

Religious tourism-a bibliometric analysis of WoS publications (1992 – 2023)

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Abstract: This paper aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis of religious tourism theme in order to summarize the research's structure by different variables. Publications' data were extracted from the Web of Science Collection (WoS), since 1992 till 2023. The literature analysis was carried out with the support of VOSviewer (version 1.6.18.) software as open tool for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks. Trends of scientific publications, by institutions, authors, journal for three keywords: religious tourism, faith-based tourism, ecumenical tourism were identified. A complete WOSviewer analysis was performed only for "religious tourism", based on 2,571 publications downloaded. For ecumenical terms only 19 articles were found out and 29 for faith-based tourism. Thus, the suitable concept found for studies about heritage, motivation, infrastructure, case studies etc. was covered by religious tourism. The main productions belonged to several authors specialized in religious destinations from Israel, India, Portugal, Italy, Asia or America, but few of them grouped together. They tend to network with other authors ranked lower than themselves, thus amplifying the body of research on the subject. These findings may be helpful to researchers, giving them both a brief assessment regarding religious tourism and directions needed to cover other topics in the field.

Key words: *religious tourism, WoS, bibliometric analysis, VOSviewer soft, ecumenical tourism, faith-based tourism*

1.Introduction

Religious tourism is a special tourism activity that started almost with the beginning of mankind. Major religions stimulated globally the tourism, being in the same time a mean for the spread of their own religious beliefs (Pușcașu, 2015). But, in religious tourism, it is not necessarily involving the tourist's belief in a certain religion (Rahman, 2023). It is more likely a return of people to spiritual values and the search for means to satisfy this kind of motivation which causes an intensification of religious tourism, respectively of trips to some destinations able to offer tourist products that can meet specific requirements. Also, religious tourism can serve a social and cultural purpose, offering to individuals the opportunity to learn about different cultures and religious practices (Muntele & Iașu, 2006). Moreover, it is important to provide cultural support and educational resources, specialized guides, etc. to help tourists for fully appreciation of the spiritual and architectural significance of religious sites (Guriță & Scortescu, 2023). Considered as type of cultural tourism, known by different terms: religious tourism, ecumenical or faith-based tourism (Marin et al., 2020), it provides a form of travel that tends to remain very important in the world tourism market. That's why, it is consequently necessary to identify the concept, its determining factors and trends (Busuioc, 2008). Although modern tourism is regarded as a relatively new phenomenon, it is clear that its origins are rooted

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in the age-old phenomenon of pilgrimage. The study of the relationship among religion, pilgrimage, and tourism often focuses separately on either religion or tourism alone, and pays little attention to the actual interaction between these two phenomena, or to a comparison between the two. This is surprising, as the development of tourism is difficult to be completed without a throughout understanding of religion and the practice of pilgrimage since ancient times (Collins-Kreiner and Wall, 2015).

Religious tourism encompasses both tangible materials and intangible values, which together create a rich and meaningful experience for travelers. Tangible values compound heritage, which can be represented by: sacred sites and structures (temples, churches, mosques, monasteries, shrines, and other religious edifices) as notable Mecca (Hassan et al., 2022), Vatican City (Kim & Kim, 2020), Varanasi (Das & Sharma, 2009), or the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem (Poria, Butler & Airey, 2003); religious artifacts (relics, icons, manuscripts, and sacred items) as the Shroud of Turin (Giunti, 2005) or the Crown of Thorns (Carvalho et al., 2020), plus tourist infrastructure (museums, gift shops, accommodation facilities near pilgrimage sites, and organized tour services) or natural sites with religious significance (Mount Sinai) (Olsen & Timothy, 2006).

Intangible values means from spiritual enrichment (enlightenment that individuals may seek during their journey), sense of community to rituals and practices (processions, festivals, and ceremonies) (Smith, 2015), historical and cultural significance through stories, legends associated with religious sites or events till the interaction with religious leaders, monks, or spiritual guides for personal growth or learning (Schedneck, 2021).

In sum, religious tourism is enriched by a harmonious blend of material elements that provide the physical setting and intangible values that offer depth and personal meaning to the experience. This combination makes religious tourism a profound journey for many travelers.

The aim of the study is to achieve a bibliometric analyze of the religious tourism theme of researches in WoS database. The objectives of research are: 1) To identify the statistics of assessments on religious tourism vs faith-based and ecumenical tourism; 2) To analysis the spreading network model of publications' contents.

