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Forty years of the rural tourism research: reviewing the trend, pattern and future agenda

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism has been a key research area over the last few decades. However, evaluating the advancement of its dimensions as a systematic and comprehensive audit was long overdue. This study performed a bibliometric analysis on 404 articles from 1980 to 2019 and revealed that rural tourism has maximum growth in the last two decades. Deductive and quantitative methods are the principally implemented theoretical and methodical approaches, respectively. The developed countries have majorly contributed from 1980 to 1999, while the last two decades the developing nations have contributed. The rural tourism research in the developed world has matured by debating critical issues such as community politics, power struggle, resource control, whereas these issues along with several new issues, such as climate change and epidemic, have ample scope in future especially in the context of Eastern World. This study offers an insight into the evolution of conceptual framework, authorship, institution-specific productivity, spatial distribution of study areas, crucial themes, and the future research directions. The present findings will work as a comprehensive reference to the potential research dimensions and add to the existing knowledge body of the tourism research in general and the rural tourism research in particular.

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Rural tourism; bibliometric research; textual analysis; community politics; systematic review; rural tourism research

Introduction

The journey of rural tourism dates back to the nineteenth century, when the urban minds started visiting amidst the serene countryside for solace (Kohl, 2006). The commercial praxis is evident only after the 1950s with the expansion of railways, advanced transport and communication systems (Lane, 1994b). Eventually, 'Touristization' (Young, 1983) of the rurscape brought out the undesirable impacts too. However, the issues received the augmented professional attention only after the 1980s when the World started concentrating on taking necessary measures to save 'Our Common Future' (WCED, 1987) and the developed countries started adopting supportive policies for the growth of rural tourism as a rural economic regeneration tool (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). The 2000s witnessed the consideration of rural tourism as a tool for development, especially in the peripheral areas of developing countries. The vernacular of governments, planners, policy makers, tourism professionals and academicians became more critical on the challenges and prospects of tourism in rural areas (bearing a peripheral connotation), having keen interest to find out the rationale to

address and manage three broad dimensions: the well-being of the local communities and local businesses (Bramwell, 1994), the conservation of the rural resources (Lane, 1994a), and the emphasis of local authenticity and identity (Mitchell & Hall, 2005) in a sustainable way.

Roughly, the academic attention in this field started in the 1970s with a more descriptive approach (Smith et al., 1986) and then evolved into a complex form due to the dynamic nature of rurality, national policy, community response and other related issues (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). Duality between rural tourism as a 'tool for modernization' and 'rural tourism as a tool for conservation' was put forward (Collins, 1979). Several authors have criticised that tourism in rural areas can bring out numerous negative implications (Ap, 1990; Besculides et al., 2002; Cole, 2012; Ghaderi & Henderson, 2012; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Smith, 1989; Ye et al., 2018) and even claimed that rather than alleviating poverty it may bring severe inequality and injustice to the community level (Barbieri, 2013). Growing congestion, litter, increasing price of local goods, land, rising cost of living, increasing crime rates, issues related to cultural authenticity, resentment, antagonism, dishonesty, and alienation among stakeholders in rural areas are some

of the noteworthy negative consequences that rural tourism may bring out. Some authors with post-structuralist lens are in favour of exploring the deep-rooted factors and embedded structural properties such as community politics, power structure, community heterogeneity, cultural turns, etc., to resolve the debates (Saxena, 2012). The capacity of rural tourism to generate guaranteed employment while maintaining the economic balance of power among the rural households is one such contested issue (Argent, 1999; Verbole, 2000). Modification in the name of touristisation that disturbs the cost and benefit balance of tourism development is another debated issue (Collins, 1979). The image of 'rurality' itself is sharply contradicting among the actors of the developed and developing countries making the operation more complicated (Gray, 2009). To understand this dynamic, hybrid and complex nature of rurality and rural tourism, scholars have suggested not to consider rural areas as mere points on map but rather active spaces, and to engage into detailed empirical research on 'everyday rurality' (Saxena, 2012). It is well argued that rural tourism of the developed and developing countries is required to be researched differently due to their unlike development and growth contexts (Lane & Kastenholtz, 2015). Researchers suggested to reveal the 'networked dimension of rural tourism especially in developing world' and to have empirical insight into the 'everyday rurality' of rural tourism destinations to develop an effective understanding about the rural tourism (Saxena, 2012). In spite of thousands of research papers including book chapters and other professional documents, there remains a persistent layer of contradictions and paradoxes in the rural tourism arguments. One of the significant reasons behind such inconsistency is the pattern of varied rural tourism researchers 'operating in isolation' (Lane & Kastenholtz, 2015).

Rural tourism has been a major research concern among the academicians and tourism professionals over the last few decades (Balogh & Csaky, 1991; Bramwell, 1991; Bramwell, 1994; Chow, 1980; Dernoï, 1991; Fotiadis et al., 2013; Fotiadis et al., 2016; Fotiadis et al., 2019; Kallmuenzer & Peters, 2018; Lane, 1994b; Oppermann, 1996; Park & Yoon, 2009; Pham et al., 2018; Sharples & Sharples, 1997; Spector, 2020; Su, Wall, and Wang, 2019; Wilson et al., 2001). However, the progress of its dimensions is least researched by the systematic audit of the published scholarly works on rural tourism. A considerable number of publications are found exploring the knowledge development and evolution in various research aspects of the tourism industry such as sustainable tourism (Niñerola et al., 2019; Ruhanen et al., 2015), ecotourism (Khanra et al., 2021), agritourism (Rauniyar

et al., 2021), and rural tourism (Michalko, 2015). Such studies frequently adopt a systematic approach to review the existing academic literature in the form of bibliometric analysis to reveal the theoretical progress of a specific research arena in terms of concept development, progress of research themes from simple to critical ideas, authorship chain analysis, contribution of institutions, countries, etc. Interestingly, in some of the studies rural tourism appeared as an important term in the results section. For instance, Ruhanen et al. (2015) conducted a bibliometric analysis on the existing tourism literature written on the sustainability contexts. While considering four highly ranked tourism journals to create the database of the study, the authors intended to analyse the trend and pattern of publication during a time frame of 25 years. In the result, rural tourism appears as one of the significant themes or subjects which also contextualise sustainability in tourism research. However, exploring further conceptual development of the rural tourism research was out of scope of this research paper. A similar pattern is noted in the study of Niñerola et al. (2019), who considered all the sustainability-related tourism literature available in the Scopus directory. So, naturally, rural tourism appeared in the results of such bibliometric research as a theme talking about sustainability issues in ruralscapes. Further dedicated discussion on rural tourism was out of scope of this paper too. Another bibliometric research on ecotourism was published recently by Khanra et al. (2021) who have significantly contributed to the analysis of ecotourism literature from six reputed journals by finding out the four major themes of sustainable tourism such as ecological conservation, residents' attitude, carbon footprint, and visitors' behaviour. However, the rural tourism context does not appear in this study's results other than the reference list. Contrary to these, a recent bibliometric publication on agritourism by Rauniyar et al. (2021) has incorporated rural tourism as a keyword to search the relevant sample literature for the study in connection with agritourism. They have set up an argument that agritourism has a very close link with rural tourism in terms of rural functionalities and sometimes they are even used interchangeably. While the same argument is found in some other literatures (Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005; Sznajder & Przezbórska, 2004; Yang et al., 2010), there remains the counter-group of scholars who prefer to investigate the tourism operations in rural settings in a more critical way in terms of impacts on physical and social environment, product diversification, stakeholders' relationship, etc. Although the study of Rauniyar et al. (2021) considered a significant number of rural tourism articles (81 articles), the focus of the theme

analysis and discussion mainly revolved around the agritourism context. In contrast to this, Lane and Kastenholz (2015, p. 1136) opined '... it would be a mistake to think that rural tourism was always linked to farms.' As a stark difference, in the line of the scholars (Darău et al., 2010; Fagioli et al., 2014; Lane, 1994b; Saxena, 2012) who see rural tourism as a distinct research entity in terms of its manifold nuances and dimensions of product components, stakeholder relationships, etc., the present study exclusively focuses on the rural tourism literature for the bibliometric analysis. Further argument on dearth of bibliometric analysis on rural tourism is given in the literature review section.

Since the last 40 years, a lot has been done in the rural tourism research and naturally some issues are over-researched, and some are less explored or even least told. Rural tourism is decoupled with the on-going unresolved contradictions, debates and criticisms. Besides that, presently the global tourism industry as a whole is going through a tough time due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation (Baum & Hai, 2020; Newsome, 2020; Sah et al., 2020) and rural tourism is not an exception. In the Post-COVID-19 situation rural tourism researchers are also needed to focus on some new research agenda to ensure its resilience to handle such situations in future. Therefore, this is the right time to administer a comprehensive review of the scholarly articles on rural tourism in a systematic and scientific manner which is long overdue.

Literature review

Review articles are very widely accepted academic works to showcase the state of knowledge in tourism studies (Güzeller & Çeliker, 2019; Koseoglu, 2016; Tribe & Xiao, 2011; Wu et al., 2012). Grant and Booth (2009) have recommended the typology of review articles based on a simple SALSA (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis and Analysis) framework, suggesting that systematic reviews are helpful to scientifically search the sources, find out what is known, what remains unknown in a definitive field of study. Ruhanen et al. (2015) have grounded the systematic literature review as a scientific and pragmatic methodological approach in the tourism studies. Similarly, Zeng and Ryan (2012) conducted a systematic review to assess the performance of tourism to alleviate poverty in China, identifying specific trends and patterns of research, well-researched themes and gaps in the pro-poor tourism research. Similar types of systematic reviews were undertaken to examine the status of tourism research in India (Singh, 2016). Among the systematic reviews, bibliometric and meta-data analysis are two well-accepted approaches in the tourism

research. There is a significant difference between bibliometric analysis and meta-data analysis in a systematic review approach. According to Koseoglu (2016, p. 2), 'bibliometrics is a set of statistical methods to investigate the evolution of the sciences and/or disciplines by assessing the publication performance of authors and institutions and by mapping the structure and dynamics of the fields via data (e.g. citations, author names, key words, employed methods, and used statistical techniques) obtained from written publications including books, journals, proceedings, and articles.' whereas, 'meta-analysis refers to the statistical methods used in research synthesis for combining and integrating results from individual studies (Jiménez-García et al., 2020, p. 2).' Bibliometric approach is often adopted to explore dimensions such as temporal pattern of tourism research (Ruhanen et al., 2015), topmost contributing countries, institutions, and authors (Güzeller & Çeliker, 2019), authorship and collaboration (Köseoglu et al., 2019). A meta-data analysis or meta-analysis is often, but not always, used as a part of systematic review process to explore conceptual development, methods and types of experiments (Prayag et al., 2019).

