



eISSN : 2687-3737



Political ecology of tourism: A bibliometric analysis

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ABSTRACT

The tourism sector significantly impacts global environmental change and resource management. The social and economic aspects of tourism are also worthy of examination from the political ecology perspective. In this context, there is a growing need for academic studies examining tourism's environmental, social, and economic components. This study is conducted to meet this need and provide an in-depth analysis of the works on political ecology in tourism. This research aims to assess scholarly investigations within the tourism domain employing a political ecology framework, utilizing bibliometric analysis as the methodological approach. Within this scope, publications in the literature have been quantitatively examined, and the studies' prevalence, interactions, and developmental trends have been revealed. The WoS database identified 192 studies published between 1998 and 2023 on the subject. The analysis of leading journals, authors, countries, and keywords related to the topic indicates the following: There has been a noteworthy surge in the number of scholarly inquiries about political ecology within the scientific realm associated with tourism. In addition, the leading country on the subject is the United States. Finally, conservation and ecotourism become the main focal points of studies on political ecology. In summary, it is anticipated that this study will provide a substantial contribution to the existing literature in the domain of political ecology within the context of tourism, offering guidance for researchers in the design and execution of subsequent studies.

KEYWORDS

Political ecology, Tourism, Bibliometric analysis

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Received 17.02.2024; Received in revised form 26.06.2024; Accepted 29.06.2024

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e-ISSN: 2687 - 3737 / © 2021 The Authors. Published by Anadolu University

<https://doi.org/10.48119/toleho.1438681>

INTRODUCTION

With the increasing complexity of global dynamics and diverse travel demands, nature and environmental issues have become a focal point of academic research. While the political ecology approach in tourism studies is relatively new, it is consistently and strongly connected to tourism and political ecology (Scruggs et al., 2023). As seen in many scientific research areas, environmental topics such as the environment, climate crisis, and sustainability also take center stage in tourism studies. In this context, the political ecology theory can be highly beneficial for examining the relationship between environmental issues and tourism. Studies conducted within the political ecology framework aim to understand tourism's ecological, social, and political interactions. As a theory, political ecology proves helpful in exploring relationships among various layers of the tourism industry, addressing sustainability challenges, and examining socio-political interactions. Additionally, political ecology provides a theoretical framework for comprehending the complex structure of the tourism industry.

Recently, bibliometric analyses, widely used in scientific research, have proven beneficial for revealing the key trends and developments in the scientific literature related to tourism and political ecology. However, upon examining national and international scientific literature, it is discerned that no academic publications containing bibliometric analyses focused on publications related to the political ecology of tourism. In light of this existing gap in the literature, the primary objective of this study is to conduct a numerical and conceptual analysis of existing academic publications on the political ecology of tourism. Considering the limited number of studies from the political ecology perspective in tourism literature, it is envisaged that this study will add meaningful insights to guiding future research for researchers. The subsequent section of the research presents a conceptual framework for the relationship between political ecology and tourism, followed by sections on the methodology, analyses, findings, and conclusions in the subsequent parts of the study.

POLITICAL ECOLOGY AND TOURISM RELATIONSHIP

Political ecology is an approach developed to examine local and international human-environment interaction in connection with Third World countries' economic development. It combines various disciplines and focuses on the relative power issues of different social actors in accessing and managing natural resources. Political ecology, however, also concentrates on the relative power issues that various social actors have in accessing and managing natural resources (Stonich, 1998). In the tourism industry, political ecology provides a critical approach to understanding the relationship between various power structures and environmental change, shedding light on tourism's challenges in human-induced environmental change (Mostafanezhad and Norum, 2019). In this context, it is possible to say that political ecology serves as a significant approach to illuminating social relationships and power dynamics existing in the tourism industry (Douglas, 2014) and socio-ecological transformations (Jönsson, 2016). In summary, political ecology, as a framework for research, provides a valuable perspective for the reassessment of the environment in tourism concerning topics such as environmental degradation and marginalization, conservation and control, environmental conflicts and exclusion, and political objects and actors (Kervankiran et al., 2022; Mostafanezhad et al., 2016).

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of tourism as a scientific research field, various tourism-related issues have been addressed through the political ecology approach in the international scientific literature. Stoddart and Graham (2017) utilized a political ecology perspective to examine discourses questioning the harmony between oil and tourism by highlighting the conflict between offshore oil exploration and tourism through a case study. Lema (2017) employed political ecology theory to explain how neoliberalism, legal regulations, and policy changes have shaped tourism practices over time and spatially. The study concluded that political instability, institutional power struggles within conflicts, and varying interests contribute to unsustainable tourism practices and trends. In this context, it can be asserted that political ecology has enhanced our comprehension of the importance of revisiting tourism policies and laws. The relationship between tourism and water is also among the issues addressed from a political ecology perspective (Carter, 2023; Cole, 2012). Cole (2012) emphasizes the relationship

between tourism and water, illustrating how social forces can lead to unfair and unsustainable water distribution. Carter (2023), on the other hand, utilizes the political ecology approach to present the unequal socio-environmental impacts resulting from power asymmetry among stakeholders. Furthermore, conflicts such as transforming coastal areas into golf courses in the context of the political nature of environmental transformation in tourism and violations of local plans are also scrutinized within the confines of the theoretical framework of political ecology (Jönsson, 2016). Marcinek and Hunt (2019) characterize tourism as a robust global connector that impacts social and environmental well-being. Using ethnographic examples, they utilize the political ecology approach to explain how global discourses on biodiversity conservation and social development are discussed and positioned at the local level to promote tourism.

When examining the national literature, it is discernible that only one study adopted the political ecology approach in scientific research related to tourism. Kervankiran and colleagues (2022) applied the political ecology approach to analyze Turkey's tourism policies and plans, evaluating the everyday implications of decisions related to tourism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In recent years, there has been increasing scholarly attention to conducting systematic literature reviews in research areas, facilitated by the availability of online databases and the development of tools capable of practical analysis. Examining various publications on a subject plays a crucial role in revealing the fundamental thought structures within that subject. In this regard, it can be said that bibliometric analyses help depict the overall status of a subject or research area and illustrate communication among researchers. Bibliometric analysis, based on statistical techniques, provides the opportunity to conduct both primary analyses (such as research tables by years, by journals, etc.) and advanced analyses (such as co-citations, co-authorship, etc.) for documents within the field of interest (Aria et al., 2020).