3. Materials and methods

The Web of Science Core Collection (WoS) is the most comprehensive data base which gather only publications with high scientific relevance was used for bibliometric analysis. Among information, It offers citations and journals ranking. In order to complete the research, the following key phrases: "religious tourism", "faith-based tourism" and "ecumenical tourism" were mined on the metadata contents. The search results were narrowed by publication data ranged since 1992 to 2023, the English publication language, and article types, book chapters, conference papers, reviews, books and editorials. At this phase, the findings by the three keywords were analyzed statistically. Because in the database only the works found by the phrase "religious tourism" exceeded 1000 records, they were analyzed in VOSviewer. Consequently, mapping the collaborative networks, by countries, institutions, authors and the keywords co-occurrence network, and the co-citation references network, the first 1,000 records (the maximum allowed by WOS platform) were exported as tab-delimited extension compatible file for VOSviewer (version 1.6.18.). The collaborative network of co-authorship, keywords co-occurrence, (co)citation, bibliographic coupling were done through the option "create map based on bibliographic data". Two ways of analysis were performed: co-authorship by countries, institutions and authors and co-occurrence of authors keywords. Following the settings in VOSviewer for the institutional affiliations map maximum 100 organizations were selected, each

having 2 minimum documents. In case of countries' map, 84 were selected with minimum 5 documents, authors with minimum 1 work, 1,908 were found. In case of co-occurrence 81 of authors meet the thresholds. These analysis used the association power, with attraction sized 2 and repulsion 1. The option to create a "map based on text data" the same first 1,000 documents were exported as RIS file from the WoS, with two fields (titles and abstracts). Choosing the binary method of counting, with 5 minimum thresholds, 1,104 terms were selected and score at 60% level clustering 662 terms. Thus, the soft allowed to construct the knowledge network.

Results and discussions

The documents published between 1992 and 2023 identified through the phrase "religious tourism" in the title, keywords and abstracts summed up, 2,571 examples, much more than faith-based tourism, with 29 or ecumenical tourism, 21. For all publications aimed at the three search phrases, the evolution is different: continuously increasing with a decrease during the COVID 19 pandemic period for studies of religious tourism, and atypical, unpredictable in the cases of the other two phrases (Figure 1).

Among the *religious tourism* publications, 85.6% are articles, and 1.9% represents review papers (Figure 2).

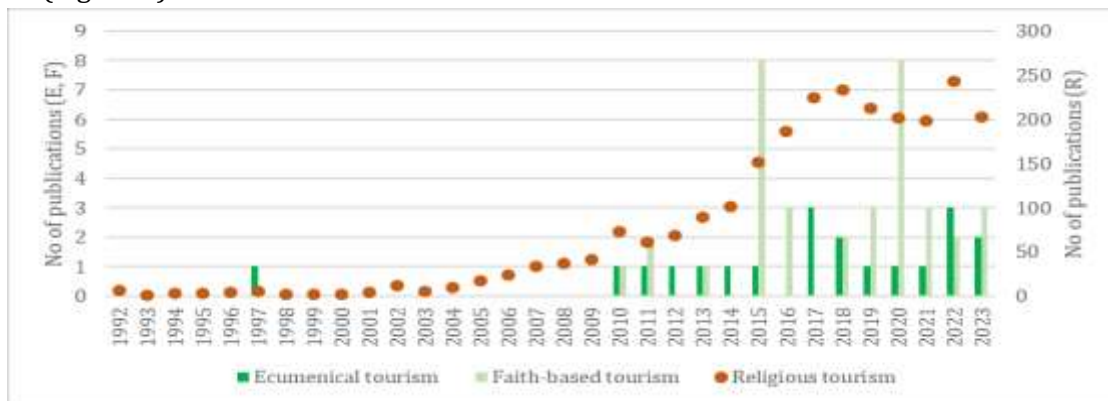


Figure 1. Number of publications between 1992 and 2023 in WoS. Processed in Microsoft Excel 2021, after WoS data extracted by the following phrases: *Religious tourism*, *Faith-based tourism* and *Ecumenical tourism*.