In contrast to the huge volume of research articles on rural tourism, only few researchers attempted to review the research trends since its inception (Sasu & Epuran, 2016; Saxena, 2012), creating a serious dearth of systematic review to audit the scientific progress in this field. Bird (2007) has explicitly explained what the scientific progress is all about, in relation to a specific domain of science or research in terms of theory development or knowledge accumulation. The progress is discussed from three major approaches – the epistemic approach, the semantic approach and the functional-internalist approach. The epistemic approach progress is seen in terms of its very meaning which is the accumulation of knowledge; with the semantic approach, progress is defined in terms of verisimilitude meaning the likeliness to reveal the truth or nearness to truth by a research domain; and the functional-internalist approach focuses more on unfolding new dimensions of research to solve the problem or functioning to synthesise the solutions. The very first research question of the present study investigates the pattern of knowledge accumulation in the rural tourism research through decades. The other research questions delve into revealing the progress of rural tourism in terms of unfolding new areas of theory development (from simple to more critical with time) in the form of contexts, themes and sub-themes to give solutions to the real-time rural tourism functionalities, in general.

Nair et al. (2015) published a review article on rural tourism focusing on the evolution of the rural tourism

definitions, how it differs in the developed and developing economy. They did not mention any time frame for their review study and administered content analysis only on those papers which had the definitional context of rural tourism in its main body and title. Naturally, it fails to give a comprehensive idea about the progress in the rural tourism research. Michalko (2015), reviewed 215 full articles on rural tourism from 15 leading journals for the time period from 1991 to 2010. The study was based on content analysis to categorise the articles into the major themes like subject areas by journals and years, nature of research (conceptual or empirical), and the regional focus. This is probably the only available study that adopted a quasi-systematic review of the rural tourism literature till date. However, the scope of this study is limited in terms of the parameters considered if compared with a fully-fledged bibliometric analysis. Apart from that, the study period i.e. from 1991 to 2010 omits the rural tourism context of developing countries like India which became operational after the 2000s and the related articles got published even after 2010. The study also misses articles recording the story of the first and part of second phase of rural tourism development during the 1970s and 1980s as mentioned by Lane and Kastenzholz (2015). Streimikiene and Bilan (2015) attempted to review the literature to explain the trends of rural tourism development in regard to its supply and demand factors. The methodology was neither systematic nor bibliometric in nature. Lane and Kastenzholz (2015) attempted to unveil the evolution of the rural tourism research by reviewing the literature based on a temporal classification and identified major themes of the rural tourism research. However, while highlighting the necessity of integrity among the researchers to contribute for the new generation rural tourism scopes, they bypass the potential research areas which are still unaddressed. With a discursive approach to discussion, their objective also bypassed the important and effective parameters of systematic bibliometric research. Sasu and Epuran (2016) conducted their review in terms of the new trends of type, creativity and authenticity features of rural tourism. Their objective was not at all to take an account of the overall progress in the tourism research. Scholars suggest that with the changing nature of rurality, rural tourism, welfare, and business management the nature of research is bound to be reviewed to include new concepts and research themes (Michalko, 2015; Saxena, 2012). The existing reviews related to rural tourism underperform to reveal the advancement in the rural tourism research.

Considering the situation mentioned above, a thorough evaluative bibliometric review of the rural tourism research is the need of the hour to give a

systematic and objective insight into the evolution of conceptual framework, authorship, institution-specific productivity, spatial distribution of study areas, key themes, and the future research directions. The present paper proposes to undertake a bibliometric analysis of rural tourism literatures published in 14 JCR (Journal Citation Report 2020) and SCOPUS indexed tourism and hospitality journals from 1980 to 2019 (40 years), to bring forth the overall progress in the rural tourism research. The starting year (1980) is considered purposefully as it is carefully observed that the evolution of 'first phase of rural tourism' (Lane & Kastenzholz, 2015) has mostly started getting documented in the scholarly journal since that year only.

The core research questions addressed in this review article are as follows.

RQ1: how does the rural tourism research progress with time in terms of publication frequency and the contribution of scholarly journals?

RQ2: what are the major theoretical and methodical approaches adopted and which broader subject domains contribute much into the rural tourism research?

RQ3: what kind of spatio-temporal pattern does exist in the rural tourism research in regard to the selection of the study area, consideration of the less developed countries as an investigation agenda, spatiality of the contributing institutions and creation of the knowledge base (based on either emic or etic perspectives)?

RQ4: what are the thematic contexts mostly focused on and which contexts are yet to be addressed further in the rural tourism research?

Study methods

The present study adopts a bibliometric methodological approach to systematically synthesise the existing literature on rural tourism. Previous studies (Sasu & Epuran, 2016; Streimikiene & Bilan, 2015; Zhang et al., 2009) documented the over-performance of systematic review over the narrative analysis as it can answer specific research questions, involve an objective and rigorous sample-selection methodology, and moreover, can often evaluate the findings in a quantitative manner. However, every methodology has its grounds of justification of utilities to get applied for a specific study with extensive rigour. Narrative review does involve a rigorous consideration of the literatures to have an insight into the subject matter and development of a research arena; however, the approach does have 'some drawbacks in charting the evolution of a concept/construct in the literature.' The systematic reviews are more effective than the narrative reviews

in extracting the literatures more precisely, and in mapping the boundary and landscape of knowledge development while charting and counting what is known and what is not (Prayag et al., 2018, pp. 2–3).

Among the different forms of systematic reviews, bibliometric analysis is widely argued to be capable of analysing the longitudinal trends and patterns of research progress (Ruhanen et al., 2015), distribution of production among authors, the relation between authors and citations (Güzeller & Çeliker, 2018; Hall, 2011; Koseoglu et al., 2016; Ruhanen et al., 2015), approaches of analysis, contribution of broader disciplines (Sainaghi et al., 2017), conceptual development, techniques of measurement, and the outcomes (Prayag et al., 2019).

Design

The samples for the present study in the form of published articles are chosen in two stages. In the first stage, the list of journals on impactful tourism, recreation, and hospitality (now on, will be termed as tourism journals in a broader sense) is prepared based on the two globally acknowledged journal lists viz. the Journal Citation Report 2020 (Thomson Reuters, 2020) and the Scopus to fix the standard of the scholarly publications. Many review articles in the tourism domain advocate in favour of considering such standard lists to design the selection criteria for the journals (Barrios et al., 2008; Güzeller & Çeliker, 2019; Ruhanen et al., 2015). Accordingly, a total of 14 major journals are selected as found common in both mentioned international standard lists and for the rationale that the high ranked journals arguably reflect the leadership in the rigour of major research trends and patterns pertaining to a particular research domain (Oh & Kim, 2017). The impact factor of the selected journals ranges between 7.439 and 1.25. A threshold value for the impact factor was set to select the journals. No journal below impact factor 1 is selected for the present study. Journal impact factor (JIF) is one of the easily calculated and objective measures available in the academia to evaluate the general quality of papers in a journal (Garfield, 1994). Several scholars have used the impact factor to rank the journals under investigation (Feingold, 1989; Nisonger, 1995; Nisonger, 2004). Journals with higher impact factors have better average citation for articles. Therefore, seemingly they are either publishing promising articles or giving better exposure to them, and consequently, more influencing the development of knowledge in that domain than other journals. The selected journals for the present study contribute to different aspects of tourism research such as management, marketing, sustainability, geographies and economies of tourism, etc. While considering the multi-

dimensional contribution of the journals in the tourism research, it was also taken care of that the name of the journals should bear any one or both terms– ‘tourism’ or ‘tourist’. Journals with scopes to publish the tourism research relevant to specific regions such as Nordic, North Atlantic, North Sea and Baltic Sea (in the case of Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism) are excluded from the present list of journals, even though they might have the higher impact factor. On the other hand, Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research is purposively included in the list as the journal publishes articles even outside the Asia-Pacific region. Inclusion of this journal was also to get an unbiased distribution of sampled articles all across the world, including the Global North and the South. As another criterion of filtering, journals with high impact factors, but not publishing direct articles on rural tourism, are excluded from the sampled journal list e.g. Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism.

Subsequently, in the second stage, keyword-based searching criteria are set in the Science Direct for the sorted journal volumes to select the sample articles. Science Direct is a well argued and valid browsing platform to generate the best search results, especially in the listing of the indexed journal articles grounded on a keyword-based searching criterion (Andrea, 2012; Buhalis & Law, 2008; Zhang et al., 2009). The keywords are such as ‘rural tourism’, ‘village tourism’, ‘community-based tourism’, ‘village’, ‘rural’. Apart from that, to make the searching criterion more rigorous and inclusive, the major international publishing houses such as Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, Sage Publications, and other search-browsing platforms, such as Google Scholar and Scopus, have been engaged so that no article gets excluded from the primary sample database. The keyword searching has also been administered on the database of abstracts, titles and even the keywords of the published articles. The starting year is purposively set from 1980 as the decade started witnessing the experience of neoliberal wave in the western world (Cohen & Centeno, 2006; Mosedale, 2016). The neoliberal trend is attributed to a gradual withdrawal of the state’s role in supporting welfare initiatives economically. So, several state-aided welfare programmes eventually came to pause. State-incentivised rural tourism functionalities also experienced the same crisis, which compelled the local tourism entrepreneurs to enter the harsh global competition. This impacted the tourism industry and its development in many ways and they were promoted in the form of critical academic writings by the academicians and tourism professionals from around the globe (George et al., 2009; Lane, 1994b).

Materials

A total of 404 relevant articles are selected as the samples for the temporal period 1980–2019 and to come to this valid sample size the present study adopts the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow chart model (Figure 1), as suggested by Yang et al. (2017) and later, adapted by Prayag et al. (2019). Primarily, a total of 890 articles are short-listed as per the keyword-based searching criteria. Then these articles are thoroughly screened to validate their scope and relevance in the present study objective, and while doing so, 40 articles are excluded as they are found invalid as journal publications. Subsequently, a total of 446 articles are also excluded from the final list of the sampled articles. It is observed that despite not having a direct concern of such articles with the rural tourism research context, the articles appear live in the keyword-based search results only because of the presence of the keywords either in some parts of the main text body or even in the reference section of such articles. Therefore, exclusion of these articles is meant to be logical and scientific. The final list of materials prepared for the present study consists of the full-length published research articles on rural tourism context out of which six are the review articles. Only the articles available in English language are included in the sample list because in the academia of tourism research the legacy of this language still preponderates over the other languages (Hall & Tucker, 2004). The details of frequency of articles under each of the selected journals could be found in Table 1 of this paper.

Procedure

The analytical framework of the study is based on four major heads of findings and discussions viz. the trends in the rural tourism research (addressing RQ 1), the approaches in the rural tourism research (RQ 2), the spatio-temporal pattern in the rural tourism research (RQ 3), and the contexts and themes in the rural tourism research (RQ 4). For each of these sections, some typical methods and techniques are adopted.

