

Trends in Cultural Tourism Research: A Bibliometric Analysis of Creative Economy Contributions

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ABSTRACT

This study explores trends and contributions in cultural tourism research within the context of the creative economy through a bibliometric analysis of publications indexed in Scopus. Using VOSviewer, the study identifies key themes, influential authors, and collaborative networks, revealing the central role of cultural tourism as a nexus for integrating cultural preservation, creativity, and economic growth. The analysis highlights sustainability, innovation, and digital transformation as emerging focal points in the field. Prominent researchers such as Greg Richards and theories like the experience economy are pivotal to the discourse, while international collaborations involving countries like Indonesia, the United States, and China demonstrate the global significance of cultural tourism research. Despite its growth, gaps in cross-regional representation, particularly in Africa and South America, highlight areas for future exploration. This study provides actionable insights for advancing cultural tourism strategies to align with sustainability goals and foster inclusive economic development.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism, Creative Economy, Bibliometric Analysis, Sustainability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism, an intricate sector of the tourism industry, intertwines cultural heritage and modern consumer demands, forming a significant part of the global tourism market. This niche allows tourists to immerse themselves in the traditions, practices, and spaces historically significant to a destination, fostering a deeper connection between tourists and the cultural identities of the locales they visit [1]. As [2] highlights, cultural tourism not only enhances the visitor experience through authenticity and learning but also contributes substantially to local economies. With an increase in consumer interest towards authentic cultural experiences, destinations worldwide are increasingly leveraging their cultural assets as a catalyst for economic development and sustainability [3].

The intersection of culture and economy has given rise to the concept of the creative economy, which is recognized for its dual value: preserving cultural heritage and spurring economic growth. According to the [4], the creative economy, encompassing industries such as arts, crafts, and design, is a dynamic sector that adapts and evolves, influencing patterns of consumption, production, and distribution. This evolution is pivotal as it transforms cultural tourism from traditional sightseeing to immersive experiences, promoting deeper engagement and longer stays [5]. Moreover, the integration of local arts and creativity into tourism offerings not only enriches the tourist experience but also empowers local communities, preserving their traditions and promoting cultural pride [6].

However, despite the burgeoning interest in cultural tourism, challenges persist, particularly in balancing the commercial benefits of tourism with the preservation of cultural

integrity. The surge in tourism can lead to commercialization that may dilute the authenticity of cultural expressions and lead to the disenfranchisement of local communities [7]. Additionally, the dependency on tourism revenue makes cultural sites vulnerable to economic fluctuations, as evidenced by the recent global events that significantly impacted travel [8]. These dynamics underscore the necessity for a robust understanding of the trends and contributions of the creative economy within cultural tourism to ensure sustainable and resilient tourism practices.

Despite its growth and recognized value, research on cultural tourism and its integration with the creative economy remains fragmented and unevenly distributed across disciplines and geographies. There is a lack of comprehensive analysis that encapsulates the global trends, thematic evolution, and the academic discourse surrounding the contributions of the creative economy to cultural tourism. This gap hinders the ability of policymakers, scholars, and practitioners to fully understand the impacts and potential of cultural tourism in fostering economic and cultural vitality. Moreover, insufficient insights into these trends could impede the formulation of strategies aimed at maximizing the socio-economic benefits of cultural tourism while preserving cultural authenticity.

The objective of this study is to conduct a bibliometric analysis of the existing literature on cultural tourism with a focus on the contributions of the creative economy. This analysis aims to map out the key trends, major themes, and academic contributions over the past two decades. By identifying the most influential studies, prevalent themes, and emerging trends, this research intends to provide a comprehensive overview of the academic landscape of cultural tourism research. This, in turn, will offer valuable insights and guidance for future research directions, policy formulations, and practice implementations in the realm of cultural tourism and creative economy integration.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Conceptualizing Cultural Tourism*

Cultural tourism has been extensively studied within the context of experiential travel, where tourists actively seek connections with the cultural essence of their destinations. [9] defines cultural tourism as "the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs". This definition underscores the intrinsic motivation behind cultural tourism: the pursuit of authentic experiences that offer a deeper understanding of the cultural, historical, and social fabric of a place. Moreover, [10] emphasize the importance of cultural tourism in promoting the conservation of heritage while offering economic opportunities to local communities.