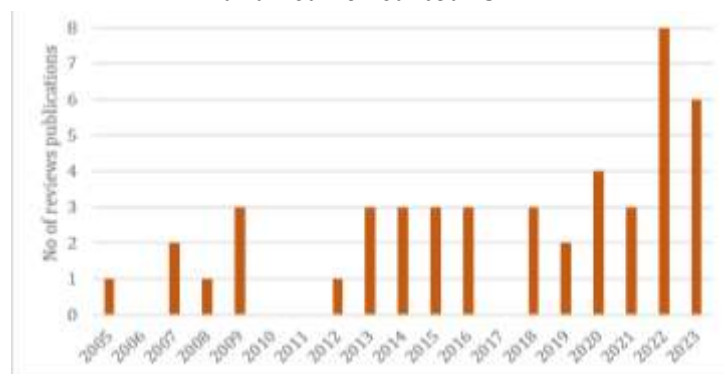


Figure 2. Number of Review publications about *religious tourism* between 1992 and 2023 in WoS.

Processed in Microsoft Excel 2021, after WoS data base.

Moreover, almost 40% of them were hosted by journals indexed as "Emerging Source Citation", and a quarter in "Social Science Citation". The prevailed categories of journals are "Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism" (41%) and Religious (21%),(Table 1).

Table 1. Type of WoS index and top twenty categories of journals of refined publications by “Religious tourism” terms (% in total)

| WoS index | % | WoS categories | % | WoS categories | % |
|-----------|-------|-----------------------------------|------|-----------------------------|-----|
| WOS.ESCI | 38.39 | Hospital. Leisure Sport Tourism | 41.4 | Anthropology | 4.0 |
| WOS.SSCI | 27.46 | Religion | 21.1 | Green Sustainab. Sci. Tech. | 4.0 |
| WOS.BHCI | 12.95 | Management | 6.5 | Economics | 3.2 |
| WOS.AHCI | 12.48 | Environmental Studies | 5.6 | History | 3.1 |
| WOS.ISSHP | 11.86 | Business | 5.2 | Archaeology | 3.1 |
| WOS.SCI | 9.68 | Humanities Multidisciplinary | 4.9 | Area studies | 2.6 |
| WOS.ISTP | 4.31 | Sociology | 4.7 | Multidisciplinary Sciences | 2.1 |
| WOS.BSCI | 0.15 | Social Sciences Interdisciplinary | 4.4 | Education Ed. Research | 1.9 |
| | | Environmental Sciences | 4.4 | Cultural Studies | 1.8 |
| | | Geography | 4.2 | Architecture | 1.7 |

Within the publications selected by the phrase *faith-based tourism*, there is no review article. However, as indexing, they cover almost half in "Social Science Citation" and a third in "Emerging Source Citation". About the same proportions are included in "Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism" (44.8%) and Religious (24.1%) (Table 2).

Table 2. Type of WoS index and top twenty categories of journals of refined publications by “Faith-based tourism” term (% in total)

| WoS index | % | WoS categories | % | WoS categories | % |
|------------|------|-----------------------------------|------|-----------------------|-----|
| WOS.SSCI | 31.0 | Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism | 44.8 | Business finance | 3.4 |
| WOS.ESCI | 48.3 | Religion | 24.1 | Cultural Studies | 3.4 |
| WOS.BKCI | 6.9 | Business | 17.2 | Development Studies | 3.4 |
| WOS.AHCI | 6.9 | Management | 13.8 | Economics | 3.4 |
| CPCI.SSHP | 6.9 | Environmental Studies | 6.9 | Geosciences | |
| WOS.SCI Ex | 3.4 | Sociology | 6.9 | Multidisciplinary | 3.4 |
| | | Art | 3.4 | Public Administration | 3.4 |
| | | | | Social Issues | 3.4 |

For *ecumenical tourism* publications 71.4% are articles, available mostly in “Religion” journals (31.6%), followed equally by "History" and "Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism" (15.5%), then by “Architecture” and “Sociology” (10.5%). There are 17 other categories of journals that have one article each (5.3%). As the WoS Index, they are grouped both in “Art& Humanity Citation” and “Emerging Source Citation” (38%), followed by “Social Science Citation” (31%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Type of WoS index and top twenty categories of journals of refined publications by “ecumenical tourism” term (% in total)

| WoS index | % | WoS Categories | % | WoS Categories | % |
|------------|------|-----------------------------------|------|----------------------------------|-----|
| WOS.AHCI | 38.0 | Religion | 31.6 | Area Studies | 3.4 |
| WOS.ESCI | 38.0 | History | 15.8 | Communication | 3.4 |
| WOS.SSCI | 31.0 | Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism | 15.8 | Construction Building Technology | 3.4 |
| CPCI.SSHP | 2.1 | Architecture | 10.5 | Education Educational Research | 3.4 |
| WOS.CPCI-S | 1.1 | Sociology | 10.5 | Engineering Civil | 3.4 |
| SCI-EXPAN | 1.1 | Agricultural Economics Policy | 5.3 | Environmental Sciences | 3.4 |

In the case of “religious tourism”, 1, 032 organizations were identified, of which 254 meet the condition imposed in the methodology.

