

Trends in Research on Sustainable Development of Craft Village Tourism: A Bibliometric Analysis Using CiteSpace Software

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Abstract

This study examines global research trends on sustainable development in craft village tourism from 1976 to 2024 using CiteSpace software, explicitly to address a critical structural and conceptual gap in the existing literature: a lack of a macro-level, systematic synthesis of the field. A dataset of 185 documents drawn from the Scopus and Web of Science databases was analyzed to identify key themes, influential authors, and collaborative networks. Results show an evolving focus—from early works on cultural preservation and traditional crafts toward multifaceted approaches encompassing economic sustainability, environmental management, and community-based strategies. Despite a recent surge in publications, co-authorship and keyword analysis reveal moderate to low network densities, indicating fragmented collaboration and limited thematic integration. Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam and Indonesia, leads empirical research on heritage conservation and community empowerment, while China and developed countries often contribute frameworks for policy and technology adoption. Emerging topics include digital transformation, circular economy models, and post-pandemic resilience. Future studies should establish standardized sustainability criteria, strengthen cross-regional partnerships, and apply advanced digital tools to enhance stakeholder engagement. By converging cultural preservation, economic viability, and environmental stewardship, craft village tourism can be positioned as a resilient and equitable model of rural development.

Keywords

Bibliometric analysis; craft village tourism; CiteSpace; sustainable tourism

Introduction

In recent years, sustainable tourism has emerged as a critical focus within the global tourism sector, with particular emphasis on the development of traditional craft villages. Researchers and policymakers increasingly recognize these villages for their dual role in preserving cultural heritage and fostering sustainable economic growth (Hall, 2019; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). As demand for authentic travel experiences rises, craft villages serve as “living museums,” showcasing local heritage, artisanal skills, and cultural traditions (Nguyen Phu & Nguyen Thi Thu, 2022; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2021). Consequently, integrating tourism into craft villages is viewed as a vital strategy for rural development, poverty alleviation, and the creation of employment opportunities (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Mitchell, 2012).

This sector is particularly significant for Vietnam’s cultural economy, which hosts over 5,400 craft villages. The Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2018) and the Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2022) have prioritized this sector, mandating an average annual growth of 10% and targeting a handicraft export value of USD 6 billion by 2030. Despite this potential, historical data suggest that the linkage between these rich cultural assets and the tourism value chain remains significantly underutilized (Vu & Rasovska, 2017). To conceptually frame this analysis, this study adopts Sustainable Development Theory (SDT) and explicitly uses the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework. This approach examines the intersection of economic viability, social sustainability (community participation and cultural preservation), and environmental responsibility (Elkington, 2006; Hammer & Pivo, 2017).

However, a critical review of existing literature reveals a structural gap. While numerous studies exist, the current knowledge base is fragmented, dominated by localized case studies that impede the formation of a cohesive global intellectual structure (Gutiérrez-Salcedo et al., 2018). There is a distinct paucity of research regarding consensus criteria or the empirical validation of long-term sustainable development models within this sub-sector.

To address this gap, this paper employs bibliometric analysis combined with knowledge graph techniques in CiteSpace 6.3, using data from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. This study aims to provide a quantitative, scientific mapping of the field to clarify intellectual trends and methodological shortcomings. The review seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the main themes and trends in sustainable tourism research regarding traditional craft villages?
- Which authors, organizations, and countries are the primary contributors to this field?
- Which documents have exerted the most significant influence?
- What represents the collaborative relationships within the research community?
- What aspects of sustainable tourism in craft villages require further investigation?

Data and research tools

Data sources and selection process

To systematically map the intellectual structure and evolution of research at the intersection of sustainable development and craft village tourism, this study employs a quantitative bibliometric analysis. Bibliometric analysis is a rigorous, replicable method that uses bibliographic data—such as titles, authors, keywords, and citations—to identify influential publications, prominent authors, conceptual frameworks, and emerging research frontiers within a specific domain (Donthu et al., 2021). The objectivity inherent in this approach minimizes potential researcher bias and enhances the transparency of the literature synthesis, providing a comprehensive overview of the field's development.

The data collection process was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to ensure systematicity and completeness (Page et al., 2021). A carefully formulated search string was applied to the Scopus and Web of Science databases, chosen for their extensive indexing of high-quality, peer-reviewed literature and their established utility in bibliometric research. The search utilized a Boolean-based query structured around the primary conceptual intersection:

The criteria below were strictly applied during the database search, covering the period from January 1, 1976, to December 31, 2024:

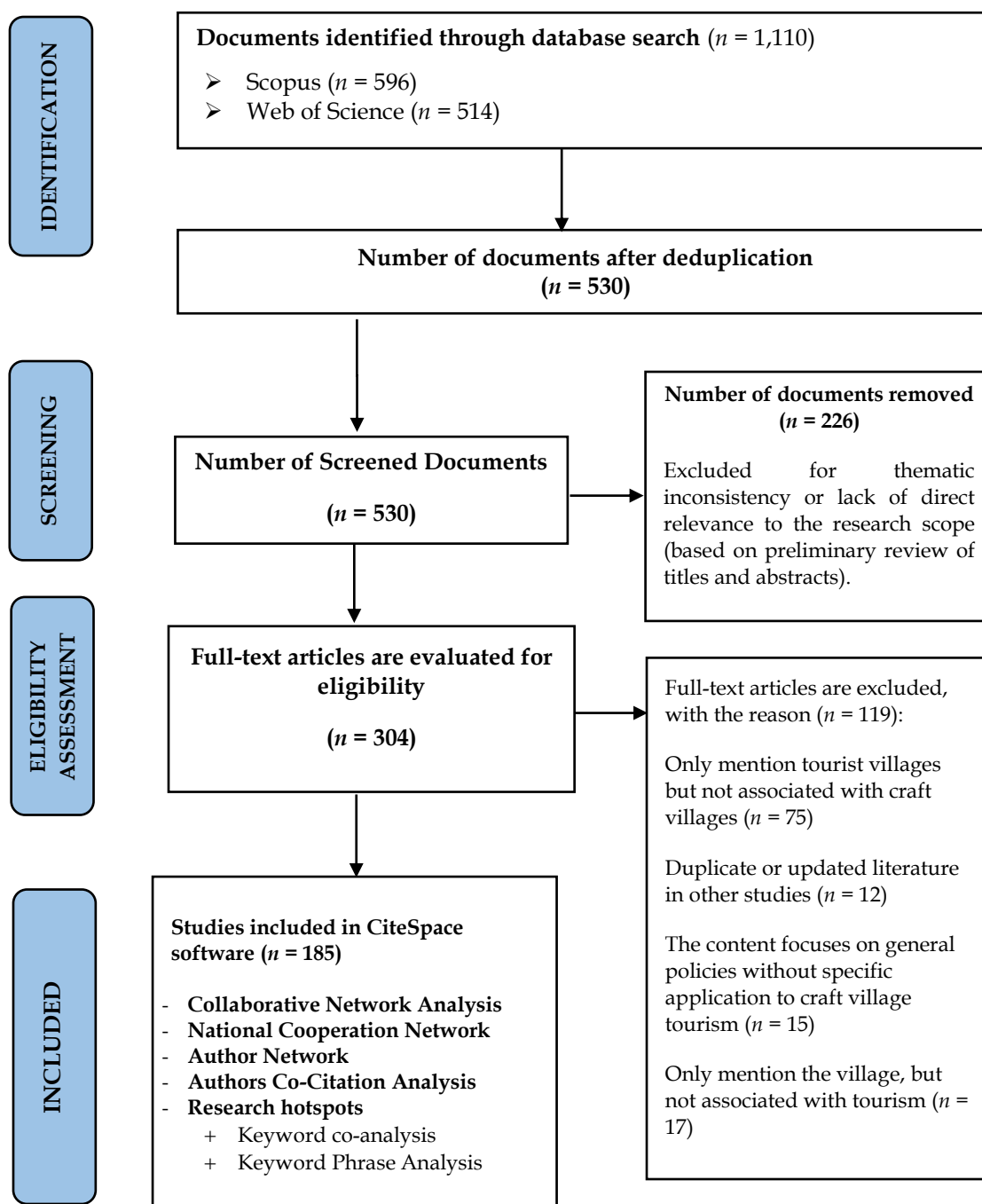
1. Keywords: ("Craft Village" OR "Craft Villages") AND (Tourism OR "Tourism Development" OR "Sustainable Tourism" OR Sustainability OR Criteria)
2. Document type: Article
3. Language: English

