

Slow Tourism as an Immersive Travel Experience: A Bibliometric Analysis

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‘Slow tourism’ is a holistic tourism concept that promotes sustainability in all aspects of a traveller’s journey. It is a promising alternative to mass tourism with which tourists, destination managers, and tourism service providers are willing to engage. In academic research, there is little consensus on what ‘slow’ means and how it is practiced or interpreted in relation to different tourism contexts, cultures, and mobilities. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the concept of slow tourism, its evolution and current scope. Moreover, the paper presents a new insight into scientific production through bibliometric analysis, not previously fully clarified in hospitality and tourism research. Data for the study is generated from English-language journal articles that were produced from a Scopus database search of specific keywords associated with slow tourism. The findings indicate that the research interests on slow tourism is growing remarkably and is related to slow travel and food, sustainability, and an immersive travel experience.

Keywords: slow tourism, sustainability, local food, immersive travel experience, bibliometric analysis



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Introduction

Tourism behaviour has changed during the COVID-19 period, resulting in the bolstering of proximity tourism. There has been an increase in ‘staycations’ or vacations close to home. Nature, rural tourism, and road trips have emerged as popular travel choices due to travel limitations and a quest for the open air. More and more travellers want to make real connections with local people, the place itself, and the local culture, and they are doing it by slowing down. They stay longer in the destination and prioritize travel quality over quantity (Wen et al., 2020). Therefore, the ‘slow travel’ experience is gaining increasing interest (UNWTO, 2021).

Slow tourism is perceived as a promising alternative to mass tourism which promotes sustainability, and with which tourists, destination managers, and tourism service providers are willing to engage (Serdane et al., 2020). It respects local cultures, history, and environments, while at the same time valuing social responsibility by celebrating diversity and the connection that a tourist gets from sharing and engaging in a space with other visitors and the host community (Jung et al., 2014).

Despite the proliferation of the relevant literature, research development on slow tourism is still in its infancy (Serdane et al., 2020). There is no consistent understanding of what constitutes slow tourism.

It can be considered as a kind of attitude regarding travel (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011) which includes use of local transportation to and from the destination and staying at one destination for a longer time to explore local culture and food. These travellers are environmentally friendly. Others see it as an alternative approach to mass tourism (Markwell et al., 2012 in Serdane et al., 2020) which brings social and economic benefits to the destination (Timms & Conway, 2012). Additionally, there are different meanings of slow tourism worldwide. In the USA, slow tourism means taking time at the destination to become familiar with it, to explore it up close. The mode of transport to the destination is not so important, whereas in Europe, slow tourism refers to travelling to closer places and with an environmentally acceptable mode of travel (Robbins & Cho, 2012 in Özdemir & Çelebi, 2018). Therefore, there is no universally accepted global definition of slow tourism.

The aim of this research is to advance previous reviews on slow tourism via a more systematic, objective, and integrated review. The paper uses a bibliometric analytical tool to identify established and emergent research clusters for the typological analysis. Such an approach was undertaken to address three main research questions:

- RQ1 *How has research on slow tourism evolved between 2011 and 2021?*
- RQ2 *What are the main themes of slow tourism research?*
- RQ3 *What are the future directions of the research in this field?*

Therefore, the aim of bibliometric analysis is to:

- Provide bibliometric information on scientific studies which were extracted from the Scopus database.
- Use the software R with bibliometrix codes and the biblioshiny online program to obtain and record the quantitative data in the different articles selected.
- Use the variable of authors per article to understand the leading authors in this research area.
- Use citations analysis and a collaboration map to understand the network of this research stream.

- Study countries to evaluate production, citations, and the network within each country.

According to the aim of the research, this paper is arranged as follows. The first part explores the literature review of slow tourism, following the methodology phases used. The third section subsequently discusses results of the bibliometric analysis via a series of visual and tabulated representations. Based on the research findings the authors elucidated research gaps and set areas for future research. The paper closes with the contribution and implications of this study.

