024. Figure 8 presents this evolution, charting the ebb and flow of research themes and pinpointing a definitive shift toward the integration of cultural insight, economic vitality, and ecological sustainability in creative tourism.

In addition, the bibliometric approach employed in Figure 8 is deeply rooted in a scholarly tradition that captures the intellectual zeitgeist of academic disciplines (Zupic and Čater 2015). By meticulously analyzing the chosen descriptors of researchers, this figure represents an authentic lexicon of the field, articulating the distinct thematic threads woven by the creative tourism research community. In fact, this approach goes beyond mere quantitative analysis; it probes the thematic fabric that underlies and propels the ongoing scholarly dialogue, providing a lucid illustration of the sector's strategic academic thrust.

Figure 9 illustrates the rich thematic evolution within the field of creative tourism research over the past two decades. The period from 2002 to 2010 establishes the foundational themes of "culture" and "creative tourism", setting the stage for the field's subsequent development. The following decade, 2011–2019, sees a diversification of topics with "experiences", "innovation", and "tourism development" coming to the fore, reflecting an industry leaning into the experiential and transformative potential of tourism.

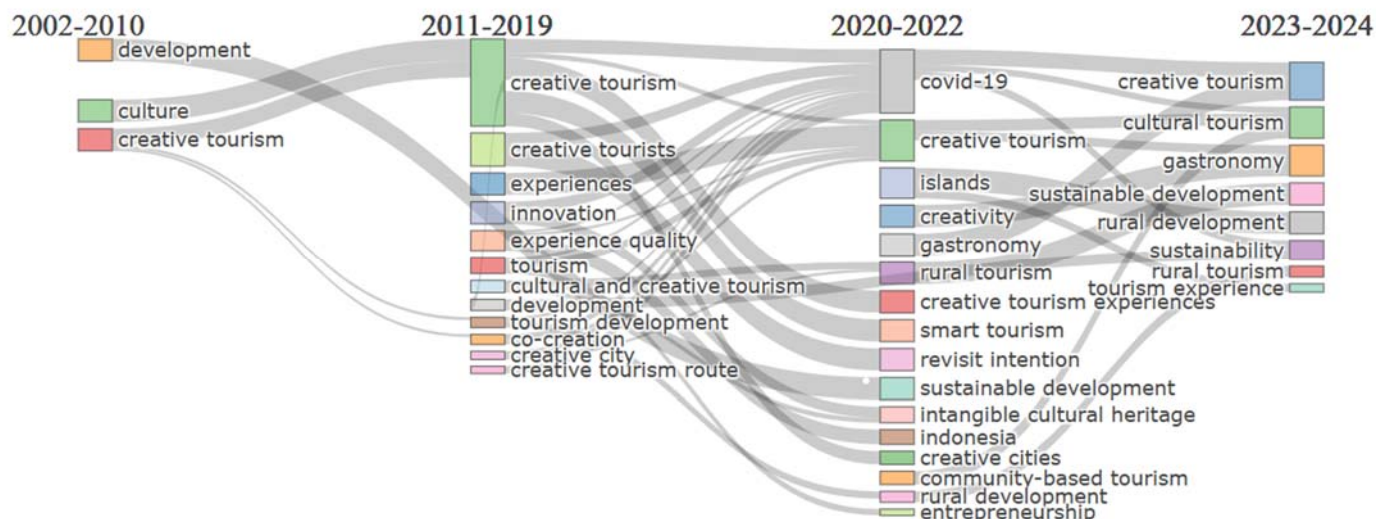


Figure 9. Thematic evolution.

A literature review conducted by [Galvagno and Giaccone \(2019\)](#) mapped the research field of creative tourism and proposed future directions. Our study builds on their findings by providing a detailed temporal and geographical analysis, offering new insights into the evolving landscape of creative tourism research.

Similarly, [Maldonado-Erazo et al. \(2016\)](#) provided a snapshot of academic publications in creative tourism, focusing on its academic evolution. Our comprehensive analysis covers methodological shifts and thematic evolution, addressing gaps in the literature and highlighting emerging themes. By doing so, we extend the understanding of the field's development, showcasing how creative tourism has adapted to contemporary challenges and opportunities.