As shown in Figure 1, the data retrieval and filtering process followed four distinct stages: (1) Identification, (2) Screening, (3) Eligibility Assessment, (4) Inclusion and Data Standardization.

- (1) **Identification:** The initial search yielded 1,110 documents across the two primary databases: 596 from Scopus and 514 from Web of Science.
- (2) **Screening:** The screening process began with the removal of duplicate entries, resulting in 530 unique documents. Following this, an initial exclusion was performed: during the preliminary review of titles and abstracts, 226 documents were excluded. This exclusion was performed following a preliminary review of their titles and abstracts because they demonstrated either thematic inconsistency or a lack of direct relevance to the research scope.
- (3) **Eligibility Assessment:** The remaining 304 full-text articles were critically evaluated against the predefined inclusion criteria. Exclusion criteria applied ($n = 119$): Articles were excluded for specific reasons: 75 documents only mentioned tourist villages but not those associated with craft villages; 12 were duplicate or updated literature found in other studies; 15 focused on general policies without specific application to craft village tourism; and 17 documents only mentioned the village but were not associated with tourism.
- (4) **Inclusion and Data Stand:** The remaining 185 articles that successfully met all inclusion criteria constituted the final dataset for this study. Bibliometric Analysis: The bibliographic metadata for these 185 articles were meticulously standardized to ensure accuracy and consistency (a critical step for reliable co-occurrence and network mapping) before being processed in CiteSpace for subsequent quantitative analyses.

This final corpus provides the foundation for mapping research trends and the field's conceptual landscape.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of Document Identification, Screening, and Inclusion Using the Bibliographic Method



Research tool

This article uses bibliometric analysis to systematically map the intellectual structure and evolution of research on sustainable development in craft village tourism. Bibliometric

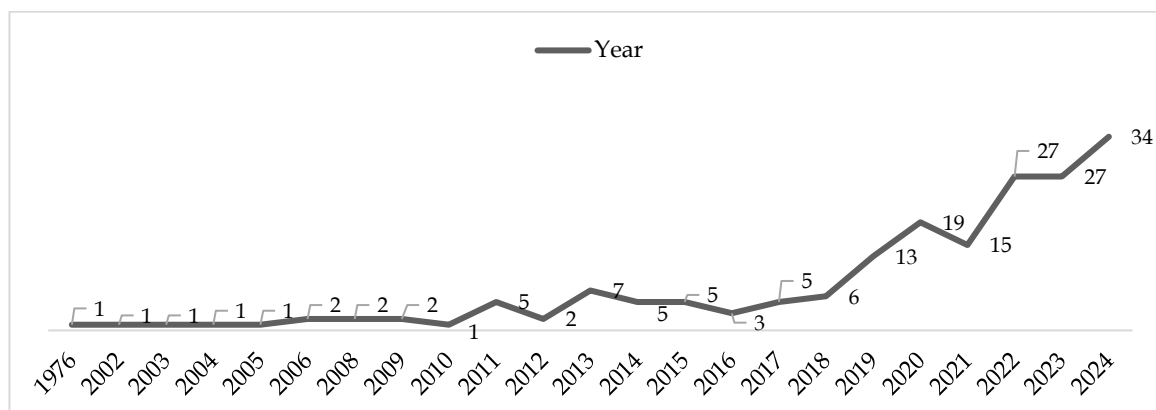
analysis is a rigorous, replicable quantitative method that uses bibliographic data to assess the impact, trends, and collaborative networks of academic literature (Donthu et al., 2021). This objective approach minimizes potential researcher bias and provides a comprehensive overview of the field's development. The study employed CiteSpace 6.3 R1 (64-bit) software, which combines bibliographic principles with information visualization to graphically depict the structural relationships of scientific knowledge (Chen, 2006).

The bibliometric methodology applied to the final corpus of 185 documents encompasses several key analytical techniques: Collaborative Networks, which identify influential individuals and organizations (Newman, 2004), Co-Citation Analysis (ACA), which reveals the underlying intellectual structure of the field by highlighting foundational works (Small, 1973), and Co-Keyword Analysis, which identifies main research themes and tracks emerging trends over time by analyzing the occurrence and association between keywords (Callon et al., 1983). Combining these methods helps clarify the overall picture of scientific cooperation and future research orientation in sustainable craft village tourism.