The map contains 12 clusters. By documents, for the 1,000 works, published between 2013 and 2023, the rank of the first five institutions were: Haifa University (16), Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Trobe University (12), Arizona State University (10) and Johannesburg (9). Authors affiliated to Arizona University had the highest number of citations (614) and Haifa (614). Authors from Johannesburg have the greatest network power with total link strength of 20 (Figure 3).

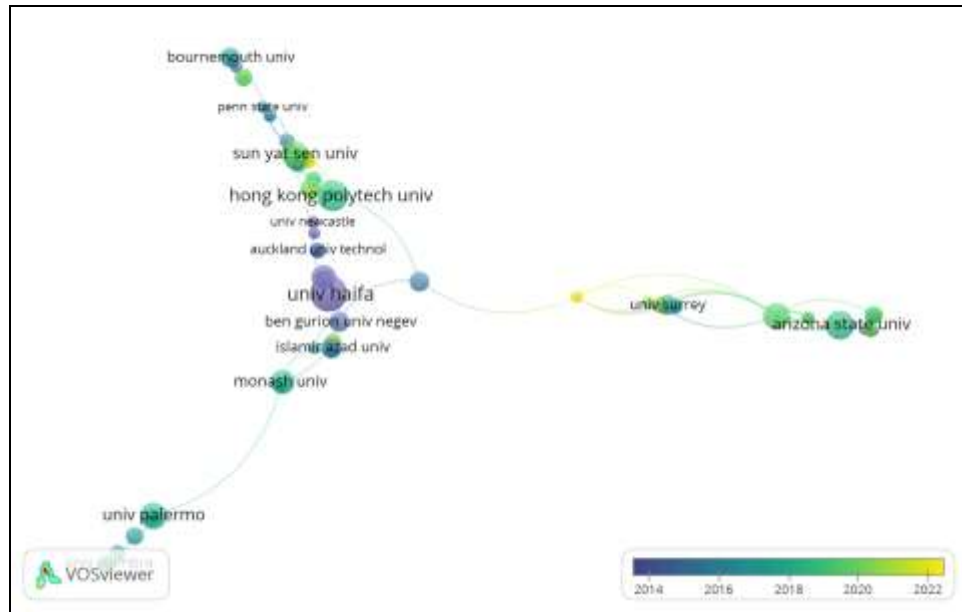


Figure 3. The collaboration network by institutions generated by VOSviewer

By countries, USA contributed the most in this field (92 publications), followed by China (82), England and Australia (around 60) and Spain (59) (Table 4). In a predictable way, the citations' rank of the religious tourism publications, five countries registered over 1,000, as follows: USA remained first, then the next three productive countries, Australia, England and China, changed the places, adding Israel, with half USA's citations. New Zealand comes close to the leading group in terms of citations production, while the other states have values below 600. The collaboration network by countries formed four powerful clusters: USA, England, China and Asuralia (Table 4, Figure 4).

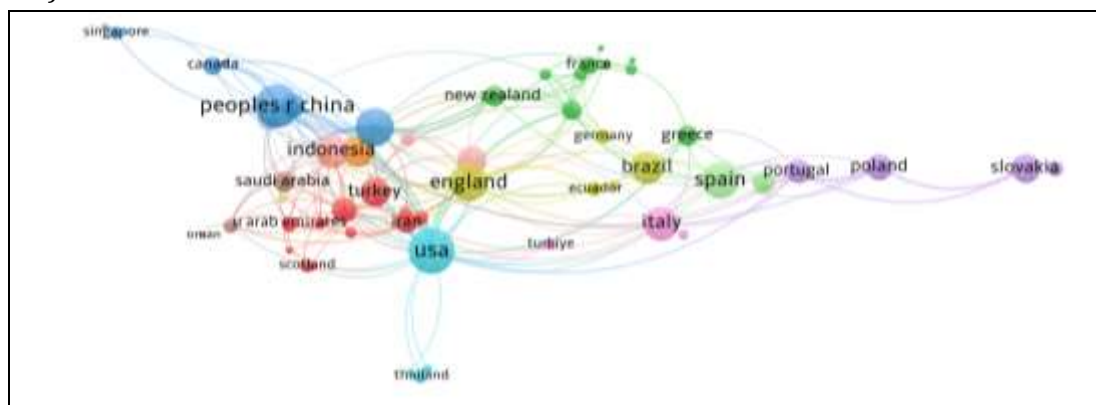


Figure 4. The network of collaborations by countries in religious tourism researches. Source: WOSviewer