Literature Review

The term 'slow' in the context of sustainability originates from the Slow Food movement which began in Italy in the late 1980s. Carlo Petrini, who is a father of the Slow Food movement, was against the opening of the first McDonald's restaurant in the centre of Rome in 1986 (Myhrvold et al., 2011 in Paul, 2014). He believed that everybody is entitled to tasty, healthy, and local food. Such a philosophy later spread to all aspects of urban living as a Cittaslow (Slow City) movement which aims to increase the quality of life and ensure sustainable development in cities (Nilsson et al., 2011). Today, more than 100,000 small cities are part of the Cittaslow network. Those cities satisfy major criteria grouped into seven macro-areas ranging from energy and environmental policies, quality-of-urban-life policies, policies for hospitality, awareness and training, and social cohesion. People in those cities respect tradition through the joy of slow and quiet living (Cittaslow International n.d.).

Slowness is an effective concept of slow tourism which offers an alternative to mass tourism with more attention on destination sustainability and tourist experience (Heitmann et al., 2011; Meng & Choi, 2016). In the literature several authors have acknowledged the need to differentiate between slow travel and slow tourism. The term 'slow travel' is more about slowing down the speed (Gardner, 2009 in Caffyn, 2012), taking time to explore the destination. The journey becomes a moment of relaxation, not a predetermined, imposed goal to achieve. Those travellers are seeking greater authenticity in their holidaying and require a different experience while having a moral conscience

towards the impact they bring to the destination (Conway & Timms, 2012). They usually use clean modes of transport such as biking (Dickinson et al., 2011) and walking which gives them the possibility to explore the destination slowly and immerse themselves in it (Molz, 2009 in Rabbiosi, 2021; Kato & Prozano, 2017). Doing so, travellers make real and meaningful connections with people, places, culture, food, heritage, and environment (Caffyn, 2012; Moskwa et al., 2015; Park & Lee, 2019; Walker & Lee, 2019). Therefore 'slow travel' generally refers to the tourist journey while 'slow tourism' is concerned with all tourism activities at the destination (Conway & Timms, 2012). Such tourism focuses on the full travel experience and encourages travellers to reduce their travel frequency and stay longer in a destination to immerse themselves in a destination, its culture, and people (Dickinson, 2015 in Losado & Mota, 2019) which is a central point for creation and consumption of memorable tourism experiences (Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015). When travellers are encouraged to physically (e.g., touching, smelling, walking) or mentally (i.e., thinking or watching) connect with a given event or performance, they can immerse themselves in a meaningful experience of learning and discovering it. In this sense, Lumsdon, and McGrath (2011) point out that slow tourism creates a chance to slowly explore a destination and enrich the travel experience.

The major reasons for participating in slow tourism are 'self-reflection' and 'discovery' (Oh et al., 2016; Lin, 2018). For instance, self-reflection assists travellers to become reinvigorated and recharged while discovery encourages travellers to get inspired, discover themselves, immerse themselves with their destination more deeply, and restore positive attitudes and mindsets. Time is valuable for them. Such tourism encourages independent rather than group travel. They choose destinations with the aim to stay longer in places with a slower pace, which offers opportunities to walk, cycle and enjoy the countryside (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011; Sompong et al., 2015; Serdane et al., 2020). They use local trains, local buses, bicycle or walk to explore destinations. Moreover, such transportation represents low carbon means of travel (Conway & Timms, 2012; Kato & Prozano, 2017; Chi &

Han, 2020). They opt to stay in accommodation with a host family so they can immerse themselves in the local life and learn about the local culture first-hand (Khan, 2015; Meng & Choi, 2016; Losada & Mota, 2019; Ince et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2021). They are looking for a quality over quantity experience, something totally different from trips where travellers just follow the list of all must-sees and after getting home realize that they need a holiday to recover.

Oh et al. (2016) have undertaken very interesting research on the motivation and goals of practicing slow tourism. In their opinion, slow tourism is not a counterbalance to developed mass tourism, but rather a coexisting phenomenon. Both slow and fast ways of travelling are constantly intertwined within the same tourist. They suggest that the tourism industry should not consider slow tourism as an independent, separate, and opposite phenomenon to mass tourism, but should treat it in parallel. The focus should be on a tourist behavioural approach – their motivation to travel, their value and the goals they would like to achieve during the holiday.

According to the literature review, slow tourism research has been mainly focused on the factors that affect the choice of slow tourism destination such as a traveller's sociodemographic, attitudinal and motivational characteristics (Meng & Choi, 2016; Oh et al., 2016; Lin, 2017). This study tries to define major themes, trends, authors, and countries of slow tourism research during the last decade.