Research results

Descriptive analysis

Figure 2: Number of Statistical Documents from 1976 to 2024



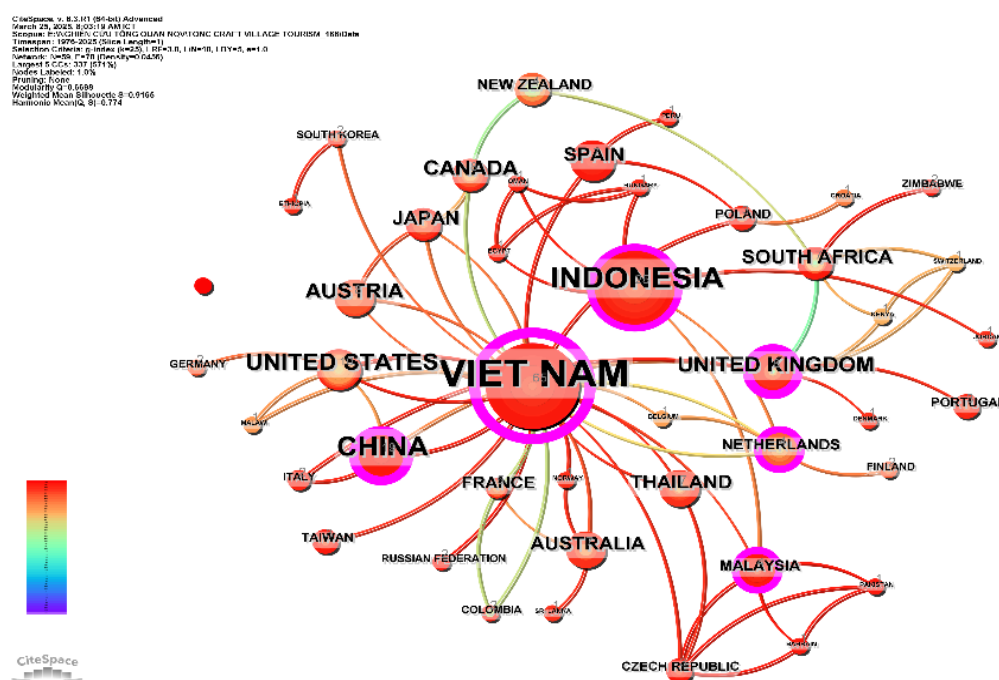
As shown in Figure 2, the longitudinal distribution of the 185 identified documents reveals an evolving research interest that can be categorized into three distinct chronological phases. During the initial phase, spanning 35 years from 1976 to 2010, the field received minimal academic attention, with only six studies published—accounting for approximately 3.24% of the total dataset. These foundational works were published sporadically (specifically in 1976, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006), reflecting a nascent stage of awareness regarding the intersection of traditional craftsmanship and tourism. The second phase, extending from 2011 to 2018, marked a period of steady growth as scholarly output began to rise, driven by the early recognition of craft villages in cultural heritage preservation and sustainable rural development. The final phase, from 2019 to 2024, represents a pronounced research boom, containing 134 documents or roughly 72.43% of the total corpus. Annual productivity in this period surged from 13 publications in 2019 to 34 in 2024, indicating a significant acceleration in the field's intellectual momentum. A critical inflection point is observed between 2021 and 2022, where the volume rose from 15 to 27 articles—an 80% year-on-year increase. This surge

is largely attributed to post-pandemic recovery strategies, the integration of digital transformation in tourism promotion, and a shift toward multifaceted sustainability frameworks encompassing circular economy models and community resilience. Overall, the field has transitioned through a period of minimal attention (1976–2010), steady growth (2011–2018), and a pronounced boom (2019–2024). Moving forward, more profound studies, technological innovation, and strategic planning are essential to fully realize the potential of craft village tourism in a sustainable manner.

National cooperation network

The analysis of the National Cooperation Network, as seen in Figure 3, delineates the structural dynamics of global academic collaboration in craft village tourism, involving 59 countries and 78 collaborations. The network exhibits moderate rather than extensive global engagement, quantified by a low network density of 0.0456. Measured on a scale from 0 to 1, this low figure suggests that knowledge flow is constrained by geographical proximity, favoring bilateral linkages over robust multilateral projects (Gutiérrez-Salcedo et al., 2018).

Figure 3: National Cooperation Network



The network's core hubs are countries with rich craft heritage, notably Vietnam, Indonesia, and China, which focus on Community-Based Tourism (CBT) and Heritage Preservation. In contrast, the United States, the United Kingdom, and South Africa function as bridging nodes, specializing in economic assessment and policy studies. This uneven distribution and low density reveal a significant fragmentation of knowledge transfer. Reliance on bilateral ties limits the generalizability of sustainability models across diverse cultural and economic contexts. Strengthening the network requires transcending regional silos to facilitate systematic, multilateral exchange of best practices, which is essential to advancing comprehensive, sustainable craft village tourism globally.

Co-author analysis

Table 1 provides a ranked overview of the most prolific authors based on their H-index, publication volume, and citation metrics. The leading scholar, Braunegg, G. from the Association for Resource-Efficient and Sustainable Technologies, maintains Rank 1, demonstrating substantial authority with an H-index of 37 and 6,108 citations, focusing primarily on sustainability, resource efficiency, and innovation within tourism contexts. Following closely are Schnitzer, H. (Rank 2) and Molina-Moreno, Valentín (Rank 3). A significant collaboration cluster originates at the Universidad de Granada, specializing in circular economy models and policy integration, featuring contributors such as Molina-Moreno, Valentín (H-index 18, 1,331 citations), Prados-Peña, M.B. (Rank 4), and Gálvez-Sánchez, F.J. (Rank 9). Authors from Southeast Asia and Oceania are also prominent. Mahanty, S. (Rank 7, The Australian National University, H-index 23, 1,985 citations), contributes important work on governance and sustainability in the region, often partnering with Dang, T. D. (Rank 5). Hai, L.T. (Rank 8, Vietnam National University, HCMC) reflects increasing Vietnamese involvement in community-based tourism. Further global representation focuses on rural empowerment. Nel, E. L. (Rank 6, University of Otago, H-index 29, 2,572 citations) and Hipsher, S. (Rank 10, Webster University) shape the discourse on tourism as a mechanism for poverty alleviation and local economic growth, particularly in the South African context.