Table 4. The first 20 country rank by number of documents included in WOSviewer analysis.

| Country | Documents | Country | Citation | Country | Total link strengths |
|-----------|-----------|--------------|----------|--------------|----------------------|
| USA | 92 | USA | 2,288 | USA | 64 |
| China | 82 | Australia | 1,831 | England | 43 |
| England | 63 | England | 1,690 | China | 39 |
| Australia | 61 | China | 1,292 | Australia | 29 |
| Spain | 59 | Israel | 1,122 | Malaysia | 25 |
| Indonesia | 51 | New Zealand | 973 | Spain | 22 |
| Italy | 50 | Turkey | 590 | India | 22 |
| Brazil | 48 | Spain | 483 | South Africa | 22 |
| India | 43 | Singapore | 428 | Saudi Arabia | 22 |
| Israel | 37 | Taiwan | 415 | New Zealand | 19 |
| Slovakia | 35 | India | 393 | Portugal | 19 |
| Turkey | 35 | Malaysia | 315 | UAE | 18 |
| Poland | 29 | Iran | 296 | Israel | 16 |
| Romania | 29 | Italy | 295 | Italy | 14 |
| Malaysia | 28 | Egypt | 291 | Poland | 14 |
| Portugal | 26 | South Africa | 290 | Egypt | 13 |
| Taiwan | 24 | Poland | 261 | Slovakia | 12 |
| Iran | 23 | Canada | 244 | Indonesia | 12 |
| Russia | 22 | UAE | 225 | Vietnam | 12 |
| Mexico | 21 | Greece | 224 | France | 12 |

By authors, from the 1,000 works exported from WoS, 1, 908 authors were found, having at least one publication. In this extraction Collins-Kreiner, Noga occupied the first position (12 documents), even in the entire sample of 2,571 of papers, Olsen, Daniel Howard is the most productive (24 publications). In fact, top productive authors in religious tourism with more than three articles forms a group of 200. First ten authors inscribed with more than 10 papers (Table 5).

Table 5. The most productive authors among of 2,571 works retrieved from WoS.

| Researcher Profiles | % | Recent research themes |
|--|------|---|
| <i>Olsen, Daniel Howard</i> | 0.93 | Religious, spirituality, tourism, pilgrimage |
| <i>Shinde, Kiran Ajit</i> | 0.82 | Varanasi, Religious tourism, variant |
| Collins-Kreiner, Noga | 0.58 | Religious tourism, tourism, Israel |
| Timothy, Dallen J. | 0.54 | Diverse on tourism |
| Trono, Anna | 0.54 | Religious tourism, routes in Greece and Italy |
| Krogmann, Alfred | 0.39 | Religious route in Slovakia |
| Mroz, Franciszek Tadeusz | 0.39 | The Camino de Santiago, Religious tourism |
| Di Giovine, Michael | 0.39 | Heritage sites, Iran |
| Rousseau, T. K. | 0.39 | Pilgrimage, sacred sites |
| Monteiro de Oliveira, Christian Dennys | 0.35 | South America religious tourism sites |

Regarding ranking by documents and citations published in the 1,000 selected WoS journals, Collins-Kreiner, Noga (Israel) imposed through collecting 304 citations, followed by the American Moore, Kevin, specialized in psychology of tourists (302). Terzidou, Matina focused on Greece and England marketing tourism (247), Scott, Noel, Australian researchers of destination management (237), Timothy, Dallen J. (Arizona State University, 179). But, as link strengths (25), nine authors had the powerful influence, among is Krogmann, Alfred. (179) (Table 6).

The co-authors map of association strengths by documents, citations placed Mroz, Franciszek first, with larger cluster of Polish and Slovak researchers (6, Red), then, Krogmann, Alfred with a team from Slovakia (5, green), Ambrosio Vitor, a Portuguese professor working in different international team (4, blue) (Figure 5). Top researchers by citations they are not found in the co-

authorship map, because some work alone, others collaborate on certain topics with various authors, not forming teams that can impose themselves with many articles.