Methodology

The methodology of this study includes five main phases involving (1) Study Design, (2) Data Collection, (3) Data Analysis, (4) Data Visualization, and (5) Interpretation (Cobo et al., 2011; Zupic & Čater, 2015; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Campa et al., 2021).

Study Design

The first step was to define the research aim and questions. The second step included selection of a database to develop a data set for bibliometric analysis. The Scopus database was used to search all pertinent articles for this research because it is one of the largest and highest-quality abstract and online citation databases

of peer-reviewed literature in the field of management science in general (Aksnes & Sivertsen, 2019). The search criteria were determined by the researchers to extract the collection results. First, the term 'slow' was combined with 'tourism,' and 'travel' and 'sustainable' to formulate keywords such as 'slow tourism,' and 'slow sustainable tourism,' and 'slow travel.' Those keywords were searched in three sections, including the title, abstract, and keywords. In terms of document types, only full-length journal articles in English were collected (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruiz-Navarro, 2004). Conference papers, reviews, and reports were excluded. The timeline was selected (2011–2021), keeping in mind that the concept was operationalized during the 2010s (Walker et al., 2021). The second-round search was conducted to refine the collection results and check the selected articles.

Data Collection

In the first round, 743 relevant publications were identified. After applying the research criteria such as time frame, publication type, and language, the data set included 304 publications. The authors read the title and the abstract of those publications displayed in the search results. The database was then downloaded in Bibtex format and uploaded in the Bibliometrix R package which is an open-source tool for quantitative research in bibliometrics. After the upload, the R Studio software version 3.0 was used to eliminate duplicates and create a unified file. After deleting all duplicates and selecting relevant publications from the tourism and hospitality field, the final dataset included 168 publications.

Data Analysis and Visualization

In this phase, the software R and biblioshiny web interface for bibliometrix were used to create descriptive bibliometric analysis and explore relationships within the research, such as keywords' co-occurrence and co-citation networks. The results from the analysis are visually presented in the tables and graphs.

Interpretation

Finally, data has been interpreted. The analysis of the results starts with the essential description of the main

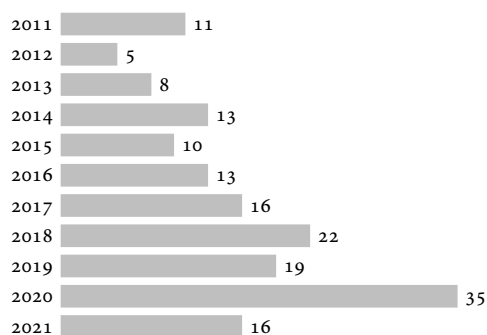


Figure 1 Annual Scientific Production – 'Slow Tourism'

bibliometrics statistics which present the following details: type of document, annual scientific production, scientific sources, source growth, number of articles per author, author's keywords, articles' citation, country's production, country's citation, country collaboration map, and country collaboration network.

Findings

Screening of available research literature reveals that in the field of slow tourism research, altogether, 368 authors contributed 168 research publications to the literature corpus from 2011–2021. The most significant increase in publication occurred in 2020, with a total of 35 articles (21%) while the lowest productivity was in 2012 (3%) (Figure 1).

Those articles have been published in 71 sources, particularly in scientific journals. The number of 'Keywords Plus' is 320 and represent words or phrases that frequently appear in the titles of an article's references, but do not appear in the title of the article itself. Out of these 168 research publications, single-authored documents constitute about 23%, while the remaining 77% of the articles were multi-authored, indicating the popularity of the collaborative nature of research among authors in the field of slow tourism. Therefore, the collaboration index (C1), which is designed as Total Authors of Multi-Authored Articles, is 2.56 authors per document. Table 1 presents a detailed characterization of the database.

Regarding the journals' productivity, the analysis is based on a ranking of the top ten journals in the economy and business management field from the Scopus

Table 1 Initial Search Results on ‘Slow Tourism’ Topic for the Period 2011–2021

Main information about data	Search Result (Number)*
Documents (articles)	168
Sources (journals)	71
Period	2011–2021
Average citations per documents	14.77
Keywords Plus (ID)	320
Author’s Keywords (DE)	700
Authors	368
Authors of single-authored documents	38
Authors of multi-authored documents	330
Collaboration Index (CI)	2.56

Notes *Search results (number) are from the Scopus database.