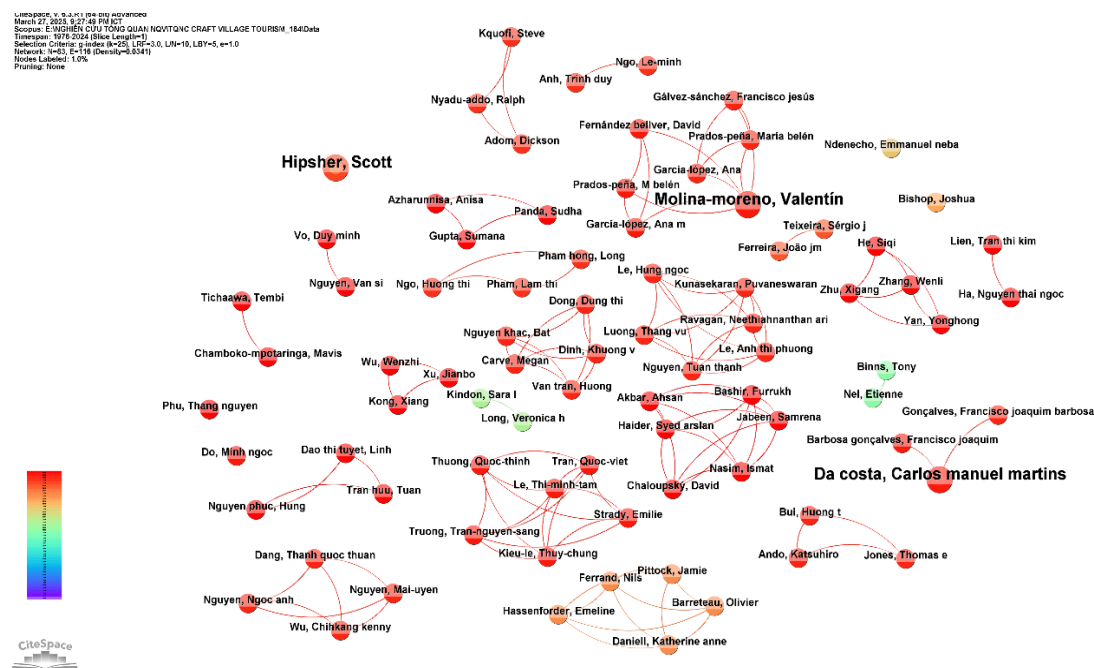
Table 1: Ranking Authors with Studies on Sustainable Tourism Development in Craft Villages

Rank	Author	Organization	H-index	Amount	Summary
1	Braunegg, G.	Association for Resource-Efficient and Sustainable Technologies	37	4	6,108
2	Schnitzer, H.	Technische Universität Graz	19	4	1,486
3	Molina-Moreno, Valentín	Universidad de Granada	18	4	1,331
4	Prados-Peña, M.B.	Universidad de Granada	9	4	287
5	Dang, T.D.	Australian Defence Force School of Language	4	4	42
6	Nel, Etienne L.	University of Otago	29	3	2,572
7	Mahanty, S.	The Australian National University	23	3	1,985
8	Hai, L.T.	Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City	16	3	777
9	Gálvez-Sánchez, F.J.	Universidad de Granada	7	3	246
10	Hipsher, S	Webster University	5	3	82

The collaborative network analysis of research on craft village tourism between 1976 and 2024 delineates an expanding yet structurally sparse academic landscape. Quantitative metrics reveal a network comprising 84 authors and 118 co-authorship links, resulting in a

low density of 0.0341. This indicates that while scholarly interest has surged significantly since the 2000s, only 3.41% of potential connections are realized – a proportion derived from the ratio of actual links to the total possible connections within the network. This suggests a high degree of fragmentation characteristic of emerging research domains. Despite this overall lack of cohesion, the field is anchored by four distinct, high-productivity clusters that drive intellectual development.

Figure 4: Collaborative Network of Authors with Articles Related to the Research Topic



Note: CiteSpace 6.3.R1 analysis results

First, a group centered around Molina-Moreno examines the intersection of the circular economy, sustainable tourism, and heritage conservation policy (Herrador et al., 2024). Second, influential research by Binns and Nel (2002) in development geography examined how tourism contributes to poverty alleviation and community empowerment in low-resource settings. Third, Barbosa Gonçalves and Da Costa (2022) lead a cluster emphasizing policy formulation and collaborative governance across Southeast Asia and Africa. Finally, a specific cohort of Vietnamese scholars, including Vo Duy Minh and Phạm Hồng Long, addresses local contexts through digital innovation and community-based tourism models (Pham Hong et al., 2021). Collectively, while these clusters demonstrate deep localized collaboration, the extensive isolation of other nodes underscores a critical need for increased interdisciplinary and cross-border cooperation to advance the global understanding of sustainable craft village tourism.

An analysis of the collaborator network shows the evolution of sustainable tourism studies from 1976 to 2024, with colors indicating periods: green for early studies (pre-2000) and orange/red for later ones. Temporal Evolution (Figure 5). From 1976 to 2000, research on craft village tourism consisted primarily of isolated inquiries into the cultural or heritage value of traditional villages (Johnston, 1976). In the ensuing decade (2001–2010), collaboration among scholars increased, driven by interest in rural economic development and the direct financial impacts of tourism on local communities (Binns & Nel, 2002; Cohen,

2001).

Figure 5: Collaborative Network of Authors with Articles Related to the Research Topic



Note: CiteSpace 6.3.R1 analysis results

The period from 2011 to 2020 witnessed the emergence of more cohesive clusters centered on environmental sustainability, community empowerment, and “tourism for poverty reduction,” thereby broadening the scope of research to address a range of socio-ecological challenges (Barrington et al., 2012; Mahanty & Dang, 2015). Most recently, between 2021 and 2024, studies have increasingly focused on post-pandemic resilience, digital transformation, and adaptation to climate change. Investigations by Kapil and Varghese (2024) highlight how shifting climate conditions affect rural craft tourism, while Wang et al. (2024) examined strategies for cultural resource management in a post-COVID context.

Although certain groups of authors – such as Molina-Moreno’s cluster on sustainability and Hipsher’s emphasis on socio-economic development – demonstrate robust collaboration, the overall density of the research network remains relatively low. Many authors continue to operate in smaller, isolated “silos” (Tseane-Gumbi et al., 2019). Fostering interregional and interdisciplinary partnerships could close these gaps, potentially yielding more comprehensive perspectives on technology use, marketing strategies, and policy frameworks (Untari & Suharto, 2021).

As craft village tourism attracts growing global interest – mainly due to its dual role in cultural preservation and community-based development – expanding comparative, cross-national research that incorporates circular economy principles (Fernández Bellver et al., 2023) and digital innovations (Makandwa & Klerk, 2024) would help craft evidence-based policies. Such approaches are crucial to ensuring the long-term economic viability and cultural integrity of craft villages.