The evolution of tourism as a discipline has led to increased scientific publications, publishers, and academic institutions. This growth has highlighted the need to understand, interpret, and summarize scientific knowledge in tourism. Recently, the bibliometric analysis method, used to examine trends in a specific research area, has gained significant interest in tourism science. This method analyzes trends, interactions, and developments in the scientific literature using numerical data from publications. Bibliometric analysis can afford researchers a valuable perspective for assessing the scope of research within the field of tourism and identifying significant topics (Güzeller and Çeliker, 2018). In this context, conducting a bibliometric study on the topic is considered a good start to introduce the widely adopted political ecology approach in the international literature to the national literature. The study utilizes the bibliometric analysis method to examine the development history of studies on political ecology within tourism research in terms of keywords, author networks, and country contributions. The bibliometric analysis methodology constitutes a widely used analytical tool that enables the quantitative analysis of scientific literature published in a specific discipline. It can reveal the current distribution of research in the field and identify research trends. Additionally, visual analyses can graphically present information about the literature, making it easier to summarize aspects such as the number of published works, research focuses, research methods, author distributions, etc., in a bibliometric manner (Han et al., 2021).

Bibliometric analysis has emerged as a crucial tool for measuring the scientific output of various elements in any research field, such as studies, authors, keywords, journals, institutions, and countries. It allows researchers to examine a given field's intellectual, social, and conceptual structure and understand how these components and their interactions evolve over time. (Öztürk & Gürler, 2022). Citation analysis, co-citation analysis, reference matching, co-authorship analysis, and co-word analysis are among the primary analytical techniques used in bibliometric analysis (Bağış, 2022).

Moreover, bibliometric studies can provide scientifically sound foundations to gain a general understanding of the field, identify knowledge gaps, and propose new research ideas (Donthu et al., 2021).

Data Collection Process

The Web of Science (WoS) database is extensively utilized and considered one of the foremost choices for conducting bibliometric analyses in scientific research (Han et al., 2021). Consequently, inquiries were executed within the confines of the Web of Science (WoS) database between December 30, 2023, and January 20, 2024, to access studies on “political ecology and tourism.” Figure 1 illustrates the literature search process for the included studies.

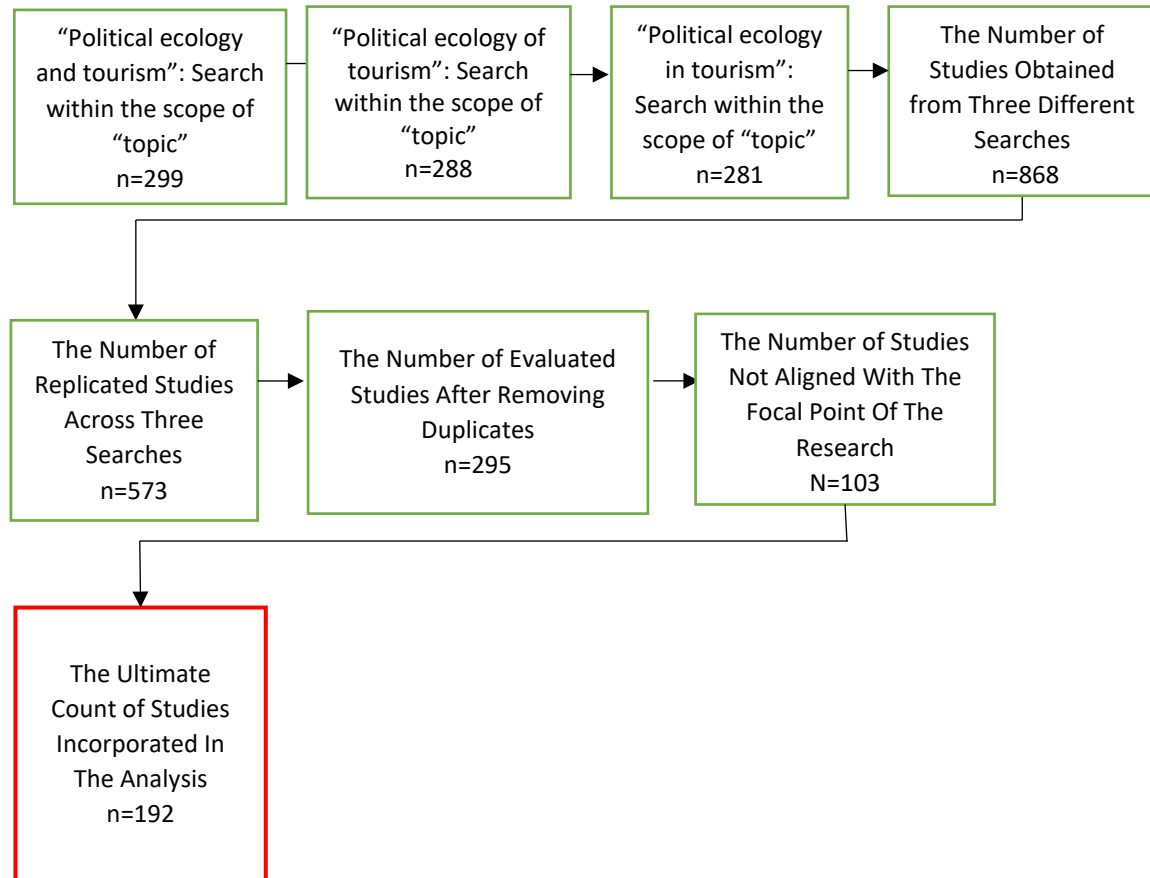


Figure 1. Literature Review Process on the Relevant Topic

During the search process, searches were conducted under the “topic” scope as “political ecology and tourism,” “political ecology in tourism,” and “political ecology of tourism.” The “topic” section search aimed to access more relevant articles. To partially prevent irrelevant results from appearing in the search and focus solely on studies related to political ecology in tourism, terms were searched as whole phrases such as “political ecology in tourism,” “political ecology of tourism,” and “political ecology and tourism.”