Table 2 Top 10 Journals on ‘Slow Tourism’ Topic in the Scopus Database from 2011–2021

Sources	Articles
<i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i>	27
<i>Tourism Geographies</i>	10
<i>African Journal of Hospitality Tourism and Leisure</i>	7
<i>Tourism Management</i>	7
<i>Tourism Recreation Research</i>	7
<i>Tourism Management Perspectives</i>	6
<i>Tourism Planning and Development</i>	6
<i>Current Issues in Tourism</i>	5
<i>Journal of Destination Marketing and Management</i>	4

database. From Table 2 it is evident that one journal stands out in terms of the number of articles: *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* with 27 articles, with *Tourism Geographies* following with 10 articles and others below that number. Furthermore, the table makes visible the fact that all journals deal with either tourism or hospitality services.

The most prominently cited publication on slow tourism is ‘Developing a Conceptual Framework for Slow Travel: A Grounded Theory Approach’ authored by Lumsdon and McGrath and published in 2011. In their framework they identify four key features

Table 3 The Top 10 Most-Cited Papers in the Journals between 2011 and 2021

Authors, Year	Journal	Total Citations*
Lumsdon and McGrath (2011)	<i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i>	109
Nilsson et al. (2011)	<i>Current Issues in Tourism</i>	33
Ekinci (2014)	<i>Tourism Management</i>	32
Timms and Conway (2012)	<i>Tourism Geographies</i>	28
Moskwa et al. (2015)	<i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i>	22
Ho et al. Chen (2015)	<i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i>	19
Adeyinka-Ojo & Khoo-Lattimore (2013)	<i>Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes</i>	16
Lin (2017)	<i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i>	15
Prezenza et al. (2015)	<i>Tourism Planning and Development</i>	15
Kato and Prozano (2017)	<i>Tourism Management Perspectives</i>	14

Notes * Number of citations is based on Scopus database.

that together make up the core components of a slow travel holiday: slowness and the value of time; locality and activities at the destination; mode of transport and travel experience; environmental consciousness, with slowness having a pivotal role. Their concept of slow tourism has received a total of 109 citations. The following most-cited study is ‘CittàSlow Eco-gastronomic Heritage as a Tool for Destination Development’ with 33 citations, published in *Current Issues in Tourism* (Nilsson et al., 2011). The authors emphasized that slow tourism could assist destinations in quality offerings and that the CittàSlow concept has an indirect potential for tourism development. Additionally, Timms and Conway (2012), with 28 citations, point out that slow tourism is an alternative model to mass tourism since it encompasses the environmental sustainability concerns of ecotourism, addresses the social and cultural sustainability interests of community-based tourism and advances the economic sustainability of a destination. Table 3 presents



Figure 2 World-Cloud Analysis of Research Literature

the top ten most-cited influential publications in the journals from the Scopus database.

According to the analysis from biblioshiny, the main keywords that are used frequently in the field of slow tourism research are ‘sustainability,’ ‘tourism’ and ‘slow travel,’ following ‘slow food,’ ‘tourist experience’ and ‘slow adventure.’ This information is essential to determine the research trends and fields in slow tourism that can be interesting as research areas. To confirm this, a world cloud analysis was adopted (Figure 2). Such analysis visually represents text data, where the size of a particular word can visualize the frequency and its assigned importance by the researchers. The larger the size of a word in the word cloud the greater the number of times that word is used in the corpus. Analysis of the text confirms that ‘slow travel’ is usually used with ‘sustainability’ and ‘tourist experience.’ Moreover, the analysis indicates that ‘tourism development’ and ‘slow food’ are more popular than the word ‘Covid-19.’

Furthermore, ‘slow tourism,’ ‘slow travel’ and ‘slow food’ were central keywords in 2011 while the keywords ‘sustainability’ and ‘alternative tourism’ have evolved since 2015, which indicates their linkage. The development trend of keywords from 2011 to 2021 is visualized on the map (Table 4).