Taken as a whole, the author network from 1976 to 2024 (Figures 4 & 5) highlights incremental yet fragmented growth in craft village tourism research. While several clusters collaborate extensively on sustainability and socio-economic outcomes, the limited density signifies considerable potential for further interdisciplinary engagement. In the coming

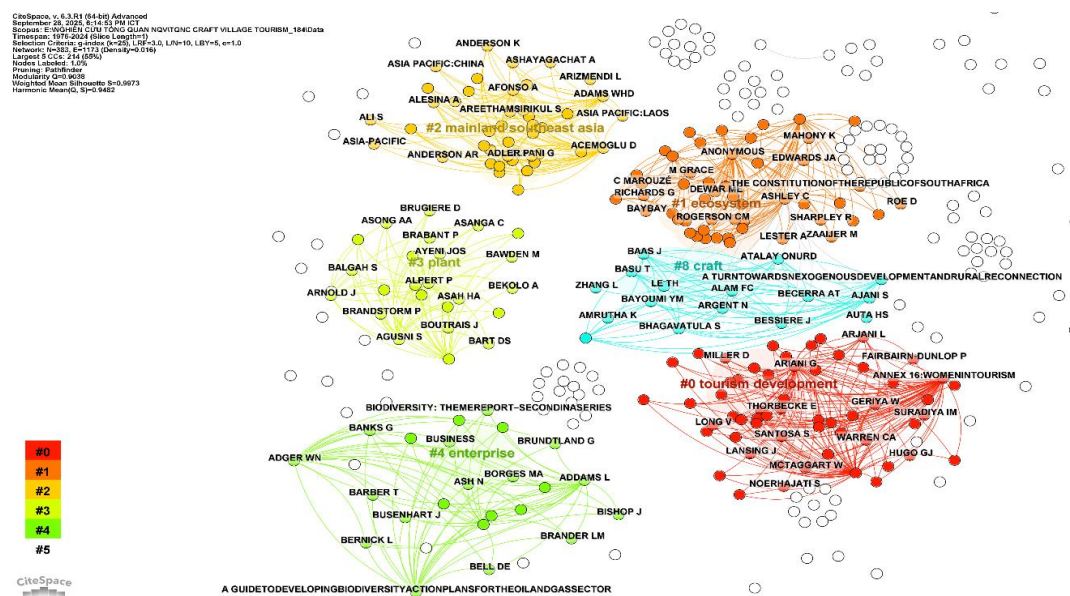
years, scholars are likely to emphasize technology-driven approaches and integrative frameworks to balance the economic, environmental, and cultural demands of craft village tourism (Kapil & Varghese, 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

Authors' Co-Citation Analysis

Co-Citation Analysis (ACA) is a bibliometric technique used to identify intellectual relationships between authors whose works are frequently cited together in the reference lists of academic publications. This method captures how often two or more authors are co-cited across multiple documents, thereby revealing the underlying intellectual structure and dominant schools of thought within a research field.

Author Co-Citation Analysis on the corpus of 185 documents related to sustainable development in craft village tourism. The resulting network visualization (Figure 6) and the cluster summary (Table 2) reveal six major clusters that delineate the field's intellectual foundations. The high silhouette values (ranging from 0.984 to 1) across these clusters confirm that the clusters are distinct and well-defined.

Figure 6: Author Co-Citation Analysis Map



Note: CiteSpace 6.3.R1 analysis results

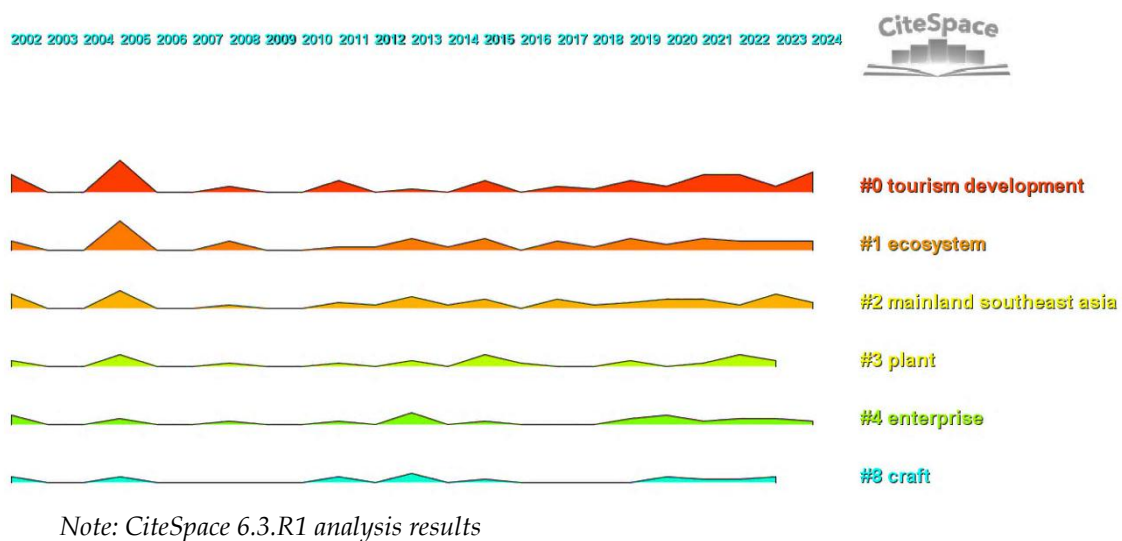
The network displays a structure characterized by specific research communities, with the largest clusters identified by distinct colors to facilitate visual interpretation. These include the red cluster (#0), labeled Tourism Development (Size 58, Avg. Year 2005), which represents the foundational theoretical landscape of the field; the orange cluster (#1), labeled South Africa (Size 50, Avg. Year 2004), focusing on local economic development and poverty alleviation; and the yellow cluster (#2), labeled Mainland Southeast Asia (Size 43, Avg. Year 2018), which reflects a more recent regional and policy-driven empirical focus. Additionally, the light green cluster (#4), labeled Ecosystem (Size 23, Avg. Year 2013), signifies a thematic shift toward environmental economics, while the cyan cluster (#8), labeled Craft (Size 16, Avg. Year 2023), represents the most contemporary shift toward circular economy and sustainability frameworks specifically for the craft sector.

Table 2: Top Cluster Author Co-Citation

Cluster	Color	Label (LLR)	Size	Average Year	Core Intellectual Focus	Key Cited Authors (Citation Count)
#0	Red	Tourism Development	58	2005	Foundational tourism theory and gender studies in developing regions.	Ariani Iga, Ariani G, Annex 16: Women in Tourism (Degree 57)
#1	Orange	South Africa	50	2004	Local economic development, poverty alleviation, and rural policy in Africa.	Anonymous (37), Ashley C (3), Rogerson Cm (3)
#2	Yellow	Mainland Southeast Asia	43	2018	Regional focus on poverty reduction, private sector engagement, and development in Asia.	Acemoglu D (2), Adams Whd (Degree 24)
#4	Light Green	Ecosystem	23	2013	Integration of environmental economics and biodiversity into business practices.	Bishop J (1), Brander Lm (1)
#8	Cyan	Craft	16	2023	Emerging analytical frameworks focusing specifically on the role of crafts in village local development.	Fernández Bellver D (Citing Article 2023)

Key intellectual clusters and temporal evolution

The analysis of the major clusters highlights the historical and thematic evolution of the field (Figure 7):

Figure 7: Author Co-Citation Landscape View

Cluster #0: Foundational Tourism Development: This is the largest cluster (average year 2005), labeled simply “tourism development.” It represents the core theoretical foundation for integrating heritage sites into the tourism economy. Its high degree of connection suggests it forms the central intellectual backdrop against which specialized studies are built. Key highly connected nodes here include Ariani IGAA, Ariani G, and Annex 16: Women in Tourism (all with the highest degree of 57).