Table 6. The WOSviewer top 20 authors ranked by documents, citations and link numbers.

| Author | Doc. | Author | Citations | Author | Links |
|------------------------|------|-----------------------|-----------|------------------------|-------|
| Collins-Kreiner, Noga | 13 | Collins-Kreiner, Noga | 304 | Alberti, Jaume | 25 |
| Olsen, Daniel H. | 12 | Moore, Kevin | 302 | Aldaco, Ruben | 25 |
| Shinde, Kiran A. | 11 | Terzidou, Matina | 247 | Bala, Alba | 25 |
| Krogmann, Alfred | 8 | Scott, Noel | 237 | Campos, Cristina | 25 |
| Timothy, Dallen J. | 7 | Timothy, Dallen J. | 179 | Fullana, Margalida | 25 |
| Mroz, Franciszek | 6 | Ryan, Chris | 171 | Fullana-I-Palmer, Pere | 25 |
| Bozonelos, Dino | 6 | Mcintosh, Alison J. | 160 | Laso, Jara | 25 |
| Terzidou, Matina | 5 | Shinde, Kiran A. | 155 | Margallo, Maria | 25 |
| Choe, Jaeyeon | 5 | Ron, Amos S. | 151 | Krogmann, Alfred | 25 |
| Liro, Justyna | 5 | Willson, Gregory B. | 135 | Oremusova, Dasa | 21 |
| Ambrosio, Vitor | 5 | Zahra, Anne. L. | 135 | Ambrosio, Vitor | 17 |
| Oremusova, Dasa | 5 | Kim, Bona | 134 | Dias, Ana Claudia | 17 |
| Trono, Anna | 5 | Huang, Keji | 131 | Gallego, Maria | 17 |
| Aragao, Ivan Rego | 5 | Saunders, Mark N. K. | 121 | Gutierrez, David | 17 |
| Moir, Polyxeni | 5 | Scarles, Caroline | 121 | Herrero, Angel | 17 |
| Mcintosh, Alison J. | 4 | Choe, Jaeyeon | 117 | Melon, Lela | 17 |
| Ron, Amos S. | 4 | Kujawa, Joanna | 115 | Quinteiro, Paula | 17 |
| Huang, Keji | 4 | Stylidis, Dimitrios | 110 | Roca, Merce | 17 |
| Albayrak, Tahir | 4 | Mcintosh, Alison | 109 | Sazdovski, Ilija | 17 |
| Di Giovine, Michael A. | 4 | Nyaupane, Gyan P. | 105 | Villanueva-Rey, Pedro | 17 |

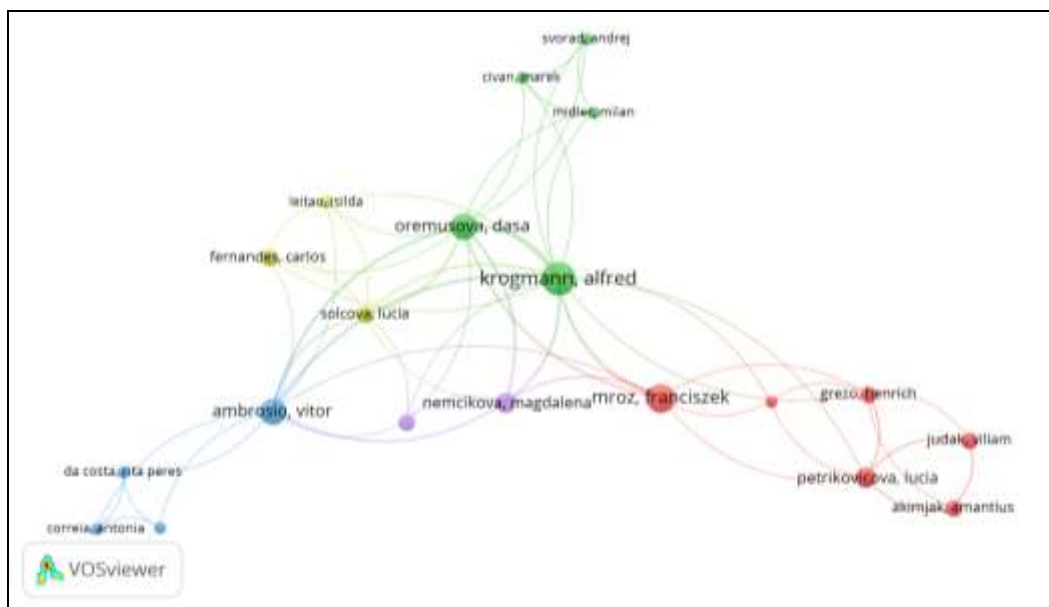


Figure 5. The citations co-authorship network generated by VOSviewer

In order to refine the analysis, the occurrence of keywords of the 1000 publications was also applied separately. From the 2,668 keywords, with the condition of minimum occurrence of 5, 81

cases were selected. Based on them, a map of the total strength of the co-occurrence links was created. Top ranked keywords were: religious tourism (297 occurrence, 331 links), tourism (148 occurrence, 177 links), and pilgrimage (129 occurrence, 224 links) (Table 5, Figure 6).