Price's bibliometric law (Nicholls, 1988) is applied to assess the publication trend in the rural tourism research. To do so, the total time span (40 years) is square rooted (6.32) based on which the topmost 6 years are considered in terms of their respective total frequency of publication (186 articles). Those 6 years are 2017 (38), 2015 (33), 2016 (31), 2019 (30), 2018 (28), and 2014 (26) (Figure 2). Based on such data, the frequency percentage (in respect to $N=404$) for those 6 years has been calculated and summed up to get the

total percentage of frequency. As a thumb rule, if it is greater than or equal to 50%, then it is assumed that most of the publications are produced during the specified years which is also a reflection of skewed distributional pattern of scholarly production across the total time span (Ruhanen et al., 2015). The analytical framework of trends is based on the decadal publication pattern of the sampled articles following Ruhanen et al. (2015). The total span of 40 years is grouped into 4 decades: from 1980 to 1989, from 1990 to 1999, from 2000 to 2009, and from 2010 to 2019. The contribution of journals is assessed in terms of percentage in respect to the total sampled articles ($N=404$), and its decadal pattern by means of calculating frequency, percentage, and growth rate (Table 1).

The bibliometric meta-data processing system is executed on the sampled articles to create a detailed database on the bibliometric variables which are very crucial in the rigorous analytical framework (Güzeller & Çeliker, 2018; Güzeller & Çeliker, 2019). The meta-data is systematically analysed by administering some quantitative, qualitative, and map-based techniques to unveil the approaches, spatio-temporal pattern and contextual themes in the rural tourism research. The meta database is prepared with the help of NVivo (version 10) which is analytical software greatly used in processing the text and numerals (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Richards, 1999). The bibliometric variables are classified into different relevant attributes from the meta-data of the sampled articles. While doing so, the materials are also coded (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Saldaña, 2013; Strauss, 1987) and counted. The variables are classified into several attributes such as theoretical approaches (2 attributes), methodical approaches (5 attributes), year of publication (40 attributes), journal name (14 attributes), impact factor (14 attributes), study area (71 attributes), subjects (15 attributes) and institutional (271) affiliations of the first author, and the countries (49) such institutions belong to. The reason to consider the first authors as a variable is that the first author is recognised to give more time and more efforts in a scholarly work than the co-author(s) (Engers et al., 1999). The NVivo-generated numerical data are further processed by using SPSS software (SPSS Statistics 22.0). The bibliometric variables are checked through the statistical tests of associations by using Cross-tabulation, Chi-square test, and Monte Carlo Simulation. Such tests provide a better understanding about the lynch pin to reveal the pattern of association among the listed variables and their logical interpretations (Mehta & Patel, 2011). Considering the large sample size with many attribute classes in each category of the variables, the Fisher's exact test is adopted following the Monte Carlo

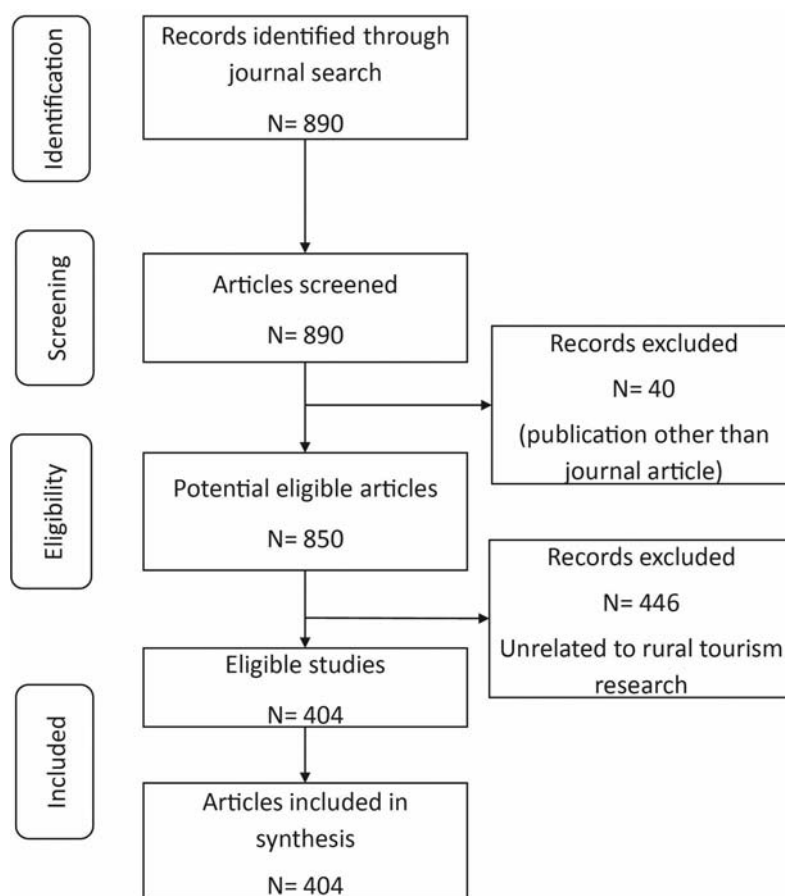


Figure 1. PRISMA model of the sample selection.

simulation (Mehta & Patel, 2011). And keeping in view the matrix size larger than 2×2 , Cramer's V is selected to evaluate the strength of association among the considered variables (Sheskin, 2000). Temporal analysis (trend) is also done to reveal the changing pattern of approaches, contributions, and the themes in the research. The bibliometric meta-data is also used for the map-based analysis (by using ArcGIS software, version 10.3.1) to reveal the spatio-temporal pattern in terms of study area and the contributing institutions. For this, only the first author's institutional affiliation is considered to get a clear indication and to avoid the complexities that may arise if authorship of all orders would have considered. A schematic network diagram is prepared considering the thematic variables and respective attributes to investigate their contextual links.

Findings and discussions

Trends in the rural tourism research

The publication trend, depicted in Figure 2, shows a growing trend all along the years considered in this study. However, a steep rise could be seen in the trend

line during the period from 2012 to 2019. This significant rising trend of publication was further analysed following the Price's proposition. As per this proposition, almost half (186 articles, 46%) of articles ($N = 404$) were published during 6 years compared to the whole time period of the study. Interestingly, those 6 years belong to the fourth decade (2010–2019) and result in a second-order polynomial trend ($y = 0.0338x^2 - 134.24x + 133395$, $R^2 = 0.8934$) of increase with a clear indication that among the four decades there lies a significant uneven distribution of academic attention to the rural tourism research.

Only few journals started contributing to the rural tourism research during the first decade (2.72%); however, during the fourth decade, especially from 2012 onwards several journals exhibited their productive input (65.10%) (Table 1). Results suggest (Table 1) that journals such as *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Tourism Management*, and *Journal of hospitality and tourism research* initiated the discourse on rural tourism in the early stage and later only *Tourism Management* continues to be the highest contributing journal for all the next decades (6.19% and 14.85% in the third and fourth decades, respectively) followed by

Table 1. Decadal contribution of journals.

Journal name	Impact Factor (2019)	Number of articles retrieved	Decade 1 1980–1989		Decade 2 1990–1999		Decade 3 2000–2009		Decade 4 2010–2019		Growth rate (in %)				
			Research contribution (in %)	Research contribution	Research contribution (in %)	Research contribution	Research contribution (in %)	Research contribution	Research contribution (in %)	Research contribution					
Tourism Management	7.432	102	25.25	4	0.99	13	3.22	225.00	25	6.19	61.54	14.85	60	14.85	140.00
Annals of Tourism Research	5.908	53	13.12	5	1.24	9	2.23	80.00	19	4.70	111.11	4.95	20	4.95	5.26
Current Issues in Tourism	4.69	28	6.93	0	0.00	0	0.00	–	8	1.98	–	4.95	20	4.95	150
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	4.097	13	3.22	0	0.00	1	0.25	–	2	0.50	100.00	2.48	10	2.48	400.00
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	3.986	62	15.35	0	0.00	12	2.97	–	9	2.23	–	10.15	41	10.15	355.56
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	3.816	13	3.22	2	0.50	0	0.00	–100.00	1	0.25	–	2.48	10	2.48	900
Tourism Management Perspectives	3.648	31	7.67	0	0.00	0	0.00	–	0	0.00	–	7.67	31	7.67	–
Tourism Geographies	2.88	34	8.42	0	0.00	0	0.00	–	14	3.47	–	4.95	20	4.95	42.86
International Journal of Tourism Research	2.585	4	0.99	0	0.00	0	0.00	–	0	0.00	–	0.99	4	0.99	–
Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	2.017	35	8.66	0	0.00	2	0.50	–	7	1.73	250.00	6.44	26	6.44	271.43
Tourism Economics	1.819	15	3.71	0	0.00	0	0.00	–	4	0.99	–	2.72	11	2.72	175.00
Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism Education	1.439	1	0.25	0	0.00	0	0.00	–	0	0.00	–	0.25	1	0.25	–
Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change	1.327	10	2.48	0	0.00	0	0.00	–	2	0.50	–	1.98	8	1.98	300.00
Tourist Studies	1.25	3	0.73	0	0.00	0	0.00	–	2	0.50	–	0.25	1	0.25	–50.00
All of the above		N = 404		11	2.72	37	9.16	–	93	23.02	–	65.10	263	65.10	

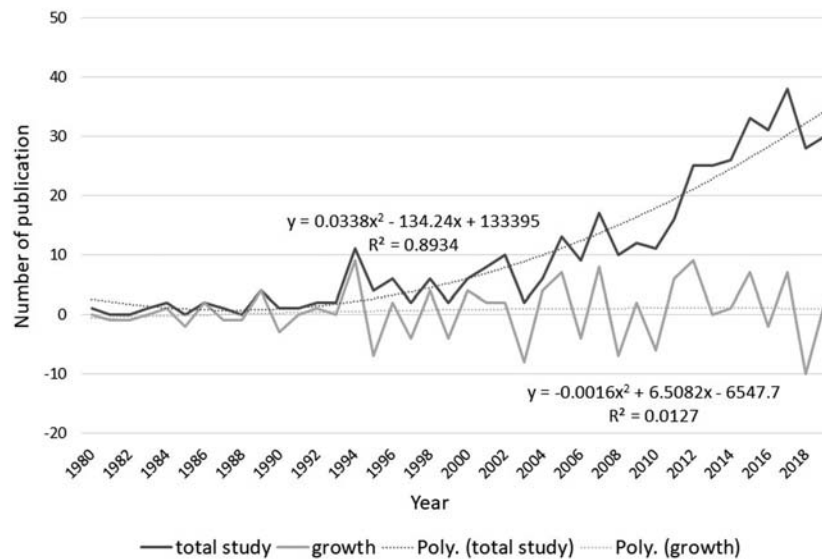


Figure 2. Year-wise frequency of publication.

Journal of Sustainable Tourism. The first published article, appeared in *Annals of Tourism Research* (in 1980), propelled the commencement of academic interest in rural tourism followed by *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing* (400% growth rate), *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (355.56%), *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* (300%), and *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* (271.43%) in the fourth decade. It supports the argument that several dimensions and complexities of rural tourism started being discussed by the tourism scholars during the third and fourth decades, especially considering the cases from the South-East Asian countries (Arranz, 2006; Bowden, 2005). Nevertheless, the remarkable lead in the scholarly contribution during the second and third decade is credited to journals *Tourism Management* (225%) and *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* (250%), respectively (Table 1).