2.2 *The Creative Economic Impacts of Cultural Tourism*

The creative economy, a term popularized by [11], encompasses industries that merge creativity, culture, economics, and technology in a way that fosters wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. [12] highlights that the creative economy not only contributes to GDP but also plays a significant role in job creation, export earnings, and cultural diversity. In the context of cultural tourism, the creative economy can revitalize local cultures and provide unique, sustainable tourism offerings (Yen, 2015). For instance, festivals, museums, and cultural performances, which are pivotal elements of the creative economy, enhance the

attractiveness of destinations by linking tourism directly with cultural heritage and innovation [13].

2.3 *Economy as a Catalyst*

Cultural tourism is often heralded for its economic benefits, particularly in terms of revenue generation and employment. Studies such as those by [14] have documented the positive impacts of cultural tourism on local economies, showing that it can lead to increased spending, higher employment rates, and improved infrastructure. Moreover, [15] argue that cultural tourism promotes greater economic stability as it tends to be less susceptible to seasonal fluctuations compared to other tourism forms. However, the economic potential of cultural tourism must be balanced against the risks of over-tourism, which can lead to resource depletion and cultural commodification, potentially undermining the sustainability of local communities [16].

2.4 *Cultural Authenticity and Tourist Experience*

At the heart of cultural tourism is the concept of authenticity, which [17] described as the main motivator for tourists seeking genuine cultural interactions. Authenticity in cultural tourism is multifaceted, involving not only the genuineness of the cultural products but also the perceptions and experiences of tourists [13]. The quest for authentic experiences encourages deeper engagement with the local culture, often leading to a more respectful and meaningful interaction between tourists and host communities. However, as [18] notes, the commercialization of cultural elements can lead to staged authenticity, where cultural displays are modified to suit tourist expectations, potentially diluting the cultural value and leading to what MacCannell termed "pseudo-events".

2.5 *Integration of Technology in Cultural Tourism*

The integration of technology, particularly digital media, has transformed the landscape of cultural tourism. Technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are increasingly used to enhance the tourist experience by providing deeper insights and interactive engagements with cultural heritage [19]. For example, AR applications can overlay historical information on live views of ancient sites, enriching the visitor experience and providing educational value [20]. Moreover, social media platforms have become crucial in marketing cultural tourism destinations, allowing for the sharing of experiences and influencing destination choices [21].

2.6 *Theoretical Frameworks in Cultural Tourism Research*

Theoretical frameworks such as social exchange theory and the experience economy have been instrumental in understanding the dynamics of cultural tourism. Social exchange theory, as applied by [5], examines the reciprocal relationships between tourists and host communities, emphasizing the importance of mutual benefits and respect. Meanwhile, [8] concept of the experience economy offers a framework for creating value through memorable experiences, which is particularly relevant in cultural tourism, where the emphasis is on the depth and richness of the cultural encounter.

3. METHODS

This study employs a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer to scrutinize the academic literature on cultural tourism and its intersection with the creative economy, exclusively extracting data from the Scopus database. The analysis covers publications from the year 2000 to 2022, with search terms "cultural tourism," "creative economy," and "cultural heritage" combined through Boolean operators for comprehensive search results. VOSviewer, a tool designed for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks, was used to perform co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-authorship analyses. This approach facilitates the identification of the most significant authors, documents, and terms, highlighting thematic clusters and the evolution of research trends over the specified period.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Network Visualization