Out of the 868 studies obtained from three different searches, duplicates and studies unrelated to the research focus were excluded, resulting in 192 studies included in the analysis. The analyses were conducted using Microsoft Office Excel, VosViewer, and RStudio Bibliometrix programs.

FINDINGS

The distribution of the included studies in the analysis, based on publication years, resulting from searches conducted on the Web of Science database for studies on “Tourism and Political Ecology,” is presented in Figure 2.

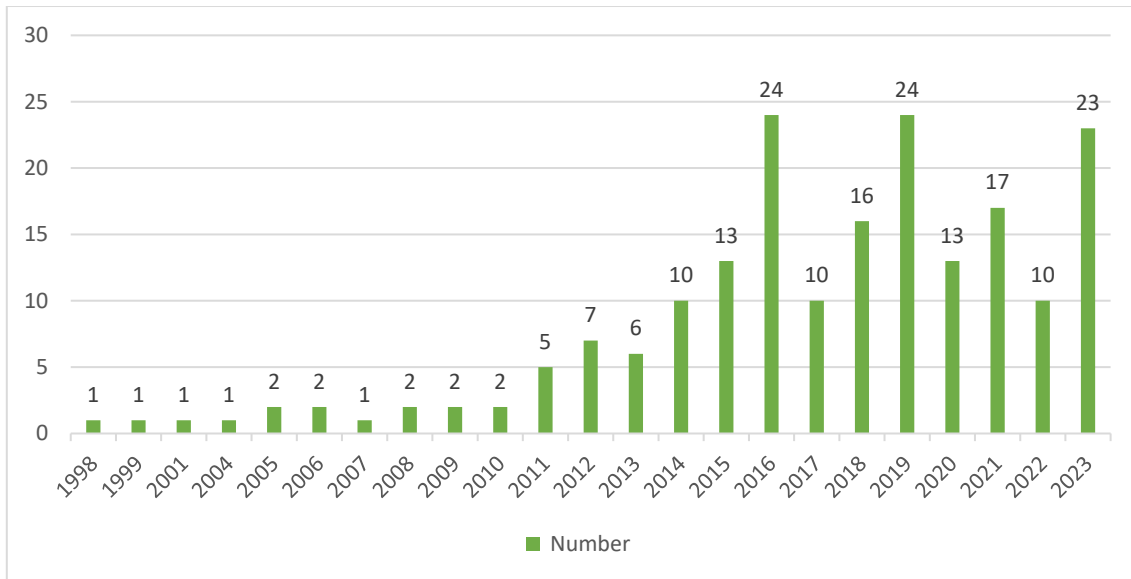


Figure 2. The Evolution of Publications on the Political Ecology of Tourism Over the Years

As illustrated in the graph depicting the distribution of studies by publication years on the topic of “tourism and political ecology,” it is discerned that scholarly research on this subject emerged in 1998. A significant surge in the number of studies is particularly notable after 2011, and post-2014, the count of articles surpasses 10. The years 2016 (24), 2019 (24), and 2023 (23) are notably the years with the highest volume of publications on the subject (Figure 2).

Table 1 provides the distribution of studies based on publication types. All publication types were included in the search process. This approach was chosen because political ecology represents a relatively new area of inquiry within the field of tourism, necessitating a thorough literature review to capture the full scope of existing research.

Among the 192 studies included in the analysis, it is observed that 81.77% are classified as articles, 5.69% as conference papers, and 4.66% as reviews.

Table 1. Distribution of Studies by Publication Type

Publication Type	n	%
Article	157	81,77
Conference paper	11	5,69
Both the article and conference paper	2	1,03
Review	9	4,66
Book Summary	5	2,59
Both the review and book chapter	1	0,51
Both the book chapter and article	5	2,59
Editorial article	2	1,03
Total	192	100

The analysis of the 192 studies was conducted to identify the academic journals where the studies were disseminated using the RStudio Bibliometrix program. The results are illustrated in Figure 3.

The Journal of Sustainable Tourism stands out as the most prolific journal, contributing 22 studies. Annals of Tourism follows it with ten studies, Tourism Geographies with eight studies, Geoforum with seven studies, and the Journal of Political Ecology with five studies.