Cluster #1: Local Development and Poverty Alleviation (South Africa): This cluster (average year 2004) is founded on seminal work such as Binns and Nell (2002), titled Tourism as a local development strategy in South Africa. It represents the earliest influential school of thought, focusing on tourism as a mechanism for poverty reduction and socio-economic upliftment in rural and developing regions, particularly in the African context. Highly cited authors here include Anonymous (37 citations, highest burst 4.42), Ashley C. (3 citations, centrality 0.03), and Rogerson C. M. (3 citations).

Cluster #2: Regional and Policy Focus (Mainland Southeast Asia): With a later average publication year (2018), this cluster focuses on poverty reduction, the private sector, and tourism in the Mainland Southeast Asia region. The prominence of this cluster demonstrates the growing empirical research emphasis within the Asian region, driven by localized policy and development concerns (Hipsher, S., 2017).

Cluster #4: Ecosystem: comprises 23 documents with an average publication year of 2013. This cluster represents a crucial research trajectory focused on integrating environmental economics and biodiversity into tourism business models and practices. Its emergence highlights a thematic shift toward recognizing and quantifying the value of natural capital and ecosystem services (such as biodiversity and landscape) as an indispensable factor for sustainability. This indicates a scholarly interest in developing tools and policies to internalize environmental costs and promote ecologically friendly business operations. Foundational works, such as those by Barrington et al. (2012), established the groundwork for applying principles of environmental economics within the context of tourism and conservation.

Cluster #8: Emerging Sustainability Frameworks (Craft): This is the most recent core cluster (average year 2023), labeled simply “craft.” It is associated with contemporary studies such

as Crafts as a key factor in local development: a bibliometric analysis (Fernández Bellver et al., 2023). The emergence of this cluster indicates a distinct recent shift toward analyzing the craft component itself within broader sustainable and circular economy frameworks.

The intellectual trajectory of sustainable craft village tourism is characterized by three distinct evolutionary phases: a foundational emphasis on local development (Cluster #1, 2004), subsequent integration into general tourism theory (Cluster #0, 2005), and a recent shift toward policy and regional specificity (Clusters #2 and #8, 2018–2023). To systematically map these structures, this study used Author Co-Citation Analysis (ACA), a bibliometric technique that reveals underlying intellectual linkages through citation patterns (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2013).

By analyzing a corpus of 554 academic documents using CiteSpace, a citation threshold of 40 was applied to ensure cluster interpretability (Ertz & Leblanc-Proulx, 2019). This methodological approach yielded a network of 154 influential authors organized into two primary clusters, representing distinct scholarly communities united by shared interests in cultural heritage and sustainable development. The resulting visualization, where node attributes reflect citation frequency and similarity, provides a comprehensive framework for identifying the field's dominant schools of thought and key contributors that underpin its theoretical foundation.

Co-occurrence development

Co-occurrence analysis examines keywords and terms that frequently appear in the literature to clarify their relationships. Its purpose is to uncover the main themes of the research, connect various studies, understand previous research trends, and predict potential future research directions (Donthu et al., 2021).

Keyword co-occurrence analysis

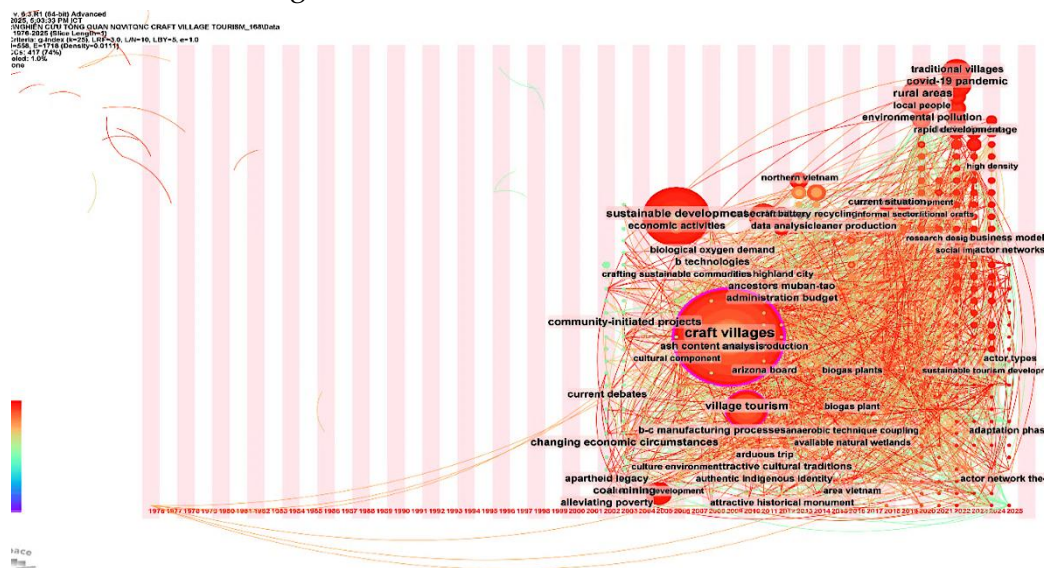
Co-word analysis is instrumental in mapping the evolution and structural composition of research domains. Utilizing CiteSpace 6.3.R1 to analyze a dataset of 185 publications, this study generated a network comprising 577 keywords and 1,910 edges. A critical observation is the low network density of 0.0115, indicating that only 1.15% of potential relationships are realized (Figure 8). This suggests a highly fragmented research landscape in which themes primarily operate within isolated clusters rather than within integrated interdisciplinary frameworks.

under-integrated into the core intellectual structure. While the thematic landscape of craft village tourism is broadening to include green technologies and social empowerment, the field requires greater conceptual integration. Future research must prioritize interdisciplinary collaboration to synthesize these fragmented topics into a cohesive agenda for resilient and inclusive tourism development.