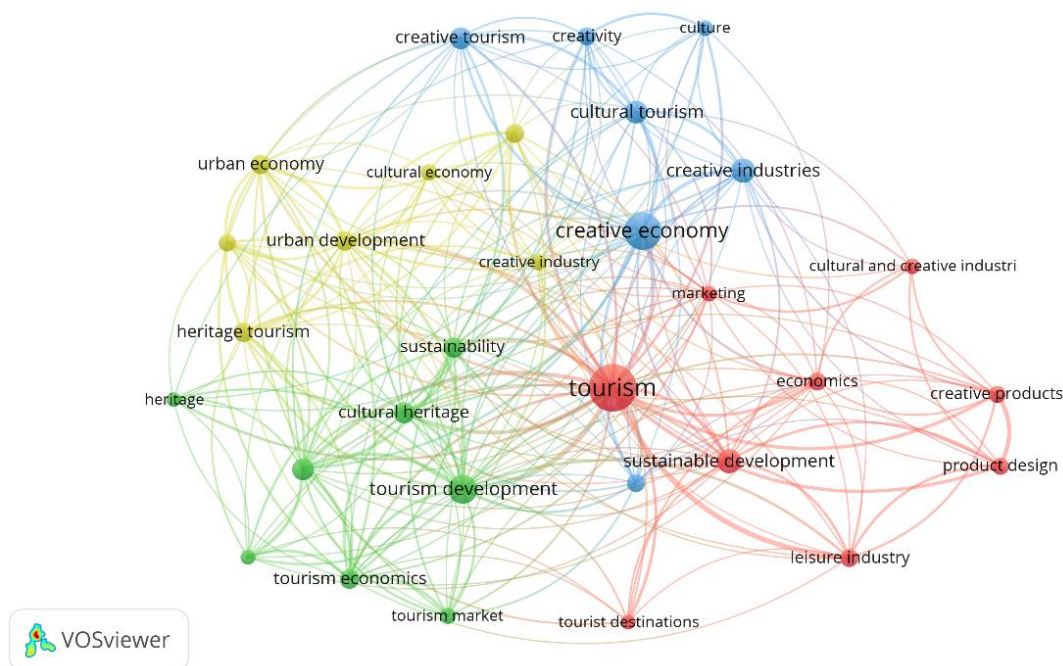


Figure 1. Network Visualization

Source: Data Analysis Result, 2025

The VOSviewer visualization showcases a bibliometric network map depicting the interconnections between key terms and concepts in the literature on cultural tourism and the creative economy. The network is organized into distinct clusters, represented by different colors, which correspond to related themes or research areas. Central to the network is the term "tourism", highlighted in red, indicating its dominant position and frequent co-occurrence with other terms. This suggests that "tourism" serves as the primary focus, linking various aspects of cultural and creative economy research. Its centrality implies that discussions around tourism are crucial for understanding the broader dynamics of cultural tourism and its interplay with creative industries.

The blue cluster revolves around terms like "cultural tourism," "creative industries," "creativity," and "culture." This cluster highlights the strong relationship between cultural tourism and the creative economy, emphasizing how creativity and cultural industries are pivotal in shaping the experiences and products offered to tourists. The presence of "cultural tourism" within this cluster also points to its role as a subset of tourism that integrates creative and cultural elements, bridging the gap between heritage and innovation. This thematic cluster emphasizes the importance of fostering creativity and integrating cultural heritage to enhance the appeal of destinations. The

green cluster includes terms such as "sustainability," "tourism development," "cultural heritage," and "tourism economics." This grouping indicates a focus on sustainable development within the context of cultural tourism. The presence of "sustainability" alongside "tourism economics" reflects the ongoing emphasis on balancing economic growth with the preservation of cultural heritage and environmental resources. The cluster also suggests that cultural tourism development is increasingly viewed through a sustainability lens, which involves leveraging cultural assets responsibly to ensure long-term benefits for both tourists and local communities.

The red cluster, in addition to "tourism," encompasses terms such as "sustainable development," "creative products," "product design," and "economics." This cluster demonstrates a focus on the economic aspects of cultural tourism, particularly the integration of sustainable practices and innovative product development. The inclusion of "creative products" and "product design" signals a growing interest in leveraging the creative economy to produce unique and sustainable tourism products. This aligns with the broader global discourse on sustainable development goals (SDGs), where tourism is seen as a vehicle for fostering economic growth while minimizing environmental and cultural degradation. Lastly, the yellow cluster features terms like "urban economy," "urban development," and "heritage tourism." This highlights a research focus on the role of cultural tourism in urban settings, emphasizing the intersection of heritage preservation, economic development, and urban planning. The inclusion of "urban economy" suggests that cultural tourism is increasingly recognized for its potential to revitalize urban areas through creative economy initiatives.