Figure 2 depicts a slow and steady growth rate of the rural tourism research without reflecting a significant trend pattern ($y = -0.0016x^2 + 6.5082x - 6547.7$, $R^2 = 0.0127$) as some of the years also mark the noteworthy growth rates. For example, the year 1994 witnesses a crowning growth in the contributed from *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (Table 2), the reason being 'sustainable development' concept was getting traction in tourism literatures by that time (Ruhanen et al., 2015).

Approaches in the rural tourism research

To analyse the approaches adopted by contributing authors, articles are broadly classified into two categories viz. theoretical approach (offering general

conceptual ideas and theories or case-specific findings), and the methodical approach (proposing technical and scientific methodology of analysis). Theoretical approach is further divided into two approaches (attributes) i.e. inductive (mainly based on case studies) and deductive (mostly to develop generalised theories). The methodical approach has five attributes (descriptive, quantitative, qualitative, mixed, and application of theoretical framework) based on the mode of enquiry, techniques used, and the database considered. Studies having descriptive approach are basically describing the reality, thus lacking any inferential statistics. On the other hand, quantitatively approached studies have inferential statistics involved in it. Its scopes traverse beyond describing the existing phenomenon, rather explaining them by testing hypotheses. On the other hand, studies that tried to describe and explain the reality without involving any statistical assumption or condition, are classified as adopting qualitative approaches. Studies that followed both qualitative and quantitative approaches in terms of mode of enquiry, tools and database are classified as mixed methodological studies. Studies, applying a theoretical framework, are descriptive and qualitative in nature. Rather than explaining a particular phenomenon, the main aim of these papers is building up theories and defining concepts.

The number of papers with inductive approach is lesser ($N = 137$) than that of the articles with a deductive approach ($N = 267$). Both of such types maintained a slow and gradual growth trend up to the year 2002 (Figure 3). After that, the deductive studies depicted a sharp positive trend ($y = 0.0008x^3 - 4.8575x^2 + 9650.6x$

Table 2. Year-wise journal contribution.

Year	Asia Pacific				Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research				Journal of Tourism Studies				Yearly research contribution	
	Journal of Tourism Management	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	Annals of Tourism Research	Journal of Tourism Research	Tourism Geographies	Tourism Management Perspectives	Current issues in Tourism	Tourism Economics	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change	International Journal of Tourism Research		Tourist Studies
1980	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
1981	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
1982	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
1983	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
1984	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
1985	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
1986	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
1987	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
1988	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
1989	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	4
1990	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
1991	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
1992	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
1993	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
1994	-	9	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
1995	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	4
1996	3	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
1997	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
1998	2	1	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
1999	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
2000	2	1	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	6
2001	1	1	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	8
2002	2	1	3	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	10
2003	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
2004	2	1	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
2005	4	2	2	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	13
2006	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	9
2007	3	1	4	-	7	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	17
2008	4	1	4	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
2009	4	-	-	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12
2010	2	2	1	1	1	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	11
2011	4	-	2	4	3	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	16
2012	8	5	2	2	1	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25
2013	2	4	1	4	3	1	5	1	1	1	-	-	-	25
2014	4	2	-	3	3	1	4	2	1	3	1	-	-	26
2015	5	10	1	-	3	7	2	1	1	1	-	1	-	33
2016	7	7	1	3	1	5	1	4	-	2	-	-	-	31
2017	16	4	1	2	4	2	2	2	2	-	-	-	1	38
2018	6	2	7	5	4	4	2	1	-	-	1	-	-	28
2019	6	5	4	2	1	5	2	-	2	-	2	-	-	30
1980-2019	102	102	62	53	35	34	31	28	15	13	10	4	3	1
Total = 404														

– 6E + 06, $R^2 = 0.8415$), while the case studies comparatively (inductive) reflect a slower rising trend of positive growth ($y = -4E-05x^3 + 0.2184x^2 - 441.53x + 297357$, $R^2 = 0.4471$). During the first two decades researchers adopted the inductive as well as deductive approaches which support the argument of Lane and Kastenholz (2015) that during the first and second phases, researchers were mostly involved in digging out the several plausible issues of rural tourism from different perspectives and contexts. After 2002, researchers started becoming more concerned of finding out scopes to develop the generalised theories pertaining to rural tourism at the global level. In the line of Hall and Page (1999), it supports that during that time tourism as a subject was suffering from problems such as unavailability of substantial theoretical, methodological and spatial development assisting in the research. However, the upsurge of deductive trend in the rural tourism research was criticised by the researchers recently, advocating for the need to admit the unique setting of each rural tourism project and thus reemphasising on the importance of case studies in synergy with the general theories (Beeton, 2005; Saxena, 2012; Xiao & Smith, 2006). It further widens the platform of inductive approach among the rural tourism researchers in the near future.

Following the associationship between the research approaches and the contribution of the journals it is revealed that none of the selected journals has a significant alignment towards the theoretical approach ($P = 0.420$), but a slight and very weak proclivity towards the methodical approach ($P = 0.02$, Cramer's $V = 0.253$). Association is a very general relationship where one variable provides information about another (Altman & Krzywinski, 2015), but the strength and direction of that relationship is unknown. The term associationship here simply indicates the relationship among the chosen categorised bibliometric variables related to approaches of the sampled articles. Cross tab and Chi-Square test are some of the well-established tools to test such associations among categorical variables (Ugoni & Walker, 1995). It is not new for review studies to use Chi-square test to check the associationship among different categorical bibliometric variables such as themes and journals (Ruhanen et al., 2015). However, the strength of associationship (effect size) is measured with the value of Cramer's V (see the procedure section). As recommended in Cohen (1988), the effect size has been mentioned in the footnote of Table 3.

The theoretical approach is found to have a significantly moderate associationship (Table 3) with the themes of the rural tourism research ($P = 0.00$, Cramer's

$V = .325$). Such associationship further depicts that case studies often address the themes such as impact studies and performance appraisal of rural tourism projects. In the case of methodical approach, case studies are often found to adopt a descriptive approach resulting in a significantly moderate associationship among methodical and theoretical approach ($P = 0.00$, Cramer's $V = .352$). However, the deductive approach is also conspicuous in the rural tourism studies with the quantitative approach ($N = 140$), among them themes like impact study has a substantial number of deductive and quantitative studies ($N = 34$). Such findings confirm the proposition of Saxena (2012) that there are several issues of rural tourism that need the case-specific attention.

The methodical approach of the rural tourism research is seen to be more inclined towards the quantitative approach ($N = 174$) followed by the qualitative approach ($N = 109$), descriptive ($N = 93$), mixed method ($N = 16$) and theoretical framework ($N = 12$). The methodical approach has a significantly moderate associationship with the rural tourism themes due to the publication of quantitative impact studies ($N = 49$) as mentioned above ($P = 0.00$, Cramer's $V = 0.325$) and the quantified market segmentation analysis ($N = 18$). The qualitative method approach got its recognition in the rural tourism research during the late 2000s and after 2005 it became a well-adopted trend. Most of the qualitative studies ($N = 36$) focus on the issues such as stakeholders, their politics, network, and motivational psychology of tourists. Descriptive studies are mostly ($N = 32$) related to the studies assessing the performance of individual rural tourism projects, the challenges faced by those projects and their possible case-specific solutions. Descriptive approach has been widely used in the rural tourism research since 1980, but in recent years (after 2012) it is found to be outmoded (Figure 4). Mixed methodology is an underutilised approach in rural tourism studies, although first traced back in 1992. The mixed methodological research bears a huge scope in the rural tourism research because the present-day researchers consider a combination of different methodological approaches instead of investigating the business social operations with the help of a single approach (Hewlett & Brown, 2018; Singh et al., 2012). Studies using a theoretical framework as a methodical approach are less prevalent unlike the other methodical approaches (Figure 4) and are mostly used in the mid-1990s to develop new theories on rural tourism since the inception of reconceptualising rural tourism operations towards sustainability (Bramwell, 1994; Lane, 1994a, 1994b).

Broad subject domains of the first authors are also considered as variables (14 contributing subject

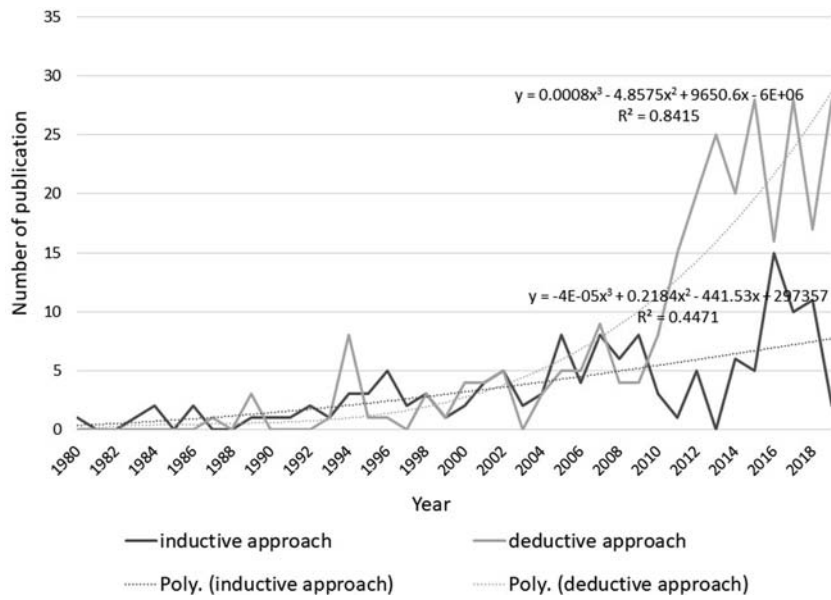


Figure 3. Yearly trend of theoretical (inductive and deductive) approach.

domains as individual attributes) to study which disciplines have already contributed and (Table 4) to indicate the potential subject domains yet to indulge in exploring the issues of rural tourism. To select the contributing subject domains, the departmental affiliation of the first author was considered. Scholars like Panda et al. (2013) have previously used the address and affiliation of the first author to see the spatial distribution of the papers while conducting a bibliometric study. Similarly, along with the first author’s institutional affiliation, here the departmental data were also recorded to trace out the contributing subject domains. One author might be engaged in multiple organisations. As a solution, the present study has considered only that very departmental affiliation of the first author which was mentioned in the author details part of a particular article. Eight cases were identified where the department of first author was not identifiable, they were categorised under miscellaneous category and considered as independent researchers. Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality studies (TLH) is the highest contributing subject domain in the

rural tourism research ($N = 137$, 33.91%), followed by Business Studies ($N = 44$), Economics ($N = 41$), Geography (37), and Management Studies (32). From the methodical approach, it is noteworthy that TLH Studies have the maximum articles with qualitative methodology ($N = 53$) unlike Economics, Business Studies, and Management Studies having a larger proportion of quantitative contribution ($N = 31$, 26, and 16, respectively). It supports that, subjects like Economics, Business Studies, and Management Studies have a pragmatic paradigm of looking at the issues under investigation (Jones & Jing Guan, 2011; Kastenholz et al., 2017; Polo Pena et al., 2013). In contrast to that, the research contribution of Geography is more of descriptive and qualitative in nature.