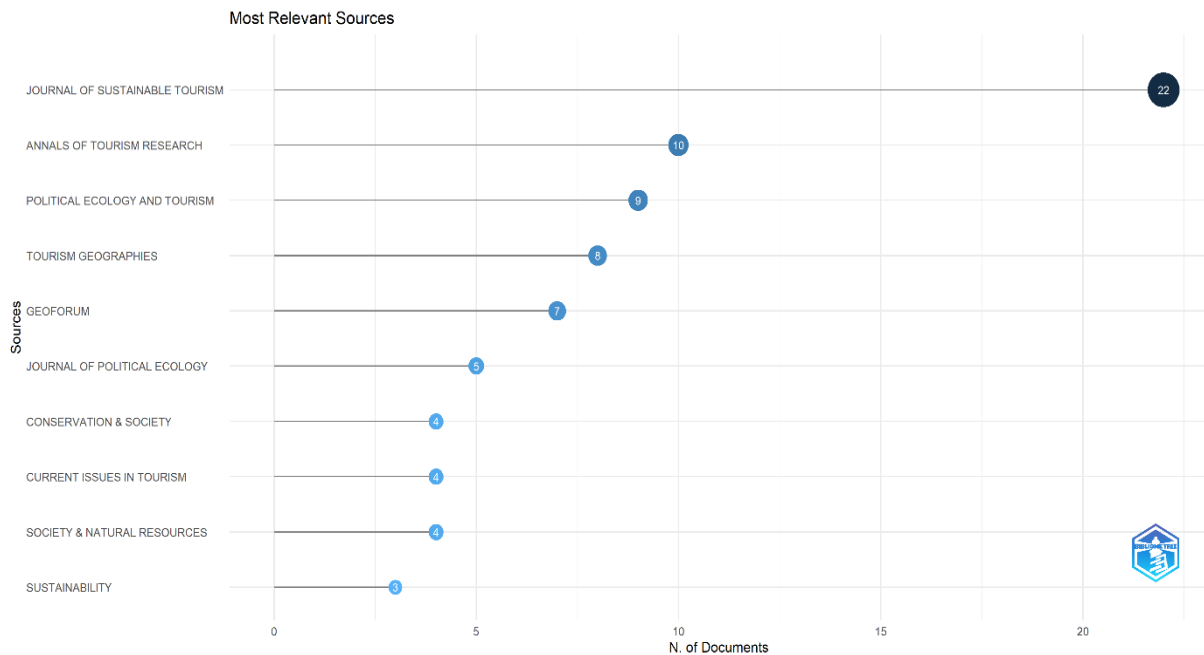


Figure 3. Distribution of publications according to academic journals

Table 2, Figure 4, and Figure 5 yield insights into the keywords employed in the investigated studies on “tourism and political ecology” and were derived from the analysis of the keywords from publications in the form of articles, conference papers, and studies that are both articles and conference papers.

Table 2.

Distribution of Keywords

English	Frequency of Repetition	%
political ecology	63	9,63
tourism	31	4,74
ecotourism	17	2,59
conservation	16	2,44
sustainability	9	1,37
sustainable tourism	9	1,37
tourism development	9	1,37
water	8	1,22
gender	7	1,07
protected areas	7	1,07
neoliberalism	6	0,91
fisheries	5	0,76
governance	5	0,76
nature	5	0,76
Others	457	69,87
Total	654	100

Examining studies within the research framework revealed the utilization of 654 keywords. Keywords with a recurrence of 5 or more are presented in Table 2. The 457 words occurring with a frequency below five in the studies have been categorized under “others” (Table 2). The visual map illustrating the conceptual coherence of the keywords, as depicted in Figure 3, was generated utilizing the VosViewer (Figure 4 (a)) and RStudio Bibliometrix (Figure 4 (b))

programs. While generating the visual map (Figure 4 (a)), 574 keywords, which demonstrated the highest connectivity, were included in the analysis.

The conceptual coherence of the studies incorporated into the analysis was mapped based on author keywords (Figure 4 (a)). The sizes of the circles in the visualization correspond to the frequency of occurrence of each keyword. Larger circles indicate higher frequencies, reflecting the prominence of the respective terms (Nunen et al., 2018). The keywords employed most frequently in the studies are found to occupy the top four positions. These terms are, in order, “political ecology” (63), “tourism” (31), “ecotourism” (17), and “conservation” (16) (Table 2). Notably, these findings align with the outcomes derived from the visual map generated by the VOSviewer program (Figure 4 (a)) and the word cloud design of keywords produced using the RStudio Bibliometrix program (Figure 5). The extensive circles within signify that the key terms are more prevalently referenced in the studies encompassed by the examination of tourism and political ecology (Figure 4 (a)). In this context, it can be affirmed that the terms “political ecology,” “tourism,” “ecotourism,” and “conservation” are utilized more frequently in studies about the subject.

In Figure 4 (b), a visual network map created by including keywords plus in the RStudio Bibliometrix program is presented. Upon closer examination of Figure 4 (b), it is discernible that two primary clusters of terms exist. In the red cluster, the term “political ecology” predominates, while in the blue cluster, the term “tourism” holds prominence.

In the visual map depicting the density of additional keywords put forth in Figure 4 (b), it is observable that the term “political ecology” is closely associated with the term “management” in the same cluster. Similarly, the term “tourism” is more interconnected with the terms “conservation” and “ecotourism” in the same cluster.

In this context, it can be posited that the subject of “political ecology of tourism” is closely connected with the themes of management, ecotourism, and conservation. The list of keywords is important for representing the subject and understanding the trends within the subject. It is widely used as a tool in bibliometric analyses to document different topics (Ellegaard and Wallin, 2015).



Figure 5. Word Cloud Design Created from Keywords

To discern the contemporary trends in the progression of political ecology in tourism, the results of the analysis conducted through author keywords in the RStudio Bibliometrix program are delineated in Figure 6. During the analysis, the criterion of a keyword having a recurrence frequency of at least 5 and a count of 10 keywords per year was applied.