[Moleiro \(2023\)](#) conducted a critical review of the literature, identifying gaps in the creative tourism field. Our study addresses some of these gaps by highlighting emerging themes and methodological innovations, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the field's development. This approach ensures that new and innovative aspects of creative tourism are continuously explored and integrated into the broader research landscape. The periods 2020–2022 and 2023–2024, marked by the global disruption of COVID-19, highlight the field's adaptability and resilience. The prominence of themes such as “sustainable development”, “rural development”, and “community-based tourism” during these years indicates a significant shift towards sustainability, local involvement, and the regenerative capacity of tourism. Additionally, “gastronomy” and “creative cities” suggest a blending of tangible and intangible cultural elements integral to the tourism experience.

This thematic progression reflects the industry's response to global challenges and anticipates future directions where “sustainable development” and “entrepreneurship” will likely play pivotal roles. The evolving dialogue within the field underscores the balance between preserving cultural heritage and fostering innovative tourism practices.

Building on the narrative of Figure 10, Figure 10 delves into the temporal dimension of research focus, charting the trajectory of term frequency over time and revealing the research community's changing priorities. This figure, titled “Words' Frequency over Time”, utilizes bibliometric analysis to illuminate the ebb and flow of discourse within creative tourism research through author keywords. It clearly traces the rise of “sustainable development” as a persistent concern and the growing interest in “rural development” and “community-based tourism”. Notably, the graph shows a significant inflection in term frequency post-2020, reflecting the field's response to global shifts and the reexamination of tourism's role in a post-pandemic world.

Through this analysis, we observe the continuity of certain themes alongside the emergence of novel concepts, signaling the field's responsive innovation. Figure 10 thus

complements the insights from Figure 10, providing a comprehensive understanding of the evolution and ongoing development of creative tourism research in a dynamic global landscape.