The temporal trend (Figure 5) reflects that while most of the subject domains are found to have some sort of

Table 3. Associationship among attributes.

Association between	Level of significance ^a	Cramer’s V ^b
Theoretical approach and journal	$p = 0.420$	NA
Theoretical approach and theme	$p = 0.00$	0.325
Theoretical approach and methodical approach	$p = 0.00$	0.352
Methodical approach and themes	$p = 0.00$	0.325
Study area and country of the first author	$p = 0.00$	0.763
Methodical approach and journal	$p = 0.02$	0.253

^aLevel of confidence: 95%.

^b0.1 = small effect size, 0.3 = moderate effect size, 0.5 = large effect size.

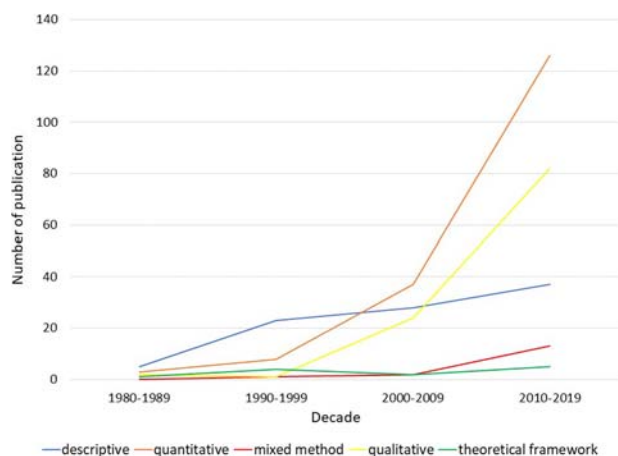


Figure 4. Decadal trend of the methodical approach.

Table 4. Subject domains contributing in the rural tourism research.

Subject	Frequency of publication (N)	Methodical approaches						Theoretical approaches							
		Quantitative (N)	Research contribution (in%)	Qualitative (N)	Research contribution (in %)	Descriptive (N)	Research contribution (in %)	Mixed method (N)	Research contribution (in%)	Theoretical framework (N)	Research contribution (in %)	Deductive approach (N)	Research contribution (in %)	Inductive approach (N)	Research contribution (in %)
Tourism, leisure, hospitality studies	137	43	10.64	53	13.12	35	8.66	3	0.74	3	0.74	85	21.04	52	12.87
Business studies	44	26	6.44	10	2.48	8	1.98	0	0.00	0	0.00	32	7.92	12	2.97
Economics	41	31	7.67	7	1.73	2	0.50	1	0.25	0	0.00	28	6.93	13	3.22
Geography	37	7	1.73	11	2.72	16	3.96	2	0.50	1	0.25	20	4.95	17	4.21
Management studies	32	16	3.96	5	1.24	6	1.49	3	0.74	2	0.74	26	5.94	6	1.49
Social studies and humanities	24	9	2.23	8	1.98	4	0.99	2	0.50	1	0.25	17	4.21	7	1.73
Agriculture	19	16	3.96	0	0.00	2	0.50	0	0.00	1	0.25	14	3.47	5	1.24
Environmental studies	19	9	2.23	5	1.24	3	0.74	1	0.25	1	0.25	14	3.47	5	1.24
Development and regional planning	19	7	1.73	5	1.24	4	0.99	2	0.50	1	0.25	12	2.97	7	1.73
Architecture, landscape planning and engineering	14	7	1.73	1	0.50	3	0.99	2	0.50	1	0.25	10	2.48	4	0.99
Miscellaneous (independent individuals)	8	0	0.00	0	0.00	7	1.73	0	0.00	1	0.25	2	0.50	6	1.49
Anthropology	4	0	0.00	3	0.74	1	0.25	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	0.74	1	0.25
Policy studies	3	2	0.50	0	0.00	1	0.25	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	0.74	0	0.00
Linguistics	2	1	0.25	1	0.25	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.25	1	0.25
Mathematics	1	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.25	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.25
All of the above	404	174	43.07	109	26.98	93	23.02	16	3.96	12	2.97	267	66.09	137	33.91

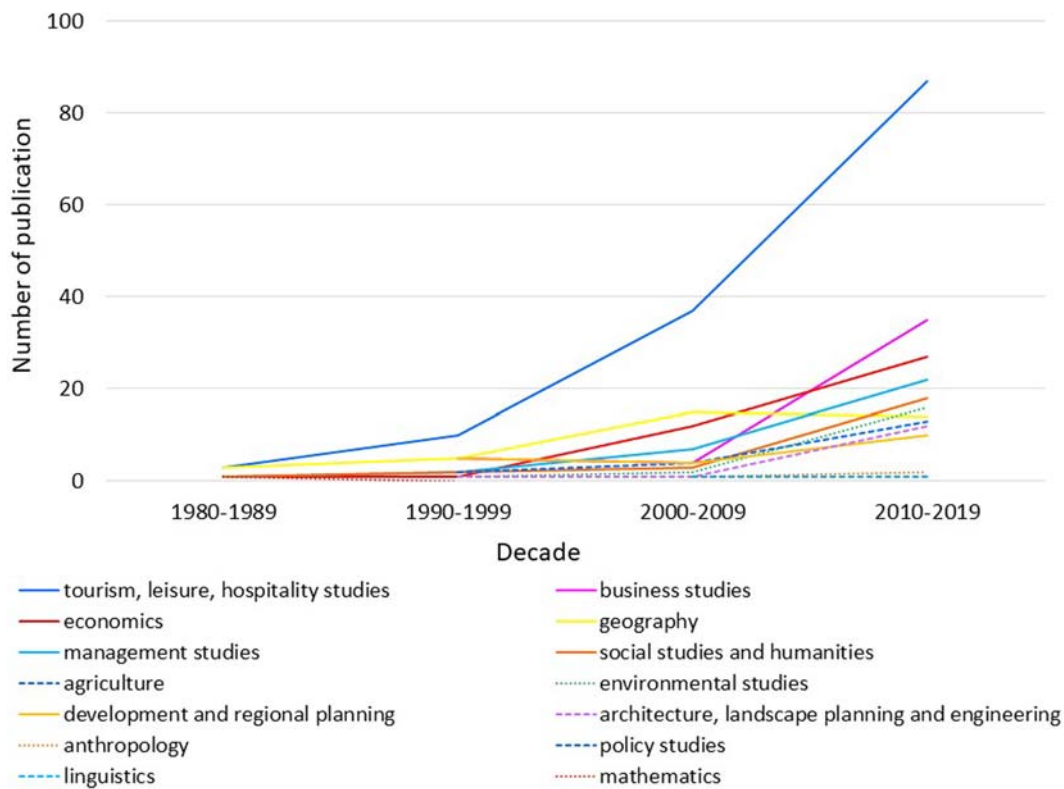


Figure 5. Decadal trend of subjective contribution.

research imprints during the first and second decades, the twenty-first century (third and fourth decades) is characterised by the era of few leading subject domains playing the major role in enriching the arena of the rural tourism research. It is observed that TLH Studies, Geography, Economics, and Management Studies (the second half of the third decade) led the rural tourism research during the third decade, but during the fourth decade, the contribution of Geographers decreased to a considerable level. However, the other three subject domains show an increasing trend during the fourth decade among which TLH Studies reflect the highest contribution. During this decade, scholars from Social studies and Humanities, Development and Regional Planning subject domains also contributed a considerable number of articles keeping in pace with the global agenda of promoting rural tourism as a developmental and poverty alleviating tool (Carson et al., 2014; Iorio & Wall, 2012). Significantly, the decreasing trend of contribution from Geography may be justified in the line of Hall and Page (1999, p. 29), who argued that the geographers who developed their research interest in tourism and recreation during the 1980s and 1990s, later on expressed unwillingness to continue that career in the tourism field because their works were highly criticised and not acknowledged by their peers who did not see tourism as a legitimate

mainstream research area within the scope of geography. Such conservative mind-set led many tourism geographers to move to the then newly emerged autonomous tourism research institutions, business schools, recreation and leisure departments to find better opportunities. However, being a trans-disciplinary subject, tourism is still a less ventured domain which requires further contribution from several other disciplines (Khokhobaia, 2018) to enrich the knowledge base and approaches of rural tourism in coming decades.

Spatio-temporal pattern in the rural tourism research

The pattern is analysed on two major criteria. Firstly, the spatio-temporal pattern of the study areas is investigated on a decadal timeframe and secondly, the location of the affiliated institutions of the first author was mapped to showcase explicitly how the rural tourism research evolved from the developed world to the developing countries over the time and space.

It is revealed that most of the research ($N=374$, 92.6%) ponder on the individual study areas. A few studies ($N=15$, 3.71%) have engaged multiple study areas for the comparative mode of enquiry and analysis. For the meaningful analysis, countries of the study areas