4.2 Overlay Visualization

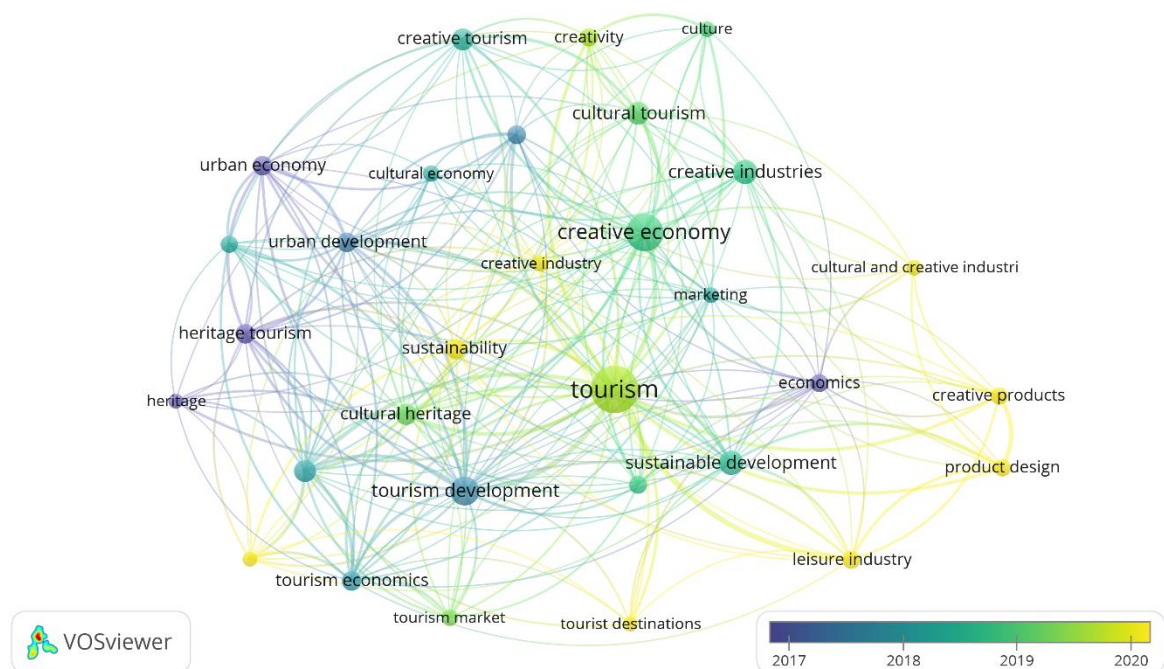


Figure 2. Overlay Visualization

Source: Data Analysis Result, 2025

The second VOSviewer visualization incorporates a temporal gradient to illustrate how key themes in cultural tourism and the creative economy have evolved over time. The central term, "tourism", remains dominant, but the color-coded timeline provides insights into the periods when specific terms gained prominence. Terms such as "sustainable development" and "creative economy," shown in lighter shades (indicating recent years), highlight their increasing importance

in research. This reflects a growing focus on integrating sustainable practices and creative economic strategies into tourism development, particularly in the context of global sustainability goals. The blue and purple clusters, representing earlier years (2017-2018), focus on foundational topics such as “heritage tourism,” “urban economy,” and “cultural heritage.” These earlier themes emphasize the importance of traditional cultural assets and their economic integration within urban and rural development frameworks. Research during this period often explored how cultural tourism could revitalize local economies and preserve heritage sites, serving as a foundation for more recent innovations.

In contrast, the yellow-green clusters, which dominate the later years (2019-2020), reflect a shift toward innovation and sustainability. Terms such as “creative products,” “marketing,” and “product design” show how the creative economy is driving novel approaches to cultural tourism. The prominence of terms like “sustainability” and “tourism development” in recent years underscores a focus on addressing environmental concerns and ensuring long-term benefits for communities. This temporal trend demonstrates how the field has expanded from its traditional focus on cultural preservation to incorporate creative and sustainable solutions for the evolving tourism landscape.