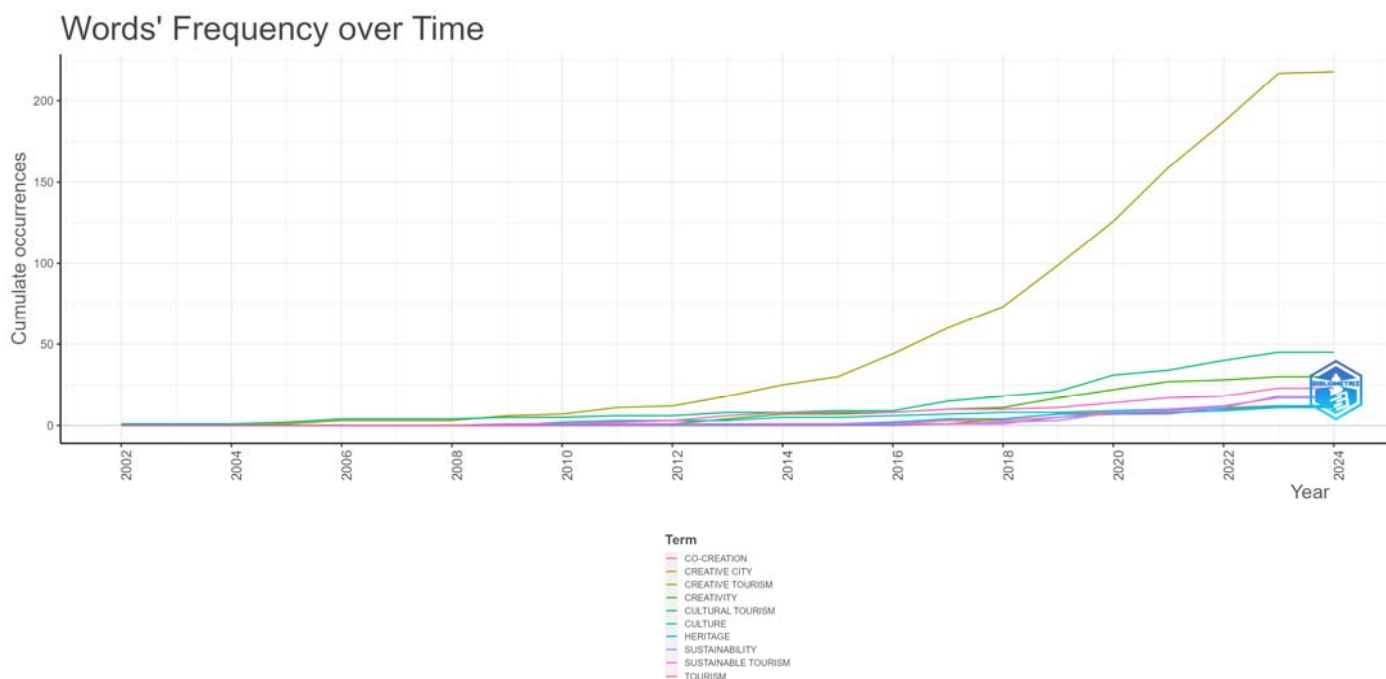


Figure 10. Word's frequency over time.

Figure 10 offers a compelling visualization of the thematic momentum within the field of creative tourism research. Through the lens of cumulative term frequencies, each plotted line tells a nuanced tale of scholarly engagement and the rising or waning prominence of specific concepts. Noteworthy is the ascendant curve of “sustainable tourism”, a clear indicator of the field’s increasing resolve to integrate tourism practices with environmental consciousness. “Heritage” also maintains a steady line, reflecting the enduring commitment to cultural preservation within tourism studies.

Simultaneously, the term “creative tourism” sees a marked upswing post-2010, signaling a pivotal moment when the intertwining of creativity and economic innovation moved to the forefront of tourism discourse. This uptick encapsulates a significant shift toward embedding creative processes within the tourism sector, heralding a renaissance of interest in how tourism can drive and reflect contemporary cultural dynamics.

The graph’s chronological tale is richly complemented by the qualitative detail from the accompanying data table, which sharpens the focus on pivotal shifts. As we trace the contours of research trends into the 2020s, themes such as “sustainability”, “co-creation”, and “creative cities” begin to form a robust constellation, reflecting the industry’s responsive pivot to embrace emergent global directives and local imperatives. The field’s resilience in the face of the transformative 2020s—a decade marked by profound global challenges—is etched into the increasing frequency of discussions around these pivotal themes.

In sum, Figure 10 not only chronicles the field’s academic evolution but also articulates its current and emerging focal points. The figure showcases a discipline in transition, embracing a multi-dimensional approach to tourism that is as adaptable as it is strategic, ensuring the continual renewal of creative tourism research in alignment with broader societal shifts.

Table 4, following Figures 8 and 9, encapsulates the thematic currents within creative tourism research, charting a path from nascent concepts to the burgeoning focus on sustainability and community engagement. This table provides a summarization of key themes

and their prevalence across distinct eras, effectively marrying quantitative data with the strategic narrative of our study.

Table 4. Strategic themes and evolutionary trajectories in creative tourism research.

Time Period	Key Themes	Cumulative Occurrences	Strategic Vision Alignment
2002–2010	Culture, Creative Tourism	Low-to-moderate	Laying the groundwork for creative tourism, focusing on culture.
2011–2019	Experiences, Innovation, Tourism Development	Moderate-to-high	Expanding to include experiential innovation in tourism.
2020–2022	COVID-19, Sustainability, Gastronomy, Rural Tourism	High	Pivoting towards sustainability and resilience post-pandemic.
2023–2024	Sustainable Development, Rural Development, Community-based Tourism	Very high	Emphasizing community engagement and sustainable growth.

Reflecting upon Table 4 reveals the adaptive nature of the field how it has flourished through academic discourse and responded to societal exigencies. It offers a structured insight into the research community's priorities and underpins the field's trajectory towards a future where inclusive and sustainable tourism practices prevail.

As we delve into Table 4, a striking pattern emerges, illustrating the evolution of creative tourism research through the lens of our bibliometric analysis. This table serves as a testament to the field's responsiveness, highlighting how pivotal themes like "culture" and "heritage" laid the initial groundwork, while notions of "sustainability" and "community involvement" later ascended, reflecting the sector's shift toward more socially and environmentally conscious practices. The table not only traces these shifts but also quantifies them, showing the increase in thematic occurrences that mirror the sector's maturation and its evolving priorities.