To present how frequently these keywords words have been used together in the literature, a co-occurrence analysis of keywords is made. The larger the size of the specific frame the greater the repetition of that keyword in the literature. Figure 3 shows the

Table 4 Development Trend of Keywords between 2011 and 2021

Year	Slow tourism	Sustainable tourism	Slow food	Sustainability	Slow travel	Sustainable dev.	Tourism	Alternative tourism	Caribbean	Slow movement
2011	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
2012	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
2013	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
2014	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0
2015	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2016	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2017	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
2018	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
2019	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
2020	4	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
2021	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0

result of the co-occurrence analysis of keywords. A close look at the co-occurrence map suggests that ‘slow tourism,’ ‘sustainable tourism,’ and ‘slow food,’ ‘travel experience,’ and ‘slowness’ are some of the keywords of slow tourism literature which have been used most frequently. The distance between two terms is an indication of how commonly they have been used together in a journal article. It can be observed that closely situated terms have been used more regularly in a higher number of research articles than two words which are located relatively farther on the map. ‘Tourism marketing’ is linked to ‘sustainable tourism’ and ‘small island.’ The research findings also indicate that ‘travel experience’ and ‘slowness’ are placed side by side, suggesting that they are more frequently used in research papers. On the other hand, ‘travel experience’ and ‘alternative tourism’ are located at a relatively greater distance on the map, which suggests that these words have appeared in a research paper less frequently. The appearance of the word ‘the Caribbean’ is suggestive of the frequency of location of slow tourism research.

To detect relationships between articles, the authors used co-citation network analysis. This type



Figure 3 Co-Occurrence of Keywords along with ‘Slow Tourism’

of analysis studies the frequency of cases when two (or more) sources have been cited in the third paper, which has a similar timeline of publications. The size of the frame of a node indicates the volume of research work on slow tourism published by that author. Relative distance in the map is an indication of the frequency with which a third common paper has cited these two authors (or journals), so two closely situated authors (or periodicals) have been co-cited more often.

The analysis of this study clustered main topics and their authors in two different colours (red and blue). The first cluster, the red one, emphasizes topics written by Dickinson et al. (2011), Lumsdon, and McGrath (2011), and Fullagar et al. (2012). These authors are focused on similar themes; therefore they are cited together more frequently (Figure 4). Those topics are related to slowness, holiday duration, nearby locations, quality tourism experience and conscious decision-making. Slowness means spending more time at the destination and gaining a quality tourism experience. Special attention is given to people and place engagement. They describe those travellers as environmentally conscious tourists who prefer buses, coaches, and trains as low carbon dioxide vehicles while travelling. In their research they cited earlier research written by Matos (2004) who pointed out that mountain regions should develop slow tourism and offer a wider range of tourist products to protect the natural environment.

The second cluster of this study is the blue one and represents the concept of Slow Food and Slow City movement described by Hall (2012) and Nilsson et

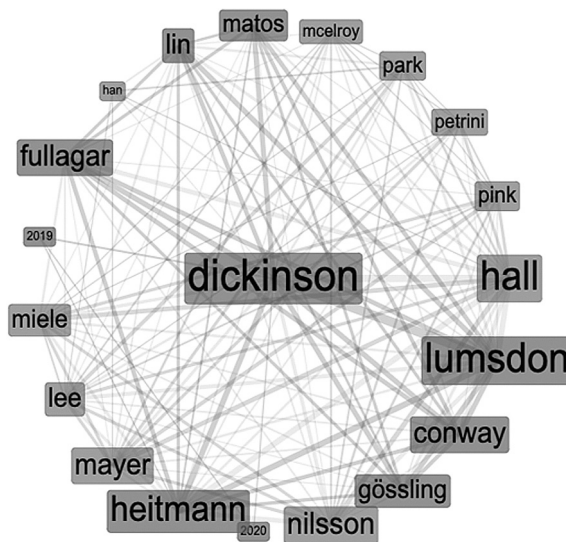


Figure 4 Co-Citation Network Analysis

Table 5 Distribution of Research Regions

Region	<i>f</i>	Region	<i>f</i>
UK	10	Germany	3
China	8	Poland	3
Australia	7	Romania	3
Italy	7	Thailand	3
Turkey	7	USA	3
Portugal	6	Malaysia	2
South korea	6	Spain	1
Japan	4	Sweden	1

al. (2011) who co-cited Mayer and Knox from 2006. Those authors recommend the concept of Slow Cities (Cittaslow) as a perfect model for local sustainable development in small towns. Such places are developed within the framework of a sustainable economic model, provide solutions to infrastructure, pollution, and traffic problems, mobilize the local dynamics of the city, and offer visitors the unique historical context of a town. Furthermore, those places provide an opportunity to each visitor to enjoy local culture, food, and hospitality.