4.3 Citation Analysis

Table 1. The Most Impactful Literatures

| Citations | Authors and year | Title |
|-----------|------------------|---|
| 570 | [22] | Cultural tourism: A review of recent research and trends |
| 290 | [18] | Arts and culture in urban or regional planning: A review and research agenda |
| 250 | [19] | Transforming the (tourism) world for good and (re)generating the potential ‘new normal’ |
| 190 | [20] | Cultural clusters: The implications of cultural assets agglomeration for neighborhood revitalization |
| 166 | [23] | The influence of tourism website on tourists' behavior to determine destination selection: A case study of creative economy in Korea |
| 106 | [21] | Metaverse tourism: conceptual framework and research propositions |
| 90 | [24] | Creative food clusters and rural development through place branding: Culinary tourism initiatives in Stratford and Muskoka, Ontario, Canada |
| 81 | [25] | Culture works: Space, value, and mobility across the neoliberal Americas |
| 75 | [26] | Cultural governance and creative industries in Singapore |
| 72 | [27] | Ambitions of a global city: Arts, culture and creative economy in 'Post-Crisis' Singapore |

Source: Scopus, 2025

4.4 Density Visualization

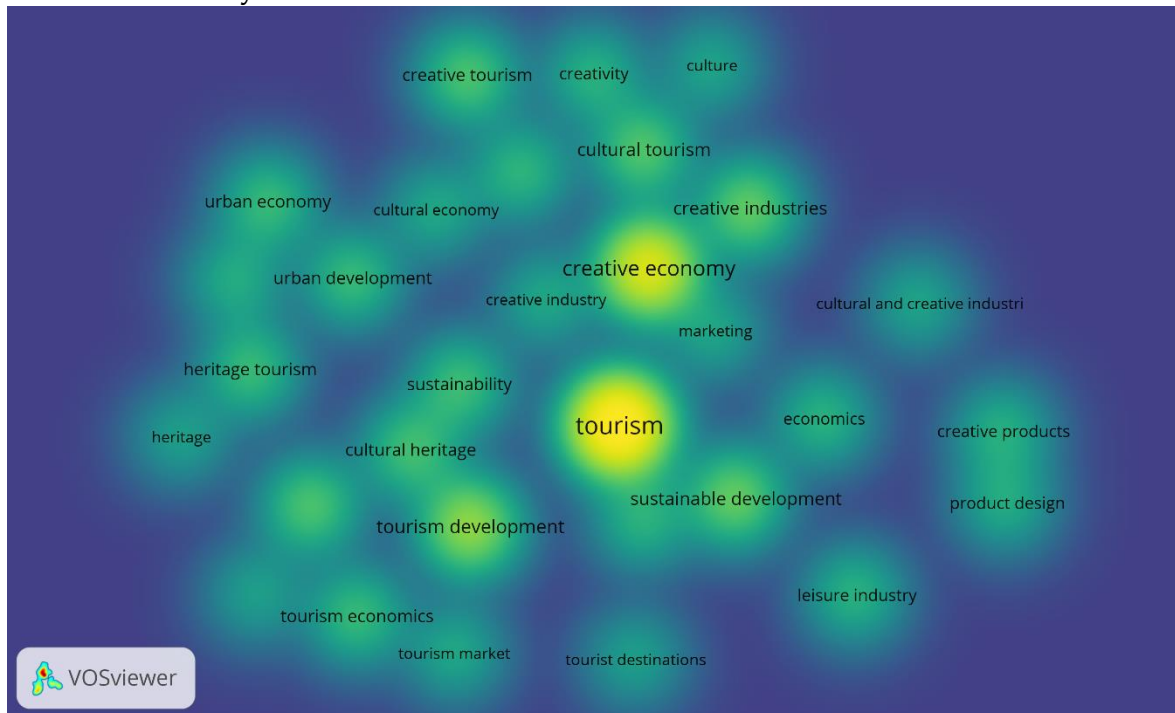


Figure 3. Density Visualization

Source: Data Analysis Result, 2025

This heatmap visualization highlights the density of connections and the prominence of key terms in the research domain of cultural tourism and the creative economy. The brightest and densest area on the map centers around the term “tourism”, signifying its dominant role as the focal point of this field of study. Closely related terms such as “creative economy,” “sustainable development,” and “tourism development” appear nearby, indicating their frequent co-occurrence and their integral role in shaping the discourse. The intensity around “creative economy” underscores its critical contribution to the evolution of cultural tourism, linking creativity and cultural heritage to economic growth and innovation. On the periphery, terms such as “heritage tourism,” “urban economy,” and “creative products” show less density but are still significant nodes. These terms suggest niche areas of research within the broader field, such as the economic revitalization of urban areas through cultural tourism and the role of creative products in enhancing tourism experiences. The presence of “sustainability” alongside “tourism development” reflects an ongoing emphasis on balancing economic benefits with environmental and cultural preservation.