The progression captured in this table speaks volumes about the dialogues that have shaped creative tourism over the years. Early discussions, heavily centered on culture and creative tourism, eventually expanded to embrace "innovation" and "tourism development", marking the field's foray into a phase of experiential richness and economic redefinition. The later surge in themes related to "sustainability" and "rural development" underscores a collective pivot towards practices that prioritize long-term ecological balance and the well-being of local communities, a trend that gained even more significance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4 crystallizes these thematic evolutions, allowing us to draw connections between the field's academic pursuits and the broader societal shifts influencing tourism. The increase in discussions around "sustainability" and "community-based tourism" paints a picture of an industry increasingly aligned with global sustainability goals. At the same time, the persistent presence of "culture" and "heritage" signals a commitment to preserving the essence of destinations amidst rapid change. This table, therefore, is more than a mere compilation of data; it is a narrative of growth and foresight, a reflective mirror of the field's past and a guidepost to its future directions.

This study not only charts the historical contours of creative tourism but also serves as a beacon for future scholarly inquiry and industry application. The identification of evolving themes through rigorous bibliometric analysis reveals an industry that is increasingly aligning with global sustainability objectives, while also retaining a focus on cultural richness and community engagement. Such insights are indispensable for stakeholders aiming to navigate the complex dynamics of the tourism sector. As the global landscape continues to evolve, the themes and strategies identified herein will help steer creative

tourism towards a sustainable and culturally enriching future, ensuring that it remains a vital part of the global tourism industry's response to the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

4. Methods and Materials

Our study employed a comprehensive bibliometric analysis, utilizing databases such as Scopus and Web of Science to extract relevant data from 2002 to 2024. The analysis focused on publications in English to maintain consistency and comparability with global research outputs. This method allows for a systematic review of the literature volume and thematic trends over the years, offering insights into the developmental trajectories of creative tourism research.

In addition to the bibliometric analysis, we implemented advanced data visualization techniques to identify patterns and relationships within the dataset. These techniques included co-citation analysis, which helps to understand the intellectual structure of the field, and keyword co-occurrence analysis, which reveals the thematic evolution and emerging trends in creative tourism. By integrating these methods, we aimed to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research landscape.

The goal is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the existing literature and identify the dominant trends shaping this academic discourse. Integrating the analytical capabilities of RStudio with the visual mapping strengths of VOSviewer 1.6.18, this study meticulously analyzes and visually presents the interconnected dimensions of keywords, authors, citations, institutions, publications, and other relevant elements. This methodological strategy identifies the main nodes and trends in artistic tourism research, facilitating a nuanced understanding of its evolution and current state.

4.1. Bibliometrics

Bibliometrics, a systematic approach to the quantitative assessment of academic publications, including journal articles, books, and conference proceedings, measures their scientific impact (Morandi 2014). This methodology employs statistical methods to examine patterns and developments within the scholarly literature, focusing on analyses such as citation, co-citation, and bibliographic coupling (Gimpl 2017). Bibliometrics is a robust tool for assessing the scientific output and impact of individuals, research collectives, academic institutions, and nations (Morandi 2014). Moreover, it plays a critical role in discovering new research areas and promoting collaboration among researchers (Gimpl 2017).

Bibliometric mapping, increasingly applied in various academic fields (Aria and Cuccurullo 2020), is recognized for its contribution to the field of scientific mapping (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017). The overall bibliometric mapping analysis procedure in this research includes the stages of collection, refinement, extraction, analytical assessment, and data processing (Morandi 2014; Gimpl 2017; Aria and Cuccurullo 2017, 2020). Beyond mere statistical analysis of publication patterns, bibliometrics provides a comprehensive insight into the dynamics of scientific communication and intellectual connections in various research fields. By examining publication frequencies, authorship, and citation networks, it unveils the structural and thematic evolution of disciplines, highlighting foundational works and influential figures. Used for various investigative themes, from the evolution of specific scientific concepts to examining interdisciplinary intersections, bibliometric analysis underscores the proliferation and shifts in scientific research focus, including exploration of advanced topics. As an essential instrument for qualitative and quantitative literature assessment, its application in academic evaluation remains a subject of ongoing scientific discussion.

4.2. Data Collection

To collect data for our research, we strategically selected the Web of Science and Scopus databases, known for their comprehensive coverage of scientific publications across various

disciplines. To refine our search, we focused on the term “creative tourism”, using it as the sole search term.

