

Chapter 6

Smart and Sustainable Tourism Destinations: A Bibliometric Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Policymakers and business practitioners increasingly recognize the importance of sustainability in the development of smart tourism destinations, which require clear directions and specific guidelines. The authors used the Bibliometrix R-package and VOS Viewer software to perform a bibliometric analysis of 59 articles between 1900-2020 retrieved from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection database. They compiled a bibliographic coupling, identified the key authors, journals, documents, and the most relevant universities. The findings detail four clusters: (1) smart tourism, (2) sustainable tourism, (3) technology, and (4) smart specialization. This work contributes to a better understanding of the concepts and aspires to provide useful information for those academics and destination marketing organizations (DMOs) attempting to analyze and deepen their knowledge within this research field. Simultaneously, it also aims to provide insights concerning the future development of sustainability and smart tourism in the social sciences' academic literature.

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INTRODUCTION

Previously to the current pandemic context of COVID-19, tourism was growing steadily and for some countries, it was one of the main sources of GDP. So, it has become one of the most important sectors worldwide being connected with social and economic development. To promote a sustainable development in the tourism sector a great effort has been made in technology and innovation, with consequences at the organization level and the new consumer-tourist demands (Sigalat-Signes, Calvo-Palomares, Roig-Merino, & García-Adán, 2020). Tourism and hospitality have faced several changes and digitalization is one of the most important ones. Digital innovations and technological devices influence the development of several industries such as information and communications technologies (ICT), manufacturing, and service industries. Tourism and hospitality depend on the cooperation of several stakeholders and the benefits of digital solutions allowed to better respond to consumer demands and remain competitive in a rapidly changing market (Zsarnoczky, 2018). In the last years, we testified the proliferation of web and social platforms which, in turn, contributed to the notion of an individual's life in a smart environment (Zeng, Tim, Yu, & Liu, 2020). As Ismagilova, Hughes, Dwivedi, and Raman (2019) suggest, on one hand, technology has promoted the advance of social, environmental, economic and cultural progress. However, on the other, smart cities should be capable of supporting these dimensions with resource to technology. According to López de Ávila (2015, p. 32) a smart city is defined as a “tourism-oriented and innovative space accessible to all, which is consolidated on a cutting-edge technological infrastructure, which must guarantee sustainable territorial development while facilitating visitor interaction and integration with the environment, increasing the quality of their experience in the destination and the quality of life of the residents”. The concept of a smart city underlies the notion of an intelligent tourist destination (Ivars-Baidal, Celdrán-Bernabeu, Mazón, & Perles-Ivars, 2019), focusing on tourism development as the economic driving force and being called smart tourism destinations. Big Data Analytics (BDA), new trends in tourism, cloud-based booking sites, and new forms for sharing experiences via digital platforms, opened a window for special tailor-made offers (Vecchio, Mele, Ndou, & Secundo, 2018), which go beyond mass tourism. Smart tourism depends on the adoption of these technologies that enable to collect and analyze a vast amount of data and create personalized, or hyper-personalized, experiences. More and more, consumers are looking for a touristic and hospitality experience based on a personalized offer. Destinations that can provide great personal travel experiences to tourists, increase their success, and this can be done through smart tourism destination. Additionally, today there is a pronounced need for the development of more sustainable economic activities. One of the purposes of a smart tourism destination consists of the creation of a smart experience, described as an experience facilitated by technologies, and improved by personalization (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). This implies the interconnection between communities, service providers, and tourists through dynamic platforms. Within smart tourism destination technology plays a major role since it is used to support tourist value and experience co-creation, and at the same time, create wealth for the organisations and destinations (Boes, Buhalis, & Inversini, 2015). Based on information from tourist's surrounding contexts, marketers can influence consumer's decision-making process, by promoting the interaction between the consumer and the supplier (e.g., the peer-to-peer communication used in Airbnb and Uber) (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015).

To address the growth academic importance of smart tourism destination in the last six years, this research conducted a bibliometric analysis to explore trends and patterns in the tourism field. Results indicate that the sustainability approach or concern to smart tourism is, in fact, very recent, with an

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