4.5 Co-Authorship Network

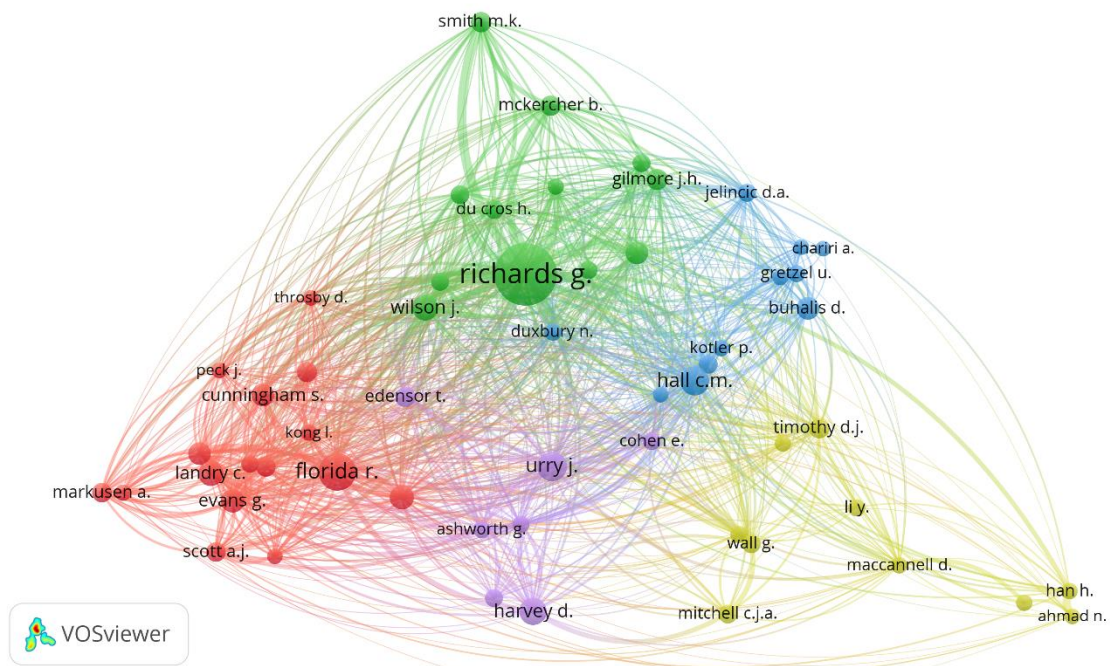


Figure 4. Authorship Visualization

Source: Data Analysis Result, 2025

This co-authorship network visualization identifies key researchers and their collaborative relationships in the fields of cultural tourism and the creative economy. Richards G. emerges as a central figure with the highest number of connections, indicating his significant influence and extensive collaboration in this domain. Surrounding him are other prominent authors such as McKercher B. and Du Cros H., who contribute substantially to research on cultural tourism and heritage management. The clusters represent groups of researchers with strong interconnections, such as the red cluster led by Florida R., focusing on the creative economy, and the green cluster emphasizing cultural tourism themes. Other influential authors, such as Hall C.M. in the blue cluster and Urry J. in the purple cluster, suggest specialization in tourism development and sociocultural dynamics.