Table 5. Co-occurrence of keywords for religious tourism publications

| Keyword | Occurrence | Keywords | Total link strengths |
|-------------------------|------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Religious tourism | 297 | Religious tourism | 331 |
| Tourism | 148 | Pilgrimage | 224 |
| Pilgrimage | 129 | Tourism | 177 |
| Religion | 48 | Religion | 90 |
| Cultural tourism | 36 | Islam | 37 |
| Tourism development | 23 | Cultural tourism | 35 |
| Culture | 19 | Spirituality | 33 |
| India | 19 | Heritage | 33 |
| Spiritual tourism | 19 | India | 32 |
| Spirituality | 19 | Sacred sites | 30 |
| Halal tourism | 18 | Culture | 27 |
| Heritage | 18 | Spiritual tourism | 26 |
| Cultural heritage | 17 | Cultural heritage | 25 |
| Islam | 17 | Sustainable development | 24 |
| Sustainable development | 16 | Saudi Arabia | 24 |
| Authenticity | 14 | Motivation | 23 |
| China | 14 | Buddhism | 22 |
| Motivation | 14 | Tourism development | 21 |
| Heritage tourism | 13 | Religiosity | 21 |
| Rural tourism | 12 | Islamic tourism | 20 |

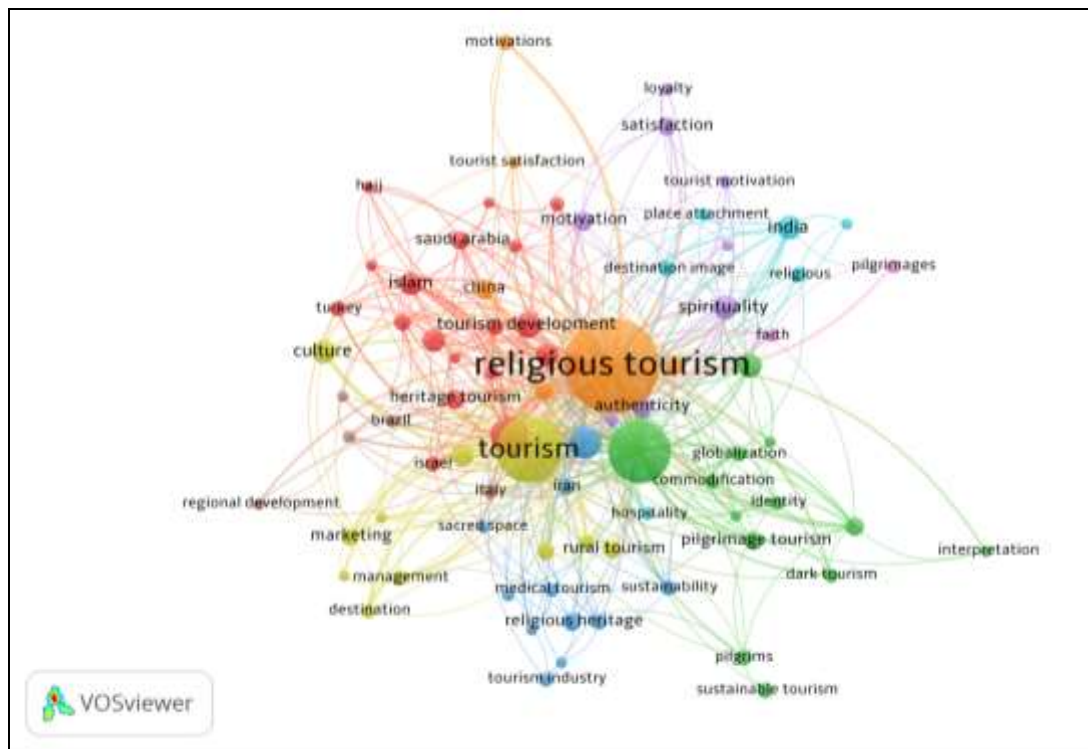


Figure 6. Map of the total strength of the co-occurrence links by keywords

The occurrence of the terms used in research on religious tourism, from reference manager files (RIS), which included titles and abstracts of each publication, through binary or full extraction, with an occurrence condition of at least 10, were identified from 16,634 terms, 476, for which the relevance score was calculated based on default, the most relevant 60% are selected. The map has

9 clusters. For the 1,000 pieces selected and entered in VOSViewer, the terms: religious tourism (201), pilgrimages (401) and heritage (193) have the highest occurrence (Figure 7).