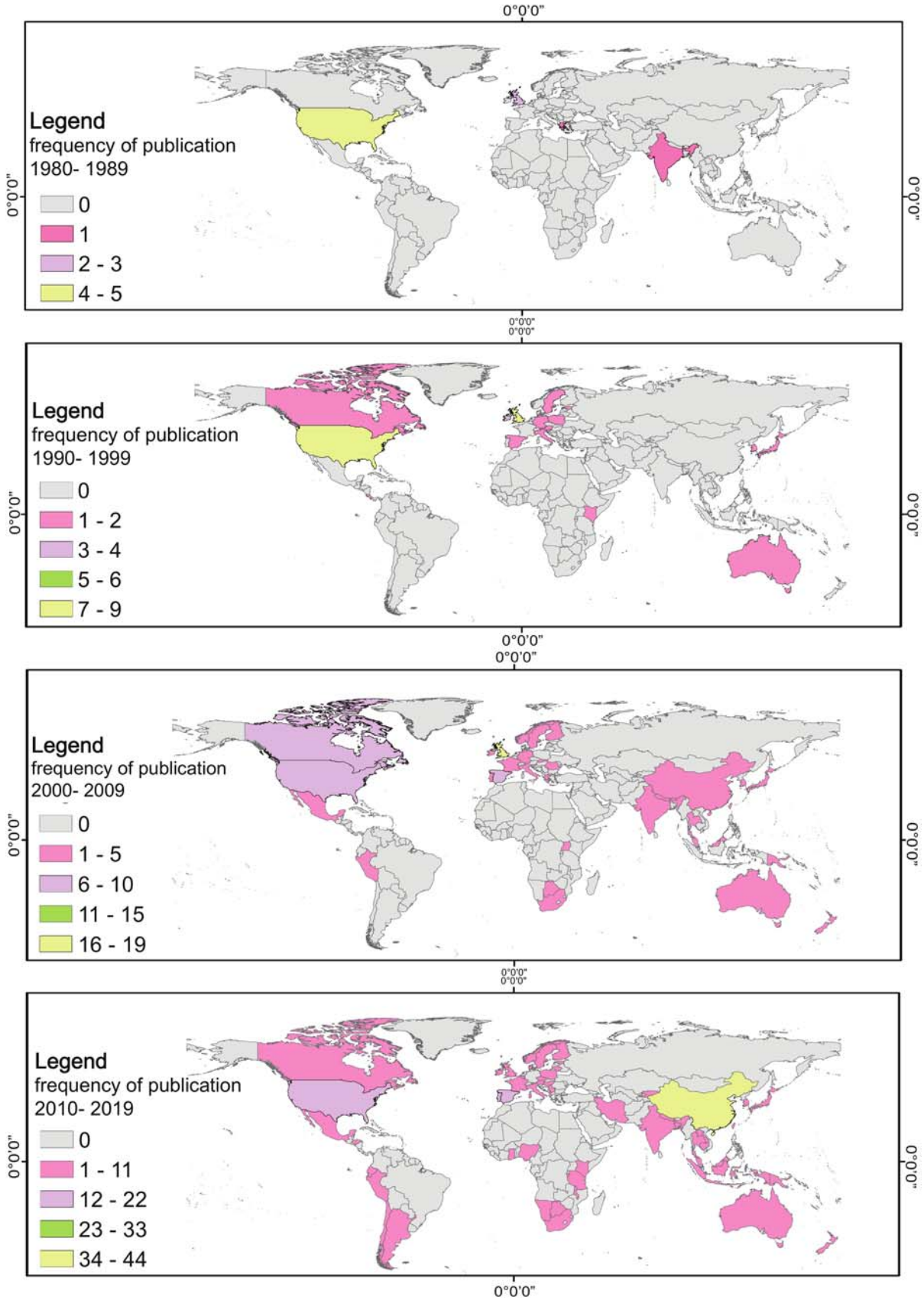


Figure 6. Distribution of study areas in all four decades.

are considered and classified as individual attributes which include 67 countries. Articles with a broad study area like considering the European countries as a single unit of investigation ($N=11$, 2.72%), and without having any study area ($N=15$, 3.71%) are kept aside from this spatio-temporal analysis. It is observed from the analysis that during the first decade USA- and UK-based study areas were taken up by the researchers (Figure 6) and confirm the theory that the idea of rural tourism is indigenously a western concept emerged from the developed countries (Darău et al., 2010; De Kadt, 1979; Lane, 1994b). The second decade reflects the same pattern with more spread of study areas in Canada and some European countries (Figure 6). Some developing countries such as India, Hawaii, Kenya were also selected (during those two decades) by the scholars as their study areas with the aim to make propositions for the future scopes and opportunities of such countries in promoting rural tourism for development purposes. These trends have synergy with the trends of contemporary global events such as decolonisation, neoliberal economy, globalisation and world politics. It is clear how the developed countries such as USA, UK entered the knowledge world earlier than the developing countries. This is because, in the developed and western world these massive socio-political and economic restructuring processes started earlier (early 1980s) than the developing world (Cohen & Centeno, 2006; Mosedale, 2016). Such shifts have eventually brought early academic attention towards critical issues in global academia. The modern shifts in governance, politics and economy have gradually entered the peripheries from the core during the later phase (1990s). However, the start for the developing countries was difficult. Their societies were characterised by long colonial history, struggle and dilemmas related to structural adjustment and frequent political instabilities. The complex history of decolonisation, neoliberal shifts, political alliance has shaped and often delayed their overall social, cultural, economic and intellectual development. Consequently, participation of these countries in global economy was also lagged. For example, countries like India, Laos, Malaysia, Indonesia and Ghana witnessed decolonisation during the 1940s or 1950s, while countries like Estonia, Hungary and Kyrgyzstan broke out from the former socialist settings during the 1990s. After these massive political changes, these countries have gone through years of internal conflicts, political unrests and economic crisis triggered by some internal or global issues (Cassey, 2019; Fabry, 2018; Gellert, 2019; Hannam & Reddy, 2016; Laungaramsri, 2015; Manasov, 2019; Notermans, 2015; Obeng-Odoom, 2012). These socio-political and cultural lags could be

contextualised as rationales for their late engagement in tourism business as well as in tourism academia.

Remarkably, the third and fourth decades (Figure 6) confirm the scenario of the 'third phase' of rural tourism development (Lane & Kastenholtz, 2015) with widespread evolvement of tourism products in the rural landscape of the developing countries. The South-Asian countries have received an increased level of scholarly attention during the fourth decade (Figure 6) which may be attributed to their purposeful consideration of rural tourism as a tool to alleviate poverty (Su, Wall, Wang, and Jin, 2019; Wang & Yotsumoto, 2019; Zhou & Chan, 2019). It also affirms that the twenty-first century witnessed a boon in unfolding the rural tourism issues in the developing countries by researchers across the globe (Sirima & Backman, 2013; Snyman, 2012). However, the cases from the developed countries remain a significant domain of rural tourism discourse throughout the four decades. Chinese cases have received the maximum academic attention during the last two decades ($N=47$, 11.6%) in comparison to USA ($N=35$) and Spain ($N=30$) in 40 years. The number of studies grounded on the countries with low or medium ranks in HDI (Human Development Index) is trivial ($N=15$, 3.71%). This evidently supports the argument that the knowledge base generated in the rural tourism field is predominantly steered by the findings from the developed world (Lane, 1994b; Saarinen & Lenao, 2014).

The contribution pattern of the developed and developing countries is further assessed by investigating the emic and etic approaches involved in the selection of the study area by the first authors from the institutes located in different countries. Etic (researching based on the theories and concepts originating from outside) and emic stance (research based on grounded theories and ideas developing from inside) are approaches in research that deals with the relative position of the observer and observed (Cuneo, 2011). In a simpler way, it tries to investigate whether the contributing country (in terms of the institution of the first author) selects the study area of rural tourism as an outsider or on its own (an insider). It has been observed that institutions from 49 countries have contributed to the rural tourism research by selecting study areas all over the world. Among them, China as a developed country adopted the emic approach at the highest level, because Chinese cases are mostly (84.09%, $N=37$) revealed and talked by the institutions from the China itself. It may be due to the limited scopes for the outside scholars to invade into the ground realities of rural destinations because of the language and administrative barriers (Flowerdew & Li, 2009; Tang, 2010). Besides that, USA has the highest number of

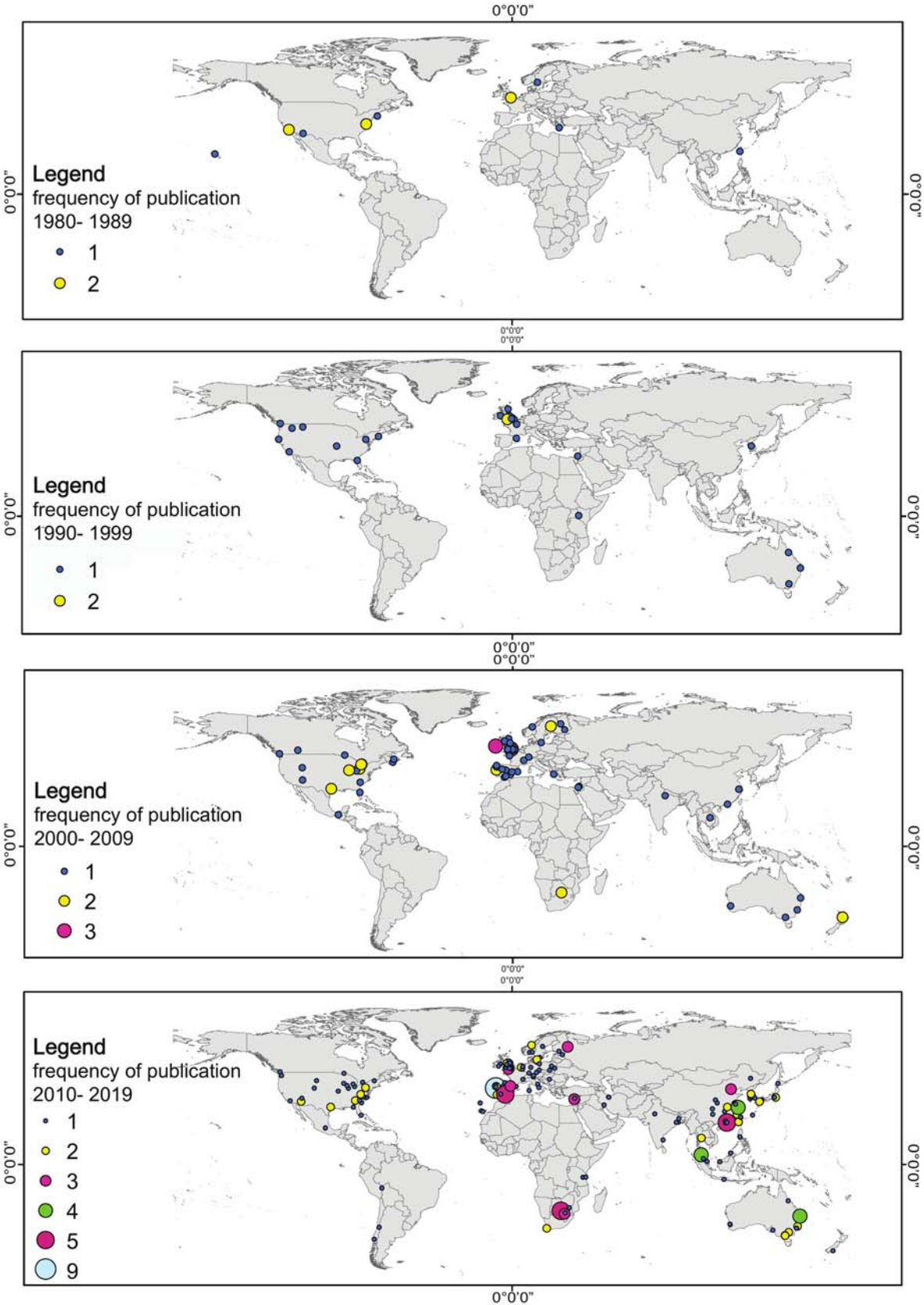


Figure 7. Distribution of contributing institutions.

contributions ($N=26$) to the study areas outside its border. Rural tourism operations in the less developed and developing countries like Honduras and India receive attention from this country. Other developed western countries like UK ($N=23$), Australia ($N=16$), Spain ($N=7$) and Sweden ($N=6$) also contribute to the developing countries with an etic approach. The less developed countries like Uganda, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea have received academic attention with an etic interpretation from the developed nations like USA, Malaysia and Australia. However, some developing countries take the etic stand for some of the less developed countries (LDCs). There lies a strong association-ship between the study areas and the countries of the contributing first author ($P=0.00$, Cramer's $V=0.763$). The reason being while selecting the study areas authors primarily choose the regions of residence as their personal contacts and networks are more limited to their local territory and the funding opportunities are sometimes tied to the national research preferences and local issues (Ruhanen et al., 2015). The dominant etic stand of the developed countries to address the rural tourism issues may be attributed to the sufficient funding opportunities held by the institutes of the developed countries that ease their scopes to explore the cases from the developing or the LDCs (Vose & Cervellini, 1983). It also supports that while most of the issues of rural tourism in the developing countries or LDCs are seen through the lens of the developed countries, it introduces a larger platform to the scholars from the LDCs and the developing countries to delve into the rural tourism research with the indigenous emic approach, as tourism in rurscape is becoming a more distinct and complex phenomena in the contemporary world (Saxena, 2012; Zielinski et al., 2018).