The selection of these databases was driven by their extensive archival depth and rigorous indexing standards, which ensure high-quality and reliable data. Additionally, the search was refined using the analytical capabilities of RStudio to filter out non-relevant publications, thereby enhancing the precision and relevance of the dataset. The final dataset was subjected to a thorough validation process to remove any duplicates and ensure the integrity of the data.

The formulated search query was as follows: “TITLE-ABS-KEY” (“creative tourism”) AND (EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, “Portuguese”) OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, “Spanish”) OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, “Slovenian”) OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, “Chinese”) OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, “Turkish”) OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, “Polish”) OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, “French”) OR EXCLUDE (LANGUAGE, “Croatian”)), aiming to filter out non-English publications and thereby streamline the data set for analysis. This targeted search yielded a substantial corpus of literature, with Scopus presenting 400 publications and Web of Science another 270. Merging these results and carefully removing 175 duplicates, we refined our dataset to a total of 490 publications.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting articles were established to ensure a focused and relevant dataset. These criteria are summarized in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Justification
Articles focusing on creative tourism	Articles not focusing on creative tourism	Out of scope of the study
Web Of Science and Scopus	Other databases	Indexing in the two main scientific databases assures reliability because only studies published in reliable sources are eligible
Peer-reviewed full-papers published in indexed journals	Not peer-reviewed studies (opinion articles, editorials, book chapters, books) and other peer-reviewed studies (e.g., theses, dissertations) when not journal papers. Research notes and conference proceedings have been excluded	Peer review validates research and assures its reliability
Language: English	Papers not written in English	English has become the main language for the diffusion of scientific papers
Only one version of the same paper	Duplicates of the same paper	Avoid repetitions
Articles with the keyword “creative tourism” in the title, abstract, and keywords to ensure deep treatment of the concept	Papers dealing with the success of tourism destinations but not with creative tourism	Refining the scope

Source: Own elaboration based on a previous work (Santos et al. 2022).

This meticulous selection process was anchored in the goal of capturing a broad yet precise snapshot of the current scientific panorama surrounding creative tourism. The exclusion of non-English publications allowed for a focused examination of the most accessible and widely disseminated research in this field. Our exhaustive search and data curation efforts concluded on 20 January 2024, laying solid foundations for the subsequent in-depth bibliometric analysis. This deliberate and strategic approach ensured that our dataset was not only extensive but also closely aligned with the research field, thus facilitating a nuanced exploration of trends, patterns, and gaps in the existing literature on creative tourism.

4.3. Data Analysis

For the analytical part of our research, we employed a quantitative approach based on bibliometric techniques, leveraging the capabilities of bibliometrix, an open-source R package. Known for its wide range of bibliometric analysis tools, bibliometrix is developed in the R programming environment and is equipped with sophisticated algorithms for performing statistical and cartographic scientific analyses (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017). A key feature of the bibliometrix package, starting from version 2.0, is the inclusion of Biblioshiny, a web interface that democratizes bibliometric analysis by making it accessible to researchers without programming skills.

The quantitative analysis was complemented by qualitative insights derived from content analysis of the most frequently cited papers. This dual approach enabled us to cross-validate findings and uncover deeper meanings and implications behind the quantitative trends. The integration of content analysis helped in understanding the contextual relevance and impact of key publications, thereby providing a richer narrative of the evolution of creative tourism research.

Biblioshiny allows for direct data download from key databases such as Scopus or Web of Science, accepting formats like BibTex, CSV, or Plain Text. It is particularly noted that Web of Science data need to be in the BibTex format to be successfully imported into bibliometrix.

To complete our analytical toolkit, we also integrated VOSviewer, a renowned software tool for its ability to generate bibliometric network maps. These maps graphically represent the complex interconnections between authors, keywords, and publications, thus enhancing the interpretation of our bibliometric data. The use of VOSviewer enriched our study by providing in-depth insights into academic networks and thematic structures prevalent in the field of creative tourism.