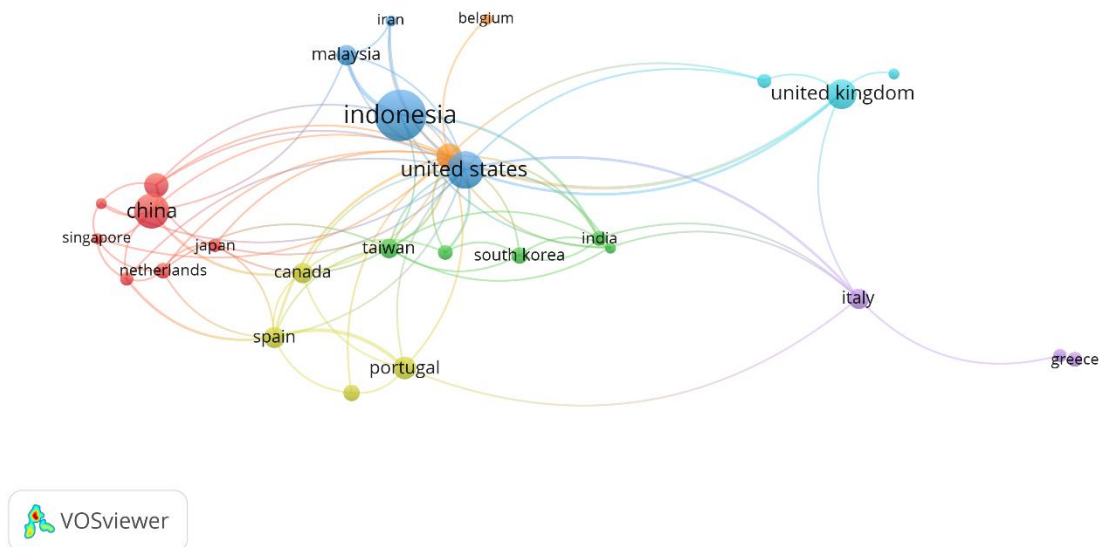


Figure 5. Country Visualization

Source: Data Analysis Result, 2025

This VOSviewer visualization represents a network map of international collaborations in cultural tourism and creative economy research. The United States, Indonesia, and China emerge as central hubs, indicating their significant contributions and strong collaborative ties with other countries. The United States connects extensively with both Western and Asian countries, highlighting its pivotal role in fostering cross-regional research. Indonesia, positioned centrally, reflects its growing prominence in research on cultural tourism, collaborating with countries like Malaysia, India, and China, which are key players in Asia. The red cluster, centered around China, shows active collaborations with neighboring countries like Japan, Singapore, and the Netherlands, suggesting a regional focus with expanding global ties. On the European front, countries such as Italy, United Kingdom, and Greece maintain strong connections within their region and with other continents, reflecting their focus on heritage and sustainability.

Discussion

1. The Central Role of Cultural Tourism and the Creative Economy

The centrality of "tourism" in the bibliometric network reflects its integral position as the foundation of research in this domain. The study highlights how cultural tourism is deeply intertwined with the creative economy, providing a platform for communities to showcase their unique cultural assets while benefiting economically. As identified in the co-occurrence and co-authorship analyses, cultural tourism is not merely about heritage preservation but also about utilizing creativity to enhance tourist experiences, diversify offerings, and address sustainability challenges [22]. The findings align with global shifts toward experience-driven tourism, where tourists increasingly seek authentic and immersive encounters. The term "sustainable development," closely linked to "tourism" and "creative economy," further underscores the growing emphasis on sustainable practices in cultural tourism. This trend reflects broader global priorities such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities). The intersection of these

concepts demonstrates that cultural tourism is not only a vehicle for economic growth but also a tool for addressing social and environmental sustainability.

2. Emerging Themes and Evolving Research Focus

The temporal analysis of key terms reveals an evolution in research focus from foundational themes like "heritage tourism" and "urban economy" to contemporary topics such as "creative products" and "product design." This shift highlights the dynamic nature of the field, with an increasing emphasis on innovation and the integration of digital technologies. For instance, the growing prominence of "creative industries" and "marketing" reflects the role of strategic marketing and creative enterprises in attracting and retaining tourists. This evolution also indicates a response to changing consumer demands, where creativity and innovation are essential for maintaining competitiveness in the tourism sector. Another significant finding is the increasing attention to sustainability, as indicated by the close links between "sustainability," "tourism development," and "cultural heritage." This trend reflects the recognition that cultural tourism must address environmental and cultural preservation challenges to ensure long-term viability. However, while sustainability is a recurring theme, there is limited research on operationalizing sustainable practices in tourism and measuring their impact. Future studies could focus on developing frameworks and tools for implementing sustainability in cultural tourism, particularly in developing countries where resources may be constrained.