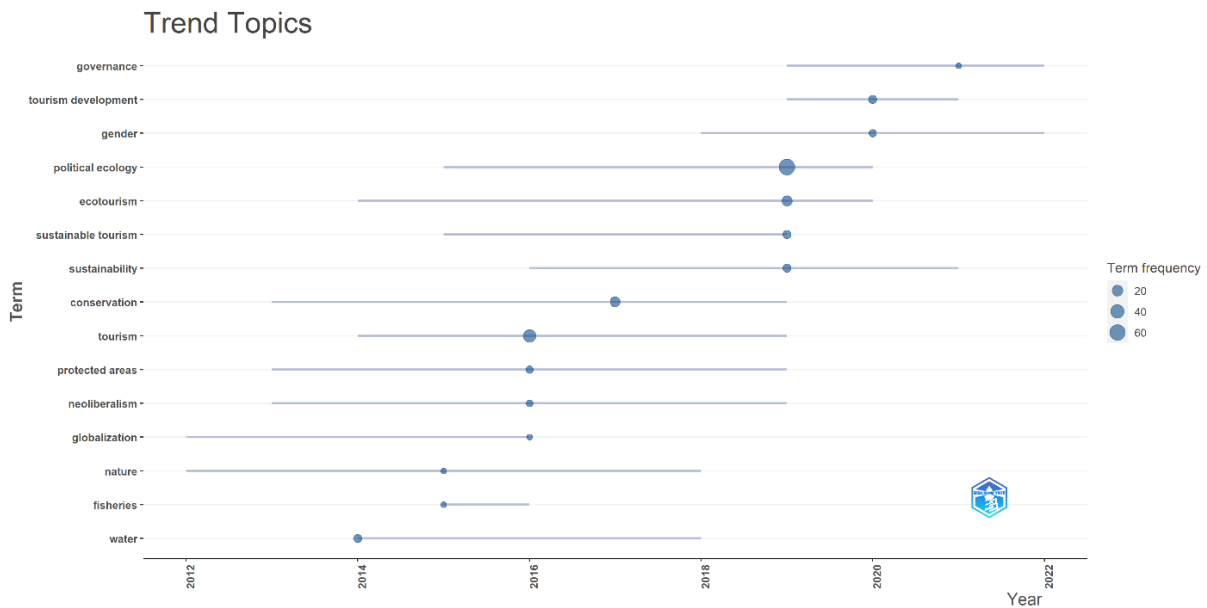


Figure 6. Evolution of Key Trends in the Subject Over the Years

Analyzing the progression of the subject based on the density levels of keywords (Figure 6), it becomes evident that in 2014, the term “water” was prominent. In 2016, the focus shifted towards terms like globalization, neoliberalism, protected areas, and tourism. The year 2017 emphasized “conservation,” while 2019 saw an emphasis on terms such as sustainability, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, and political ecology. In 2020, the discourse included gender and tourism development, and by 2021, the vocabulary expanded to include terms related to governance. The multifaceted exploration of various topics within the realm of “Political Ecology of Tourism” can be attributed to the complex nature of tourism as a research domain and the comprehensive framework provided by political ecology as a theory.

The geographical distribution of countries contributing to publications related to the topic “Tourism and Political Ecology” with two or more contributions is presented in Figure 7 in a map format.

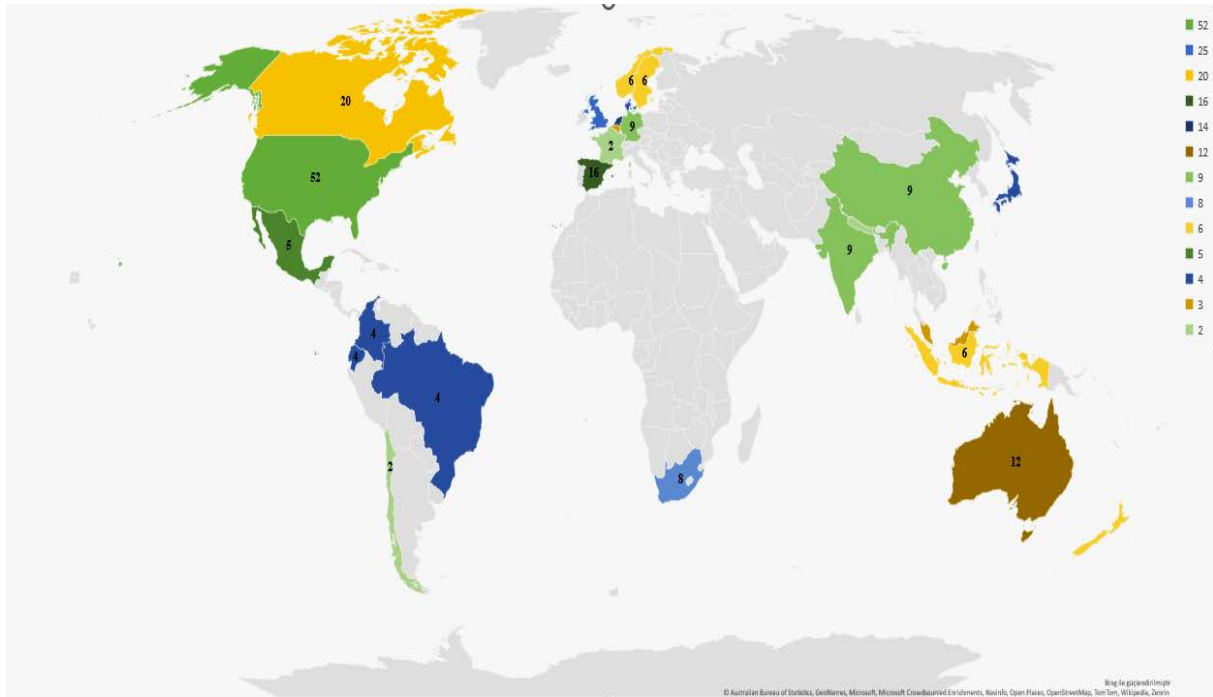


Figure 7. Distribution by Countries Associated with the Studies

The examination of the distribution of studies by countries related to the “tourism and political ecology” topic reveals that there are 29 countries and regions contributing to two or more publications (Figure 7). Among the 192 studies included in the analysis, the United States is in the first place contributing to 52 studies on the topic. Other productive countries with contributions to more than ten publications are, respectively, the United Kingdom (25), Canada (20), Spain (16), the Netherlands (14), and Australia (12). The map does not depict countries contributing to a single publication. Argentina, Austria, the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Botswana, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Georgia, Ghana, Italy, Kenya, Lithuania, Oman, Panama, Peru, Romania, South Korea, Taiwan, and Uganda have contributed to the topic with only one study each. When examined overall, there is a geographical imbalance in the dissemination of information related to the topic. Examining the distribution of studies on “tourism and political ecology” across fields (Figure 8), it is noted that the subject has primarily been investigated within the domain of “Hospitality, Leisure, Sports, and Tourism” (82)³.

³ A single topic can receive contributions from multiple fields.