Analysis of research hotspots

Using CiteSpace to generate timeline maps and keyword clusters reveals an evolving structure for craft village tourism research from 1976 to 2024. Figure 9 arranges keywords chronologically, with node sizes reflecting frequency and color gradients indicating different time slices. This analysis reveals 210 nodes and 638 links, resulting in a modularity $Q \approx$ of approximately 0.8048—a figure indicating distinct yet well-defined clusters that illustrate various developmental stages and thematic focuses (Turner et al., 2015).

Figure 9: Keywords—Time Axis Showing Trends in Global Research on Sustainable Craft Village Tourism



Note: CiteSpace 6.3.R1 analysis results

Phase 1 (Before 2000): Preserving culture and recognizing traditional values

Early research, typified by Johnston (1976), regarded craft village tourism primarily as a means to safeguard intangible heritage and uphold local artistic expressions. Keywords such as “rural tourism,” “cultural tourism,” and “crafts village” dominated, indicating a prioritization of cultural conservation over broader economic or environmental considerations. These studies, while limited in number, laid the groundwork for appreciating traditional crafts as part of cultural development strategies (Binns & Nel, 2002).

Phase 2 (2000–2010): Craft village tourism as a local economic development strategy

With the turn of the 21st century, research expanded to encompass the economic benefits of tourism activities, which are viewed as drivers for job creation and poverty reduction (Binns & Nel, 2003; Cohen, 2001). Frequent keywords—“community-based tourism (CBT),”

“heritage conservation,” and “handicrafts” –reflect an interplay of local cultural assets and livelihood enhancement. For instance, Zhou and Lu (2006) highlighted the interaction between ecological traditions and social capital in fostering the success of craft villages, and Binns and Nel (2003) underscored tourism’s potential to improve living standards in rural South Africa.

Phase 3 (2011–2020): Sustainable development and optimization of local resources

During this decade, keyword clusters increasingly referenced sustainable tourism, governance approach, digital transformation, and community-based models (Barrington et al., 2012; Mahanty & Dang, 2015). While economic benefits remained significant, there was a heightened focus on environmental stewardship and cultural identity (Ouyang & Shang, 2011). Technology began to feature in research, with scholars like Tseane-Gumbi et al. (2019) investigating new ICT tools for marketing, reflecting the global trend toward smart tourism. Studies from Latin America, Europe, and Asia began to align, sharing common aims of balancing cultural authenticity with responsible tourism practices (Shastri & Pretty, 2019; Zorn, 2011).

Phase 4 (2021–2022): Impact of COVID-19 on craft village development

Amid global disruptions, the literature in this phase highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the integration of digital solutions in craft village tourism (Karta et al., 2021; Mulyani et al., 2022). Keywords such as “circular economy,” “ecotourism village,” and “digital transformation” underscore a growing push for sustainability that encompasses not only environmental considerations but also social and economic aspects (Martín-Blanco et al., 2022). Scholars have examined the challenges faced by local communities, identifying opportunities for capacity-building and creative tourism that leverage craft heritage while addressing post-pandemic market shifts (Adom et al., 2021; Barbosa Gonçalves & Costa, 2022). With limited visitor flow, emphasis turned to online marketing and broader stakeholder engagement to sustain livelihoods (Wondirad et al., 2022).

Phase 5 (2023 to Present): Craft village tourism amid emerging technologies and conservation solutions

Recent scholarship, as indicated by the latest time slices, highlights the integration of green economy principles (Fernández Bellver et al., 2023; Kapil & Varghese, 2023) and virtual tourism platforms (Barbosa Gonçalves & Da Costa, 2023). Researchers increasingly focus on aligning cultural preservation with innovative management techniques, blending local authenticity with modern digital engagement strategies. Zhu et al. (2023), for instance, demonstrated how culture, society, and artistic elements intertwine in Xiangxi, China, while Tupamahu et al. (2023) examined the political and socioeconomic drivers influencing tourism in Indonesia. Notably, Li et al. (2023) and Zhang et al. (2024) employed GIS and landscape modeling to optimize resource use and preserve natural heritage.

Cultural Preservation as a Constant: From the earliest studies, heritage and tradition have remained at the core, evolving from pure conservation efforts to integrative models that balance culture with socio-economic imperatives.

Growing Emphasis on Sustainability: Over time, the lexicon has expanded to include

environmental management, climate change adaptation, and the circular economy, indicating a more nuanced understanding of tourism's impacts.

Technological Transformation: Particularly from the late 2010s onward, digital tools—such as marketing platforms, CRM systems, and VR/AR experiences—have emerged as pivotal strategies for adapting to globalization, market competition, and unforeseen crises like COVID-19 (Makandwa & Klerk, 2024).

Community Empowerment and Policy Support: Research continues to emphasize the importance of local stakeholder engagement and government facilitation as cornerstones for the development of practical craft village tourism (Adom et al., 2021; Nguyet & Weichgrebe, 2020).

The timeline clustering in Figure 7 reflects a multidimensional progression of craft village tourism research—from initial cultural safeguarding to current emphases on sustainability, digital innovation, and community resilience. Despite varied regional contexts, a common theme links these phases: the pursuit of equilibrium between economic viability, environmental stewardship, and the safeguarding of intangible heritage (Kapil & Varghese, 2024). Building on these insights, subsequent research may delve deeper into comparative frameworks, employing interdisciplinary lenses that merge technology, policy analysis, and community-based models. As global disruptions and environmental challenges persist, shaping a truly sustainable craft village tourism will require fostering stronger partnerships among academics, policymakers, artisans, and local stakeholders, thereby ensuring culture-driven development endures alongside socio-economic benefits (Sari et al., 2024).

Discussion

The evolution of research on craft village tourism from 1976 to 2024 reveals a progressive trajectory characterized by five distinct phases, shifting from an initial focus on cultural preservation to integrated, sustainable, and digitally enabled development models. Early scholarship (1976–2000) largely viewed traditional craftsmanship through the lens of cultural identity and heritage preservation, with Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) noting that these foundational works rarely conceptualized craft villages as tourism destinations with significant economic potential. However, the onset of the 2000s marked a pivotal paradigm shift toward rural development and poverty alleviation.

During this period, scholars such as Binns and Nel (2002) and Cohen (2001) reframed village tourism as a grassroots strategy for job creation and socio-economic upliftment, effectively moving the academic discourse from static preservation to active economic production. By the 2010s, the focus broadened further to encompass comprehensive sustainability and governance. Research by Mahanty and Dang (2013) and Barrington et al. (2012) emphasized frameworks that prioritize inclusive growth and environmental stewardship, while Ouyang and Shang (2011) highlighted the need for community-based models that empower local decision-making. Concurrently, early digital interventions, including GIS and social CRM, began to emerge as tools for enhancing operational efficiency (Tseane-Gumbi et al., 2019).