3. Influential Authors and Theoretical Contributions

The co-authorship network identifies influential authors such as Greg Richards, John Urry, and Robert Florida, whose works have significantly shaped the discourse on cultural tourism and the creative economy. Richards' contributions to understanding creative tourism and its role in cultural engagement have laid the groundwork for subsequent research. Similarly, Urry's work on the "tourist gaze" has provided a sociological lens for examining how tourists perceive and interact with cultural destinations. Florida's focus on the creative economy offers a framework for understanding how creativity drives economic growth and innovation. Theoretical frameworks such as the experience economy and social exchange theory have also played a crucial role in shaping the field. These theories emphasize the importance of creating memorable tourist experiences and fostering mutually beneficial relationships between tourists and host communities. However, there is a need for further integration of these frameworks with contemporary themes such as digital transformation and sustainability. Future research could explore how emerging technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) can enhance tourist experiences while preserving cultural authenticity.

4. Regional Dynamics and International Collaborations

The international collaboration network highlights the interconnectedness of research efforts across regions, with the United States, Indonesia, and China emerging as key players. The central position of Indonesia reflects its growing prominence in cultural tourism research, likely due to its rich cultural heritage and the government's emphasis on promoting tourism as a pillar of economic development. Similarly, China's active collaborations with neighboring countries indicate a regional focus on leveraging cultural tourism for economic growth. European countries such as the United Kingdom, Italy, and Greece also feature prominently, reflecting their long-standing tradition of cultural heritage tourism. These regions have successfully integrated creative economy practices into tourism, offering valuable lessons for other parts of the world. However, the network also reveals gaps in collaboration between certain regions, such as Africa and South America, which are underrepresented in the dataset. Future research could aim to bridge these gaps by fostering cross-regional collaborations and exploring the unique challenges and opportunities in underrepresented areas.

5. Practical Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have several practical implications for policymakers and practitioners in the tourism and creative economy sectors. First, the emphasis on sustainability and cultural preservation highlights the need for policies that balance economic growth with environmental and cultural integrity. Governments and tourism boards should prioritize investments in sustainable infrastructure and capacity-building programs that empower local communities to actively participate in and benefit from tourism activities. Second, the integration of creative industries into tourism offerings presents opportunities for innovation and differentiation. Destinations can leverage their unique cultural assets to develop creative products and experiences that cater to modern tourists' preferences. For instance, integrating local crafts, performing arts, and digital technologies can enhance the tourist experience while supporting the creative economy. Third, international collaboration is crucial for knowledge sharing and capacity building. Initiatives that promote cross-border research and partnerships can help disseminate best practices and foster innovation in cultural tourism. Collaborative efforts can also address common challenges such as over-tourism, cultural commodification, and resource depletion.

6. Limitations and Future Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The reliance on the Scopus database may have excluded relevant studies indexed in other databases, potentially limiting the comprehensiveness of the analysis. Additionally, the use of VOSviewer, while effective for visualizing bibliometric data, may not capture the nuanced relationships between concepts that qualitative methods could reveal. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating additional databases and combining bibliometric analysis with qualitative approaches such as content analysis and case studies. This would provide a more holistic understanding of the field and uncover deeper insights into the underlying dynamics of cultural tourism and the creative economy. Another promising avenue for future research is the exploration of emerging technologies in cultural tourism. For instance, studies could investigate the role of AR, VR, and artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing tourist experiences and improving destination management. Additionally, research on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on cultural tourism and the creative economy could provide valuable lessons for building resilience in the sector.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the evolving trends and significant contributions of cultural tourism research within the context of the creative economy, as revealed through bibliometric analysis using Scopus data and VOSviewer. The findings underscore the central role of cultural tourism as a dynamic platform for integrating creativity, cultural preservation, and economic growth, while also emphasizing sustainability as a core focus of recent studies. Influential authors and theories have provided a solid foundation for the field, but emerging themes such as the integration of digital technologies and innovative product design point to the future direction of research and practice. Furthermore, the network of international collaborations reflects a growing global interest in cultural tourism, though underrepresented regions present opportunities for further exploration. This study provides a roadmap for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to align cultural tourism strategies with global priorities, fostering sustainable development and enriching the creative economy.

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