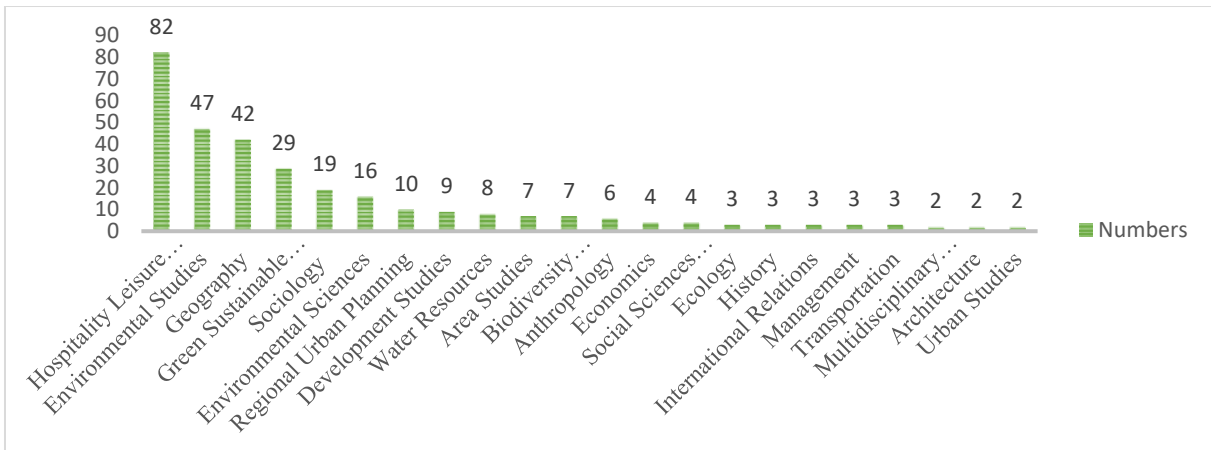


Figure 8. Distribution of Studies by Fields on the Relevant Topic

“Environmental Studies” (47) is in second place, and the “Geography” (42) field is in third place. “Green Sustainable Science Technology” (29), “Sociology” (19), “Environmental Sciences” (16), and “Regional Urban Planning” (10) are among the top seven fields contributing to more than ten studies.

The visual map of the co-authorship analysis of authors of 192 studies included in the research on the topic of “Tourism and Political Ecology” is elucidated in Figure 9.

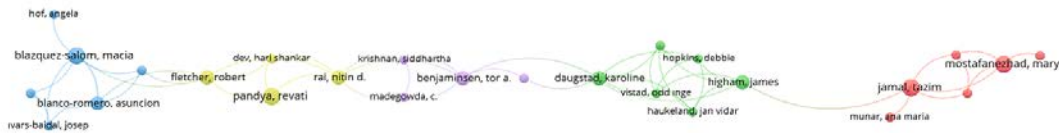


Figure 9. The Visual Map of Authors’ Co-authorship Status

The co-authorship analysis, conducted to identify connections and collaborations among authors (Dirik et al., 2023), involved the creation of a network map with criteria set at a minimum of 1 publication and 1 citation. Upon examining Figure 9, it is evident that five interconnected clusters of authors have been formed. Cole Stroma, who is both the most prolific author and has the highest citation count (7 publications and 288 citations),

does not seem to be within the most interconnected authors, including Saarinen Jarko, who is the second most prolific author with 5 publications. Moreover, Sheller Mimi (214 citations), Carrier, J.G (204), and West, P. (204), authors holding prominent positions in citation metrics, are not incorporated into the network of scholarly connections and collaborations.

Figure 10 presents a network map designed to ascertain the citation networks of authors, applying a criterion of a minimum of 1 publication and 1 citation.

The authors with the most substantial citation counts, including Cole Stroma (288), Carrier, J.G (204), Blazquez-Salom Macia (203), and Stonich, S.C (133), are observed to form strong connections. However, it is noteworthy that Sheller Mimi (214), despite having a high citation count, does not form any network.

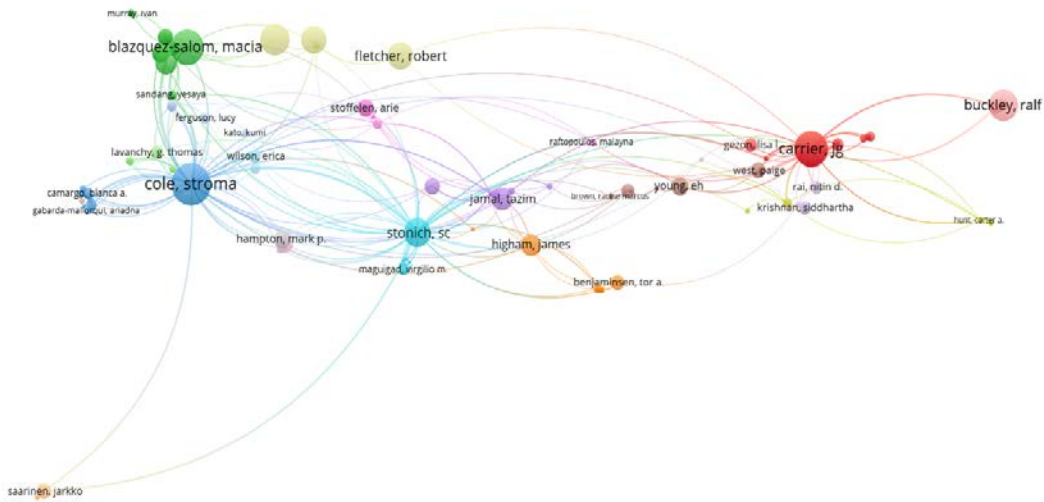


Figure 10. Visual Map of Citation of Authors

Citation of document analysis is a technique aimed at identifying research that leads to the propagation of an idea in a particular context of field or topic (Arslan, 2022). In the analysis, a minimum citation count of 5 has been set. Fifty-seven studies meeting this criterion and having strong connections among them have been incorporated into the analysis. The visual representation illustrating the outcomes of the analysis is depicted in Figure 11.