Table 6 serves as an informative summary within our research, listing the various types of documents that were examined. It also distinguishes between “author keywords (DE)”—a limited selection of terms chosen by authors to summarize the essence of their work—and “author keywords plus (ID)”, which are broader and encompass keywords and phrases identified by the Web of Science system from reference terms cited in articles (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017). This dual approach to keyword analysis enabled us to meticulously map the thematic contours and emerging trends within the scientific exploration of creative tourism, thereby offering a rich and multidimensional understanding of the field.

Table 6 provides an overview of the main bibliometric indicators of research on creative tourism between 2002 and 2024. During this period, the dataset comprises 270 sources, including journals and books, amounting to 491 documents. This reflects an annual growth rate of 8.49%, indicating a healthy expansion of the field. On average, the documents are 5.03 years old, suggesting that the work is relatively recent. Each document receives an average of 10.88 citations, although no references are listed in this table.

Regarding the content of the documents, there are 696 “Author Keywords Plus (ID)” and 1121 “Author Keywords (DE)”, revealing a rich and diverse lexicon associated with creative tourism research. Author data show that 821 authors contributed to this corpus, with 104 authors writing single-authored documents, highlighting a mix of collaborative and independent work in the field.

In terms of author collaboration, there are 129 single-author documents, and the average number of co-authors per document is 2.54, demonstrating moderate levels of collaboration among researchers. International co-authors represent 13.24% of the total, indicating a degree of global cooperation.

The dataset includes a variety of document types, with “article” being the most common (245), followed by “review article” (72) and “book chapter” (97). Other document types such as “reviews”, “editorials”, and “conference papers” are also present but in smaller numbers. This diversity reflects a multifaceted academic engagement in the field of creative tourism, ranging from peer-reviewed articles to more detailed book chapters, and early access contents that can report the latest research trends before official publication.

Table 6. Summary of bibliometric data on creative tourism research.

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	2002:2024
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	270
Documents	491
Annual Growth Rate %	8.49
Document Average Age	5.03
Average citations per doc	10.88
References	0
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	696
Author's Keywords (DE)	1121
AUTHORS	
Authors	821
Authors of single-authored docs	104
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	129
Co-Authors per Doc	2.54
International co-authorships %	13.24
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	245
article book chapter	1
article; early access	12
book	7
book chapter	97
book chapter book chapter	1
book review	3
conference paper	29
conference paper article	1
conference paper book chapter	1
conference review	2
editorial	6
editorial material	3
meeting abstract	1
proceedings paper	72
review	10

5. Discussion

The bibliometric analysis of creative tourism from 2002 to 2024 reveals a rich narrative of academic exploration and growth. This period has seen a significant increase in publications, particularly around 2021 and 2022, highlighting key developments and a heightened global focus on the field. Such trends demonstrate the academic community's strong response to emerging tourism trends, technological innovations, and major global events, reflecting the field's adaptability and increasing relevance in contemporary research.

Notably, countries like Portugal and China are leading in publication numbers, indicating the widespread appeal and application of creative tourism concepts across diverse cultural contexts. This global spread of research underscores the potential for international collaborations, enriching the field with a variety of intercultural insights. The range of research themes identified, from sustainability to cultural engagement, points to the interdisciplinary nature of creative tourism studies and suggests fertile ground for future explorations in both academic and practical tourism realms.

Scientific mapping in bibliometric analysis, as explained by (Zupic and Čater 2015), offers a panoramic and relational view of the research field's evolution over time. This approach provides researchers and academics with a comprehensive and comparative view of the past, present, and future of their field. Figure 7, which presents the scientific contributions of the ten most active authors in the field of creative tourism, is a prime

example of this approach. By outlining the output of these key researchers, the figure assists stakeholders in identifying potential collaborators, understanding emerging patterns, and determining potential new research trajectories. The prominence of authors like DUXBURY N, REMOALDO P, and RICHARDS G highlights their central role in shaping the scientific landscape, potentially guiding the direction of future studies in creative tourism.

Moreover, the H-index, as detailed in Table 2 serves as a significant metric in assessing the impact and influence of authors in the field. This index goes beyond mere publication count to reflect the depth and breadth of an author's influence through citations. It serves as an important tool for understanding which researchers have not only contributed to the expansion of the field but have also deeply influenced its quality and academic standing.