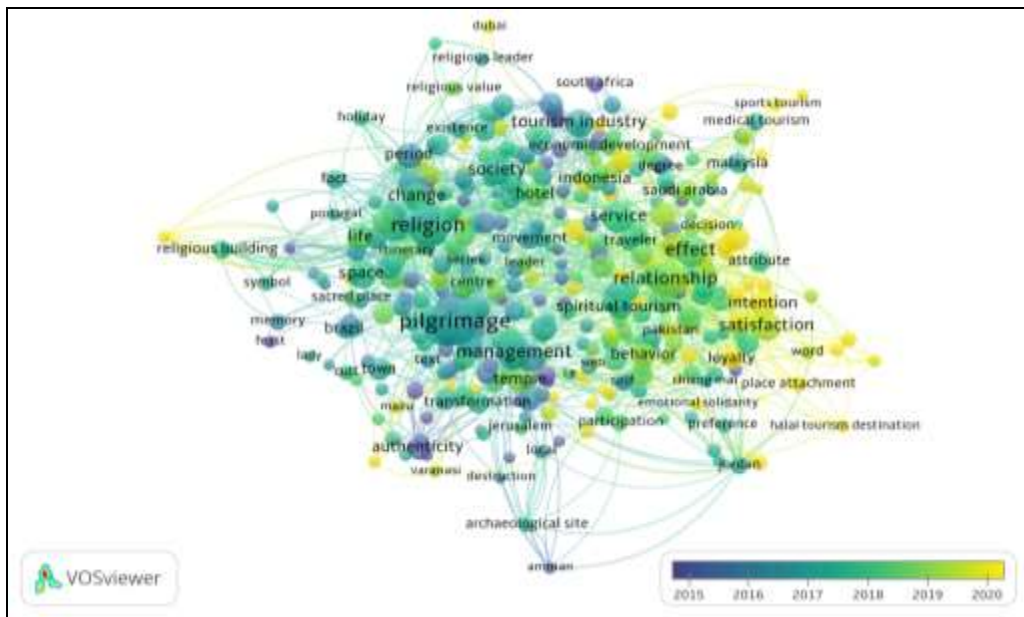


Figure 7. Scoring map of occurrence terms in publication about religious tourism in titles and abstracts.

A high score of relevance belongs to the next terms: halal, Amann, budhist temple, Mecca, Jordan, Iran, Brazil, muslim tourism etc.

Conclusions

This manuscript presented a bibliometric analysis of the religious tourism WoS publications worldwide, for the period 1992-2023, by means of the VOSviewer software.

The statistics of “religious tourism” evaluations vs. “faith-based tourism” and “ecumenical tourism” revealed the fact that, at a conceptual level, the phrase “religious tourism” is widely spread in research production. The other two approaches are extremely few, being in fact niches of religious tourism. In this regards, it can be assumed that the most appropriate term for this subtype of cultural tourism remains religious tourism. It can be considered a scientifically accepted concept that must be applied as such in the field of tourism.

The networking model of religious tourism publications’ contents has different shapes and structure. Thus, according to the institutional affiliation, the most productive authors belong to large institutions, located in countries with special religious tourism: Israel, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, then countries from Asia or America.

The key words identified certify the fact that the concept of religious tourism, related to pilgrimages and heritage is the most used and as such is required in research. Still, the case studies focus on the most famous destinations: Mecca, Santiago de Compostela/El Camino, Rome, Israel, India.

According to the authorship, there are two grouping models: very well-known authors with the highest achievements by the number of works and citations, but who do not form clusters of co-authorships, because they either work alone or change teams depending on the topics addressed, and authors with firm teams, having papers and citations at a high performing level.

Several authors imposed on this field of research. The world-famous authors identified were: Collins-Kreiner, Noga, Olsen, Daniel H., Shinde, Kiran A., Krogmann, Alfred, Timothy, Dallen J., and Mroz, Franciszek or Ambrosi, Vitor. They remains benchmarks for the analysis of works on religious tourism.

Future research

This study was generated by the research within the doctoral thesis, which represents the proof of the continuation of future research related to religious tourism in Prahova County (Romania) and its sustainable aspects.

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