The following section analyses the geographical development of publishing about the ‘slow tourism’ topic. The bibliometric analysis indicates that the UK



Figure 5 Collaboration of Countries/Regions

(74) and China (41) are some of the highest-contributing countries in slow tourism literature as the highest number of research articles originate from these countries (Table 5). Furthermore, the map (Figure 5) shows that intercountry collaboration exists and the blue colour on the map represents the existence of research networks with other nations. What can be noticed from the map is that the countries with a major number of publications on slow tourism are the ones with higher partnership rates, meaning that they have shared information and helped each other to find scientific, relevant results. The highest intercountry collaboration exists between China and Australia.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research is the first of its kind to use a bibliometric method to analyse research trends on slow tourism topics from the Scopus database. The main contribution of this paper is threefold: to present research trends on slow tourism during the last decade, to identify the most productive journals and most cited authors and, moreover, to emphasize major key words and themes which are currently evolving on slow tourism research. Those themes can be used as a potential area for future research.

According to the analysis of annual scientific production on slow tourism research during the last decade, it is evident that the highest number of publications occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic period, 2020 – 2021 (Figure 1). Slow tourism is described

as a promising alternative to mass tourism which promotes sustainability, while tourists, destination managers, and tourism service providers are willing to engage with it (Serdane et al., 2020). Such tourism respects local cultures, history, and environments, while at the same time valuing social responsibility by celebrating diversity and the connection that a tourist gets from sharing and engaging in a space with other visitors and the host community (Jung et al., 2014). In this sense, the most-cited paper written by Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) points that slow tourism is a way in which tourists approach their travel. Those travellers want to enjoy and slowly explore a destination. They want to interact with local people and be part of their daily tasks. Moreover, they wish to taste their food and enjoy the local atmosphere in a typical restaurant. Time, as a slowness, is important for them since they can immerse themselves in different social and cultural aspects of the local lifestyle (Sun & Lin, 2018) which leads to a more fulfilling and memorable holiday (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018 in Walker et al. 2021).

Furthermore, the research reveals that main themes of slow tourism are related to slow travel and food, sustainability, and the travel experience. Slow tourism activities, such as food experience (local and traditional diet) or slow-mode experience (public transport, walking or cycling) provides a more detailed and in-depth experience. In such ways, tourists have a chance to immerse themselves in a destination and

achieve an authentic experience. These results are important for destination managers, policymakers, and other significant stakeholders to design strategies that would create immersive travel experiences and make a positive impact on a destination. Moreover, analysis of co-occurrence of keywords points out that travel experience and tourism marketing are very thinly studied and therefore need the attention of researchers and practitioners to further explore it.

The analysis finds that the journals most involved in the research area are *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *Tourism Geographies*, *African Journal of Hospitality Tourism and Leisure*, *Current Issues in Tourism*, and *Tourism Management*. These journals have the highest number of articles related to slow tourism research. In addition, the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* is the journal which has the article with the most-cited paper, the one written by Lumsdon and McGrath (2011).

Regarding the geographical development of slow tourism research, most of the articles originate from the UK, China, and Australia, and there is a country collaboration between China and Australia. In Europe, Italy and Portugal have the highest number of research papers on the slow tourism topic, while the Third World countries lack in the number of research papers. Future research should explore the concept of slow tourism in South America, India, and New Zealand and compare it with the European concept.

This research paper has several limitations. First, this study attempted to provide a holistic view of slow tourism research between 2011 and 2021; however, research on slow tourism in hospitality and tourism started in the early 2000s (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011). Thus, future research may compare the contribution of regions and researchers over longitudinal studies; one from 2000–2010 and the second from 2011–2021. Second, the current research is limited to the Scopus database and reviewed only articles in journals in English. Therefore, other databases may be included in future research such as Emerald, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest as well as publications from major conferences, books, book chapters, and dissertations to explore slow tourism and the link to sustainability and a tourism immersive experience. Noteworthy is that a qualitative and mixed research method-

ology should contribute to the advancement of slow tourism research, especially in the Third World countries where there is a lack of such studies. Such research would provide guidelines for development of a slow and sustainable tourism model in their destinations. Third, while researchers usually cite their own work to inform readers about their prior work, the self-citations may affect the quality of the reported results in citation analysis. Hence, this creates an opportunity for future research to analyse self-citations as a metric to evaluate the impact of leading researchers in the field.

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