This trajectory was significantly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (2021–2022), which exposed the vulnerabilities of physical visitation models and catalyzed a shift toward resilience and technological adaptation. Academic inquiries during this phase focused on

mitigating reliance on traditional supply chains through concepts such as the “circular economy” and digital optimization (Martín-Blanco et al., 2022; Mulyani et al., 2022). Karta et al. (2021) and Wondirad et al. (2022) emphasized the critical role of branding and virtual platforms in sustaining artisanship during crises. Bibliometric evidence strongly supports this intellectual pivot; the emergence of Cluster #8 (Craft) in 2023, alongside sustained themes of Enterprise and Ecosystem (Cluster #4), confirms that the field has moved decisively toward constructing specific, resilient analytical frameworks.

From 2023 onward, the discipline has embraced a “digital-ecological paradigm,” characterized by the sophisticated integration of green economy principles and advanced technologies such as digital storytelling and landscape planning (Kapil & Varghese, 2024; Li et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2023). This modern era, highlighted by Afnarius et al. (2020), focuses on optimizing resource utilization and enhancing visitor experiences through virtual tourism and technology-enabled conservation. Despite this thematic expansion, the research community’s structural cohesion remains limited. Network analysis reveals low co-authorship density (0.03–0.04) and fragmented keyword co-occurrence density (0.0168), indicating that, while robust clusters exist around sustainability and policy, many researchers continue to operate in academic silos (Binns & Nel, 2002; Mahanty & Dang, 2013). Furthermore, a distinct regional asymmetry exists: Asian nations such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and China lead in empirical, community-centric case studies (World Tourism Organization, 2020), whereas Western nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States dominate in theoretical frameworks and policy analysis (Newman, 2004). Addressing this fragmentation requires enhanced global collaboration.

Untari and Suharto (2021) argued that strengthening North-South partnerships could facilitate the transfer of rigorous sustainability methodologies—such as applying Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) to local contexts like Bat Trang or Hoi An—while South-South collaboration could enable the benchmarking of best practices, such as comparing the effectiveness of “One Village One Product” (OVOP) strategies across Indonesia and China. Ultimately, bridging these geographical and structural gaps is essential for transforming localized empirical findings into globally validated, policy-actionable models for sustainable craft village tourism.

This study establishes its scholarly significance by offering several robust methodological and conceptual contributions. Critically, it delivers the field’s first macro-level, systematic synthesis and scientific mapping of research on sustainable craft village tourism, thereby directly filling a pronounced structural and conceptual void in the existing literature. Methodological rigor is ensured by employing bibliometric analysis and knowledge graph techniques in CiteSpace. This quantitative approach allows for the rigorous and replicable clarification of intellectual trends and methodological shortcomings, with the inherent objectivity minimizing potential researcher bias and enhancing the transparency of the literature synthesis. Furthermore, the analysis is grounded in a comprehensive and robust dataset of 185 documents, meticulously drawn from the authoritative Scopus and Web of Science databases, which provides a solid empirical foundation for accurately mapping the intellectual structure and evolution of this specialized research domain.

The final section synthesizes the limitations inherent in the current research landscape and outlines crucial directions for future study and policy action. Despite the utility of this bibliometric analysis in mapping the intellectual structure, the field faces several fundamental limitations that future research must address. The intellectual structure remains fragmented, characterized by consistently limited international collaboration and an uneven research

capacity between regions. This structural gap is further compounded by the lack of unified evaluation frameworks and standardized sustainability indicators, making it challenging to accurately measure the long-term socioeconomic impacts and compare the effectiveness of different tourism models across diverse cultural and economic contexts.

Looking forward, several key directions emerge from the bibliometric trends: First, there is a growing need to establish standardized sustainability metrics. Second, digital transformation must be harnessed not only for marketing but also for long-term conservation and planning—leveraging tools such as virtual reality, big data analytics, and AI-driven visitor personalization. Third, local communities must remain at the center of all initiatives, empowering artisans, village leaders, and local youth through education, funding, and participatory governance. Furthermore, future studies must strengthen cross-regional partnerships and conduct comparative international analyses to advance empirical findings toward globally validated, policy-actionable models. In conclusion, addressing the pressing challenges of fragmented collaboration and the lack of unified evaluation frameworks is crucial for craft village tourism to make meaningful contributions to global sustainability goals and local cultural resilience.

Conclusion

This bibliometric analysis provides a systematic synthesis of research trends in sustainable development in craft village tourism, examining 185 publications published between 1976 and 2024. The study confirms a substantial expansion in the field's volume and thematic scope. Early investigations primarily centered on cultural heritage, subsequently broadening to address economic viability, community empowerment, and environmental responsibility. Contemporary scholarship demonstrates a deliberate pivot toward more sophisticated sustainability frameworks that integrate digital transformation, policy-driven solutions, and interdisciplinary management strategies. This evolution reflects the growing consensus that craft village tourism is a potent catalyst for rural development and poverty alleviation.

Despite this thematic growth, the overall research landscape remains structurally fragmented, characterized by consistently limited international collaboration and significant regional asymmetry. Countries in Southeast Asia (e.g., Indonesia and Vietnam) and China are the primary contributors of empirical case studies, while developed nations predominantly contribute essential policy frameworks and theoretical models. This structural divergence underscores an urgent necessity for enhanced South-South and North-South cooperation to establish globally comparable sustainability metrics and mitigate socio-economic disparities. Keyword co-occurrence further substantiates this transition toward comprehensive sustainability paradigms encompassing circular-economy approaches and digital innovations, highlighting the critical roles of terms such as “smart tourism,” “digital heritage,” and “virtual reality” in future planning and management efforts. However, significant structural and methodological challenges persist in the field, including the lack of unified methodological standards for data standardization and the final assessment of empirical findings. This fragmented landscape ultimately underlines the urgent need for more systematic and inclusive frameworks.

To effectively address these deficits, future studies should prioritize refining sustainability evaluation criteria and significantly enhancing community participation. Researchers must employ advanced digital tools, such as GIS, VR, and data analytics, to support robust tourism

planning and cultural preservation. Fostering public-private partnerships and conducting comparative international analyses are crucial for developing universally adaptable best practices.

In summary, craft village tourism occupies a vital niche within the sustainable tourism agenda. Maximizing its developmental potential requires a multidisciplinary approach that strategically converges governance, technology, and inclusive community-led initiatives. By bridging critical research gaps—particularly concerning standardized metrics, digital transformation, and equitable stakeholder engagement—and by bolstering cross-regional collaboration, craft village tourism can evolve into a resilient and enriching model that sustainably supports both local livelihoods and the broader tourism industry.

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