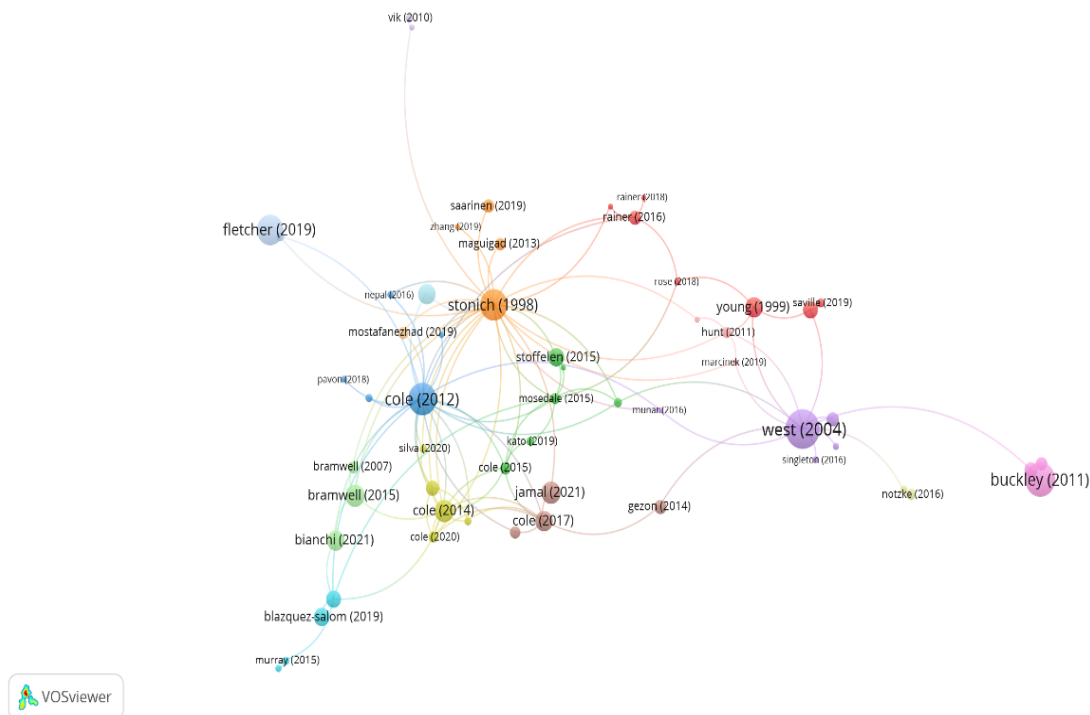


Figure 11. Visual Map of Citation of Documents

As seen in Figure 11, the studies with the strongest citation network connections are ranked with 27 connections for Stonich (1998), 23 connections for Cole (2012), and 12 connections for West (2004). Considering that Stonich’s (1998) study laid the foundation for the political ecology approach in tourism research, it is anticipated to be the most influential work contributing to academic studies conducted with a political ecology approach in tourism. The

situation where a common work is cited by two independent sources is referred to as bibliographic coupling (Dirik et al., 2023). The criterion of possessing a minimum of 1 citation was employed throughout the analysis.

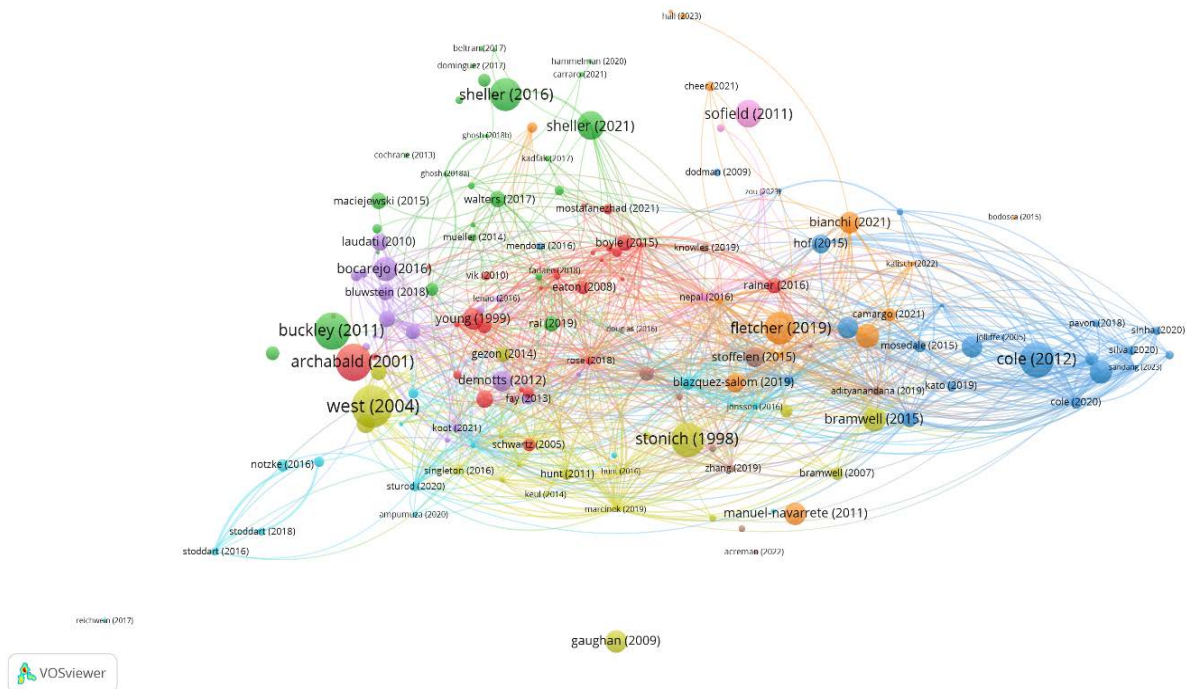


Figure 12. Visual Map of Bibliographic Coupling of Documents

When examining the bibliographic coupling graphical representation of the studies incorporated in the analysis related to the topic, in Figure 12, it is apparent that the works with the most bibliographic coupling are West and Carrier (2004), Archabald and Nau (2001), Buckley (2011), Cole (2012), Sheller (2016), Sheller (2021), Sofied and Li (2011), and Stonich (1998), respectively. The works with the highest total connection strength are Saarinen and Nepal (2016), Marcinek and Hunt (2019), Nepal et al. (2016), Mostefanezhad (2019), Munar and Jamal (2016), Cole and Mullor (2020), Rose and Carr (2018), Lavanchy (2017).