While evaluating the spatio-temporal pattern of the frequency of publication from different institutions with the help of proportional symbols, it is found that there also lies a significant leading pattern of the developed countries in contributing to the rural tourism research. Proportional symbols are certain kind of symbols (here in form of proportional circles), where the symbol size changes according to the value of the attributes, they represent (Nandanari, 2016). The proportional symbol in ArcMap software is used to represent quantitative values for a field or feature (here number of publications published from a particular institution) as a series of graduated symbol sizes. The present study has identified the locations of institutions and added circular markers to those locations proportionate to the number of publications they have published. These symbols help visualising and comparing the spatial distribution of publication all over the globe.

Although during the first two decades the first authors from a few institutes started contributing to this research domain, the institutes belonged to the developed world (Figure 7). In the latter two decades the number of different institutions all over the countries increased, but the pattern of supremacy of the developed countries remains the same (Figure 7). The map depicts high concentration of institutions in the developed nations like USA (count 55, first decade $N=7$, second decade $N=8$, third decade $N=12$, fourth decade $N=28$), UK (count 54, 1st decade $N=3$, second decade $N=12$, third decade $N=24$, fourth decade $N=15$), China (count 44, third decade $N=3$, fourth decade $N=41$), Spain (count 37, second decade $N=1$, third decade $N=12$, fourth decade $N=24$), and Australia (count 25, second decade $N=3$, third decade $N=4$, fourth decade $N=18$). It revamps the argument that authors from the developed countries contributed more in the rural tourism research in particular and corroborates the findings of the other authorship studies in the tourism research in general (Lu & Nepal, 2009; Weiler et al., 2012).

Contexts and themes in the rural tourism research

As mentioned in the 'Procedure' section, the sampled articles ($N=404$) are individually coded while reviewing thoroughly. While coding the articles, the primary focus, contexts, perspectives, and implications are taken into account. The study objectives of such articles helped a lot to find out the actual purposes of the studies and the major points of arguments. The coding manual of Saldaña (2013) is followed to make the coding system more rigorous and scientific. In the first phase, each literature was read intensively, and all the statements, which directly or indirectly reflected the purpose and contexts of the study, were coded. Afterwards, for a particular article, the codes were merged into the sub-theme(s), not necessarily always into a single one. In the second phase, sub-themes were considered as the codes of the second level of analysis and they were further merged into broader theme(s), not necessarily into a single theme. It has been observed that many articles appeared prominently into more than one theme or sub-theme. It was obvious, because implications of articles mostly addressed more than one aspect of a larger context of rural tourism operations. For instance, articles mainly focusing on rural tourism marketing strategy (sub-theme) also have an implication to the policy theme. So far, 14 key themes and 39 sub-themes are identified (Figure 8). Following the overlapping nature of articles to the sub-themes and themes, a

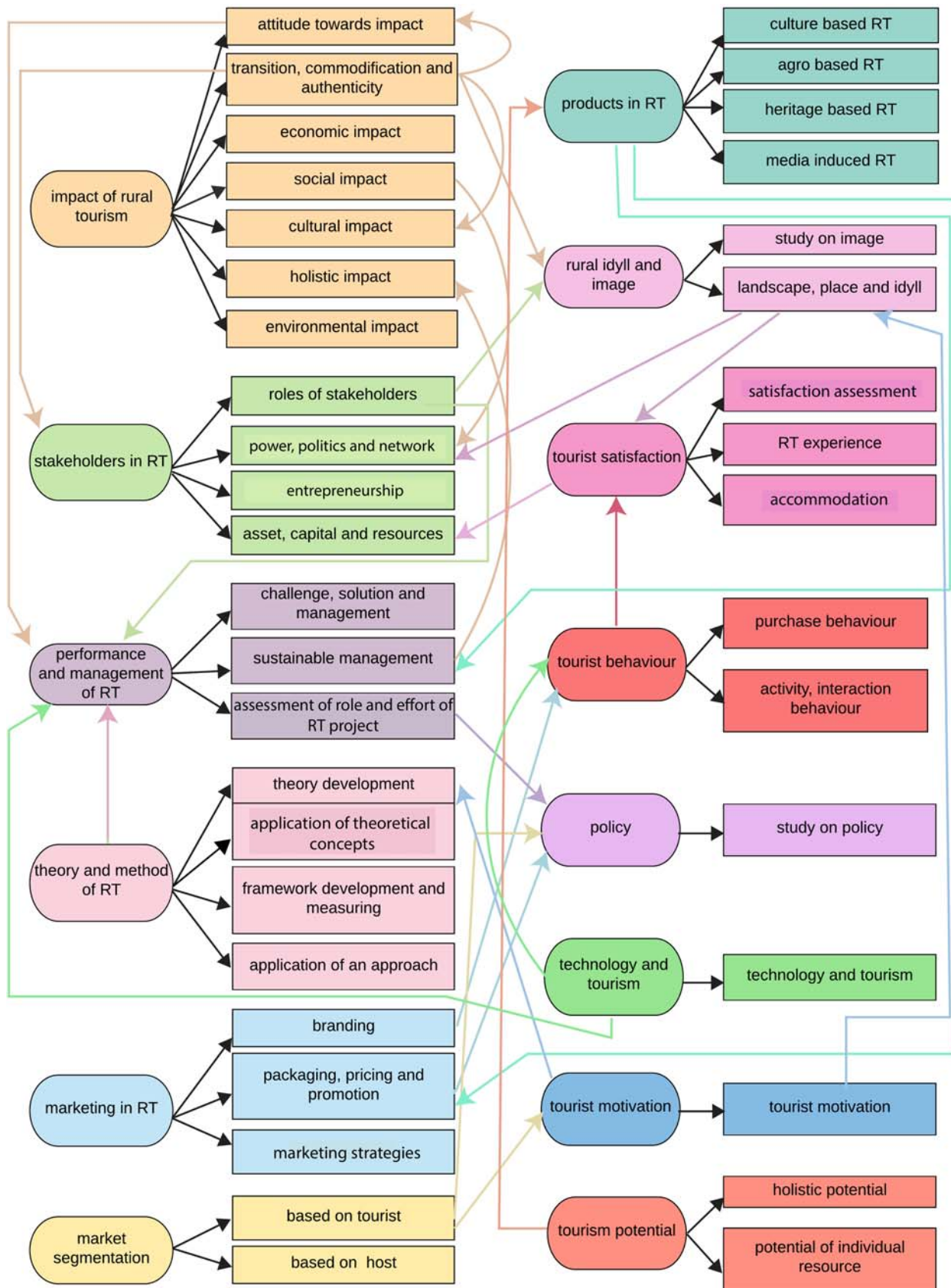


Figure 8. Relational network among the themes and sub-themes of the rural tourism research.

schematic diagram is prepared. The network of connections among the sub-themes and themes in the form of arrows are done with the help of NVivo plus (version 11) software, and the interconnections reveal how the authors of different articles addressed several issues of rural tourism in combination of different dimensions which appeared in the diagram as sub-themes and themes (Figure 8). In this diagram it could be found that some sub-themes of a broader theme have interconnections with the sub-themes of other broad themes. For instance, the 'landscape, place and idyll' sub-theme of 'rural idyll and image' theme has connection with 'power, politics and network' sub-theme of 'stakeholders in RT'. It signifies that, articles, which talked about the rural tourism resources such as landscape, place and idyll mainly, also stated the evolved power politics among the stakeholders due to the control over such resources. Rural idyll is the romantic and ideal image one has about a rural area, a stereotypical notion often generalising villages as picturesque, romantic, pollution free, peaceful, harmonious, and problem free (Short, 2005; Yarwood, 2005). Sampled articles (e.g. Daugstad, 2007), which dealt with the romantic landscape or soundscape of villages, are included into the 'rural idyll' theme. Connections among the themes and sub-themes also imply how often the authors combined the issues of rural tourism to develop their study objectives to bridge the research gaps.

Looking at the contribution pattern of the analysed articles it is found that some themes are predominantly in focus during the last 40 years (Figure 9). Out of the 14 themes, impact studies ($N = 104$, 25.74%), stakeholder issues (hosts) ($N = 76$, 18.81%), performance and management dimensions ($N = 67$, 16.58%) garnered the maximum academic attention. There is a continued increase in the number of publications on these themes mainly during the last two decades. The impact studies show an exponential growth pattern as almost 61% of publications on this theme were done in the last decade. Studies exploring the stakeholder issues regarding the host community in rural tourism operations also follow an exponential pattern (78% publications in the fourth decade). The performance and management theme reflects a growth in the second decade and receives a significant research attention during the fourth decade (22% in the second decade, 58% in the fourth decade). The significant predominance of these three themes reinforces the fact that rural tourism was an early entrant among the new forms of tourism products, especially in the developed countries, and many of the destinations have already spent more than four decades of operations (Lane & Kastenholtz, 2015) waiting for the plausible decline stage as per the TALC model (Butler, 2006). Number of articles contributing to the theory and methodology development theme followed a slow beginning in the 1st and 2nd decades