As we move from bibliometric to thematic analysis, we uncover the dominant themes and intricate web of topics that define creative tourism. By dissecting the literature's content, we expect to reveal the intersection and evolution of different concepts, how they are uniquely approached by individual authors, and what new frontiers are emerging in creative tourism research. This deeper dive into thematic analysis will enrich our understanding of the field, uncovering the core questions and groundbreaking ideas driving the advancement of creative tourism.

The thematic analysis of creative tourism research underscores the diverse and multifaceted nature of this field. Key themes that emerge include the integration of cultural elements into tourism experiences, the role of creativity in enhancing tourist engagement, and the impact of innovative practices on traditional tourism models. These themes reflect a shift towards more experiential and interactive forms of tourism, where creativity is not just an add-on but a fundamental component of the tourist experience. The analysis reveals how creative tourism transcends conventional boundaries, offering tourists immersive and authentic experiences that foster deeper connections with local cultures and communities.

Another significant aspect revealed by the thematic analysis is the intersection of creative tourism with sustainability and economic development. Studies in this domain explore how creative tourism can contribute to sustainable practices, promote local economic growth, and encourage community participation. This theme is particularly relevant in the context of global tourism trends, where there is an increasing emphasis on responsible and sustainable travel. The thematic analysis highlights the potential of creative tourism to create value for both tourists and host communities, offering a sustainable alternative to mass tourism models. It emphasizes the need for strategies that balance economic, environmental, and social considerations, ensuring that creative tourism develops in a way that benefits all stakeholders.

The examination of thematic trends and strategic directions in creative tourism, as detailed in Table 2, offers a structured analysis of the sector's evolution over two decades. This table highlights the progression from cultural and creative foundations to more complex themes such as sustainability and community engagement. The emergence of these themes reflects an adaptive and responsive field that is increasingly focusing on integrating environmental and social considerations into tourism practices. Table 2 not only quantifies the shift towards these modern imperatives but also encapsulates the increasing sophistication and depth of creative tourism research. The data presented provide a clear indication of how the field is moving towards a more sustainable and inclusive approach, aligning with broader global trends and the demands of contemporary society.

This study's findings are crucial for understanding the strategic directions in creative tourism. The increase in publications on economic and sustainability topics within creative tourism indicates a shift towards more integrative and community-focused tourism practices.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the comprehensive analysis of creative tourism from 2002 to 2024 elucidates the field's dynamic evolution, characterized by significant growth in scholarly interest and a diversification of themes. Our bibliometric analysis highlights an increasing

global focus, evidenced by the surge of publications in recent years, marking pivotal developments within the field. The thematic analysis further enriches our understanding, revealing how creative tourism seamlessly integrates cultural enrichment, sustainability, and economic development. These interwoven themes signify a paradigm shift towards more immersive, authentic, and sustainable tourism experiences, in line with global trends and the evolving preferences of tourists. This study not only provides a panoramic view of the current landscape of creative tourism research but also lays the groundwork for future explorations. As the field continues to evolve and adapt, the insights garnered underscore the potential of creative tourism to transform the tourism industry, offering innovative, sustainable, and culturally rich experiences that benefit both tourists and host communities.

The evolving nature of creative tourism presents fertile ground for ongoing academic inquiry and practical innovation, contributing to the sustainable and responsible development of global tourism. Our findings from the bibliometric analysis provide robust evidence that creative tourism is becoming an integral component of local economic development strategies, promoting sustainable practices that benefit both communities and tourists. The thematic evolution and the roles of key researchers, as depicted in Figures 3 and 4, further substantiate these conclusions, highlighting the impactful contributions and future directions for creative tourism research.

Despite the comprehensive scope of our analysis, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, our study exclusively utilizes data from the Scopus and Web of Science databases, which may not encompass the entire spectrum of the relevant literature on creative tourism. Future research should consider incorporating additional databases and sources for a more exhaustive review. Secondly, our bibliometric analysis primarily focuses on quantitative metrics, such as publication counts and citation analysis. While these metrics offer valuable insights, they do not capture the qualitative dimensions of the research, including the context and depth of the studies reviewed. Integrating qualitative analysis could complement our findings and provide a more nuanced understanding of the field. Lastly, the dynamic nature of creative tourism means that new trends and developments may emerge that were not captured within the timeframe of our study. Continuous monitoring and updating of the literature are essential to stay abreast of these changes.

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