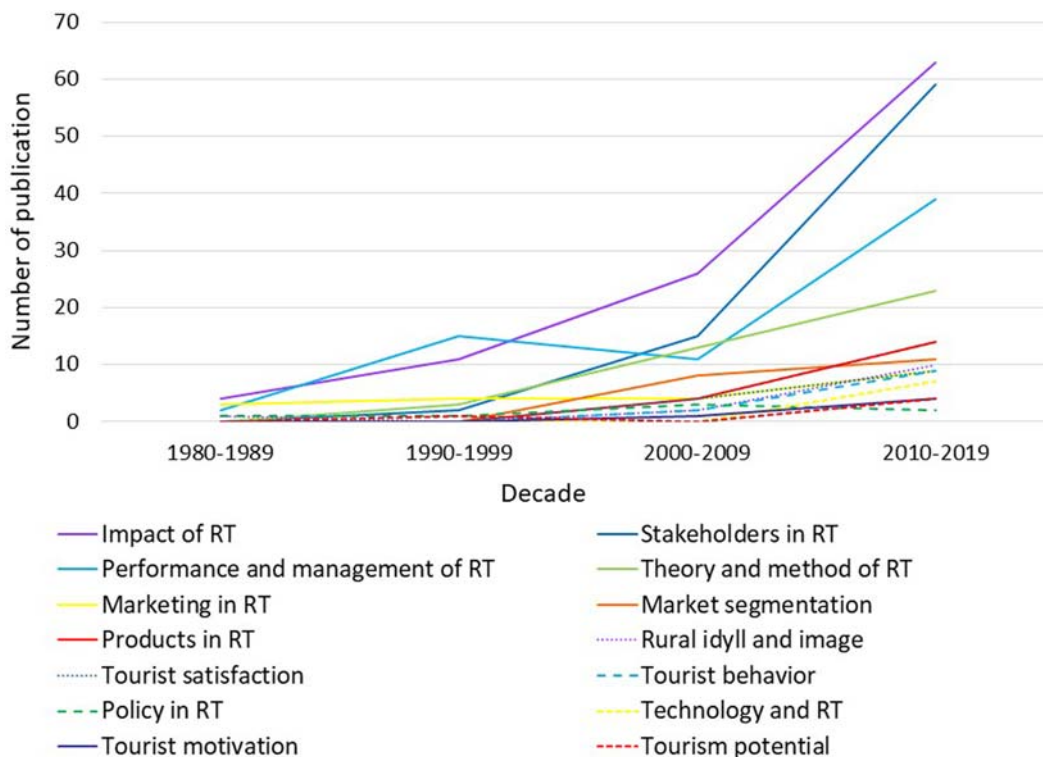


Figure 9. Decadal trend of themes in the rural tourism research.

but maintains a steady growth during the last two decades. The increasing trend of these four themes during the two decades (third and fourth) is not unexpected as Lane and Kastenzholz (2015) argued that twenty-first century is witnessing a spurred flourishing in the rural tourism research guided by the complex issues of increasing competition, neoliberal geopolitical scenario, technological advancement, increasing need of effective leadership and entrepreneurship, and crucial interplay of the governance.

Other than the four themes mentioned above new themes such as marketing, market segmentation, product development, image building, tourists' satisfaction, behaviour and motivation, policy framing, technological application, and future potentials also increasingly appear in the third and fourth decades. The marketing theme maintains a stable growth in terms of its proportional publication across the four decades. It implies that since the introduction of rural tourism product, promotion and marketing has always been an important arena of academic discourse (Frater, 1983; Huang et al., 2016; Pearce, 1998; Sharpley, 2007). In contrast, the other emerging themes follow a very slow growth rate in the first two decades and an increasing pattern during the last two decades, for instance, market segmentation ($N=11$ in the fourth decade), product development ($N=14$ in the fourth decade), and tourist behaviour ($N=9$ in the fourth decade). While investigating these themes further, it is unveiled that such themes may be attributed to the development stage of the TALC model (Butler, 2006) which are more common in the case of the developing countries as they entered in to the rural tourism market in the later phase of evolution in rural tourism (Harrison, 2001; Lea, 2006). Such findings have a clear match with the findings of spatio-temporal pattern of the rural tourism research depicting the emergence of the developing country-based studies during the third and fourth decades. It also confirms that rural tourism has different contextual dimensions and issues in the developed and developing nations which are needed to be addressed with the help of case-specific studies (Beeton, 2005; Saxena, 2012; Xiao & Smith, 2006) instead of developing a holistic theoretical approach (Galindo et al., 2002; Kieffer & Burgos, 2015; Lu et al., 2015; Ye et al., 2018).

As the rural tourism research is progressing forward from the impact studies to the recently emerging thematic domains, other sub-themes are also becoming very pertinent. The schematic diagram (Figure 8) gives a comprehensive idea about how the articles address different other issues of rural tourism while focusing on a primary dimension. For instance, while stakeholder issues being the second most important theme, the

issues of community politics and stakeholders' power structure ($N=8$), assets and capitals of stakeholders, and control on the tourism resources ($N=2$) are significantly under-represented. However, such issues are increasingly argued to be the deciding factors in achieving sustainability in rural tourism (Tsaur et al., 2006; Yanholmes, 2018). Similarly, there is a dearth of literatures in the selected leading journals primarily addressing the policy issues in rural tourism. It corroborates that the rural tourism research is lacking substantial policy-oriented knowledge base (Baker, 2005; Hwang & Lee, 2015). However, the other research studies do have the policy implications and, therefore, connected to the policy theme as a whole.

From the overall observations, it could be stated that the progress of the rural tourism research is reflecting a shifting pattern towards the maturation, but ample issues are yet to be researched. The term maturity means the state of having reached to the maximum level of development. It is like a state which is in a perfect condition. In true sense nothing could be in a perfect condition and, therefore, it is just like an optimum situation which is always targeted to be achieved. Such relativity makes the term more subjective in nature (Andersen & Jessen, 2003). No research domain can ever achieve perfect maturity in terms of being in a perfect condition without scoping out further opportunities to research on new ideas and resultant theories. Scholars like Ruhanen et al. (2015) unfolded the maturity of a research area to address how the knowledge domain got enriched with successive theory development and knowledge accumulation over the time. The objectives of this study do the same thing to gaze the maturity of the rural tourism research in terms of knowledge accumulation over time and the successive development of new themes and sub-themes of the research enriching the tourism knowledge domain as a whole.

Some relevant keywords, such as climate change, resilience, endemics, epidemics and pandemics from the general tourism research, have been searched in the sampled articles to investigate their contextual occurrences. It is found that the word count for such keywords is very meagre e.g. climate change with 96 word counts, epidemic 4 word counts and pandemic with just 1 count. Such findings further widen the research scope in rural tourism as climate change is becoming a global research agenda in the tourism research as a whole (Hall & Higham, 2005; Scott et al., 2008). Besides that, with the experience of significant crisis in the global tourism industry caused by COVID-19 pandemic situation (Zenker & Kock, 2020) researchers should also delve into the resilience and preparedness issues in the context of rural tourism to ensure the sustainability.

Implication of the study

The present study is an addition to the existing bibliometric studies on rural tourism in particular and to the existing state-of-the-art review-based knowledge body of the tourism research in general. The results have revealed that the last ten years have witnessed maximum growth in publications on rural tourism with a slow gradual progress in theory development. While depicting the predominance of deductive and quantitative approaches within the theoretical and methodical approaches, respectively, the mixed approach which is a cutting-edge methodology in tourism studies in general (Singh et al., 2012) is underutilised in the rural tourism research. The contribution of the developed countries has appeared to be exclusive during the first two decades and prevalent during the last two decades when several developing countries are also found to contribute, especially during the fourth decade. A shift of the rural tourism research has been observed from the Western World-based studies to the Eastern-based studies during the last two decades. A significant thematic maturity in the rural tourism research is attained in the developed world, whereas several new issues and dimensions are to be unveiled in the context of Eastern World that are comparatively new in the global rural tourism market. In brief, the rural tourism research in the twenty-first century is progressing and flourishing more for its journey towards maturity but bears ample scopes for many under-represented themes and sub-themes to be addressed scholarly. Issues such as community politics, power struggle among the stakeholders, resource control, policy framework are some of the major dimensions which are the key factors in sustainable rural tourism management (Iorio & Wall, 2012; Saxena & Ilbery, 2008; Verbole, 2000; Wearing & McDonald, 2002; Yankholmes, 2018) but are least addressed in the last 40 years and deserve to be the components of future research agenda.

Considering the extent of the present work in terms of the findings and discussions, this paper works as a ready reference to the academicians, students, researchers, policy makers and the practitioners to have direct access to the potential research dimensions of rural tourism yet to be addressed. The schematic diagram (Figure 8) as proposed in this paper gives a clear idea about the existing combinations of themes and sub-themes and the new potential combinations yet to be considered as the fore-fronted research agenda. Besides that, some issues, which are pertinent to the tourism research in general, are also required to be incorporated in the context of rural tourism. For instance, the presence of climate change issues in rural

tourism studies has been found very scanty, widening future research opportunities, because dealing with climate change issues has been a prerequisite in the sustainable tourism research (Scott, 2011). Similarly, the issues related to endemics, epidemics, pandemics, resilience are not discussed in the context of rural tourism. Acknowledging the disastrous effect of COVID-19 pandemic the rural tourism research should also delve into finding the new strategies of resilience and restart in the Post-COVID-19 era.

Conclusion

Given the significance of rural tourism as a major area of research within tourism studies, this study has performed a systematically organised and scientifically administered bibliometric analysis on 404 articles from the 14 leading tourism journals since 1980 which has been argued to be the tentative time when rural tourism commenced its journey as a new form of tourism product, especially in the European countries (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015). In the line of Butler (1999) looking in the past to progress in the future, the present study has attempted to unfold the growth trend, study approaches, spatio-temporal pattern of contribution, and the contextual themes of the rural tourism research over the last 40 years.

This study has similar kind of alignments with the existing bibliometric research in the tourism domain (Khanra et al., 2021; Koseoglu et al., 2016; Niñerola et al., 2019; Rauniyar et al., 2021; Ruhanen et al., 2015) in terms of methodological approaches and organisation of the discussion sections. Some sub-themes such as economic impact, environmental impacts, themes such as marketing and management of rural tourism, etc., commonly appear in the present study in the line of previous review literatures (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Michalko, 2015; Sasu & Epuran, 2016). However, the results find new arenas of knowledge development in the rural tourism research in the recent past, for example, tourists' satisfaction, market segmentation, visitors' motivation, technological implications, etc. The major differences of the present study with the previous studies are two-folded. Methodologically, the study is significantly different from the previously available bibliometric research on rural tourism in terms of considering many new bibliometric variables such as authors' institutional affiliations, contribution of different disciplines or subjects, spatio-temporal distribution of research works, etc. This study considers rural tourism as a separate research entity to explore its knowledge creation over the last forty years which is not common in the early research. On the other

hand, this study finds out several newly emerging themes and sub-themes of the rural tourism research such as rural idyll and images, tourism potential of resources, technology and tourism, stakeholders' power and politics, etc., which are least told or even not spoken of to date.

Despite the novel contribution of the present research in exploring the knowledge creation in the rural tourism research through ages, it is not devoid of certain limitations which may be taken as an opportunity for the future bibliometric research in this domain. While considering 14 major tourism journals with high academic rankings in terms of impact factor, this study filters out the other non-tourism journals which also publish research papers on rural tourism. It keeps the analysis of contribution of multi-disciplinary journals in developing rural tourism knowledge, out of the scope of the present study. This may be further addressed in some future studies. In the selection process of the sampled articles, only those papers were selected which were published by the screened 14 tourism journals, limiting the scope to consider a larger sample size for analysis. A further research may be carried out by taking all the rural tourism articles into consideration for a more extensive bibliometric research. Nevertheless, this study does not consider the bibliometric analysis on authorship chains and its global distribution. This may be further included in the future research works.

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