The dataset consisting of 192 studies was subjected to analysis in the RStudio Bibliometrix program to determine the most cited studies globally and locally in the field, and the findings are outlined in Figure 13.

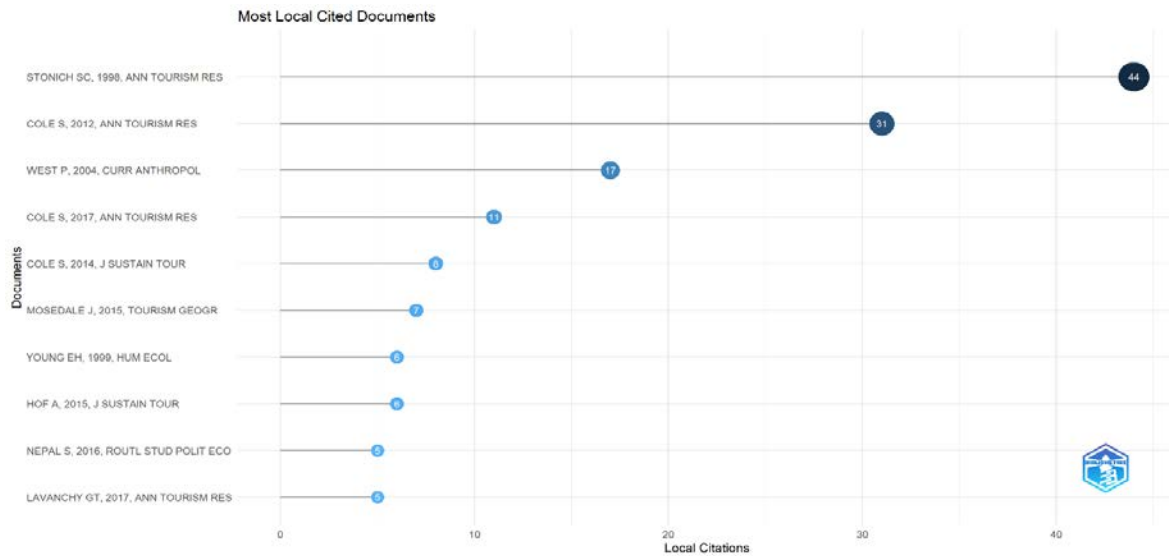
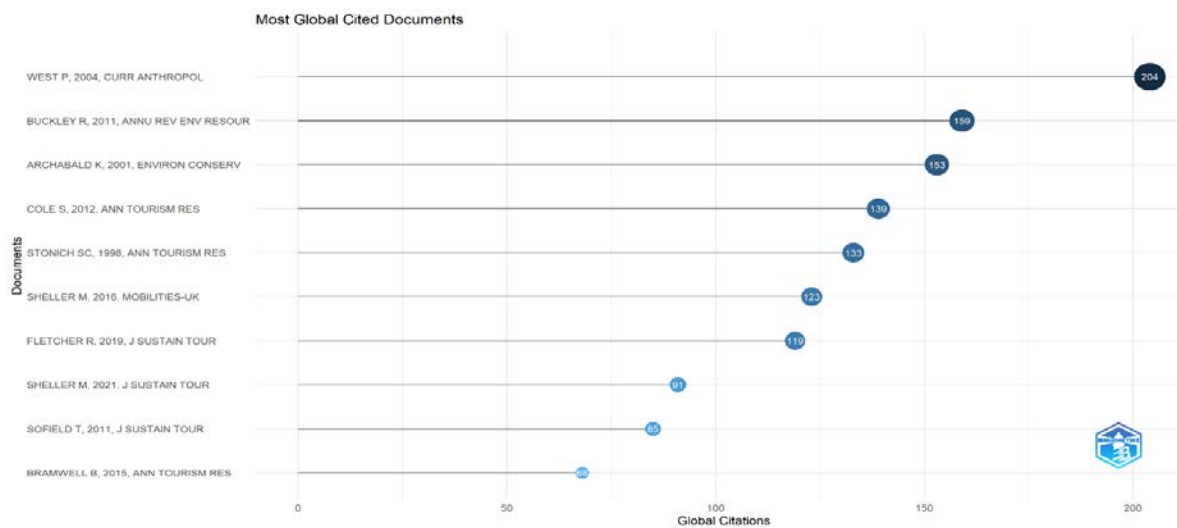
(a) Local Citation Status of Studies⁴(b) Global Cited Documents⁵

Figure 13. Citation Status of Studies

Examining the graph illustrating the local citation counts of studies (Figure 13 (a)), the study with the highest citation count is Stonich (1998) with 41 citations. Following Stonich (1998), the second most cited study is Cole (2012) with 31 citations. However, it is acknowledged that the author Cole, S. is represented in the ranking of most referenced works with three contributions. Upon reviewing the graph depicting the global citation counts of studies (Figure 13 (b)), it is evident that the study with the highest citation count is West (2004) with 204 citations.

In co-citation analysis, the relationship between two objects is based on the frequency with which these two objects are cited together (Zan, 2019), and it is used to identify the most significant sources, references, and authors in a field (Arslan, 2022).

⁴ Local Citation: refers to the number of citations a work receives from other documents within a specific search (i.e., in the example of a highly specialized set of documents under consideration) (Batsita-Caninon et al., 2023). In this context, it can be asserted that the local citation count reflects the citing situation within a specific discipline.

⁵ Global Citation: represents the total number of citations a work receives from all publications indexed in a source (such as Scopus, WOS, and Google Scholar) (Batsita-Caninon et al., 2023). In this context, it can be affirmed that the global citation count reflects the citing situation across different disciplines or within a broad research field.

The co-citation status of the cited authors of the 192 studies comprised in the analysis is presented in Figure 14.

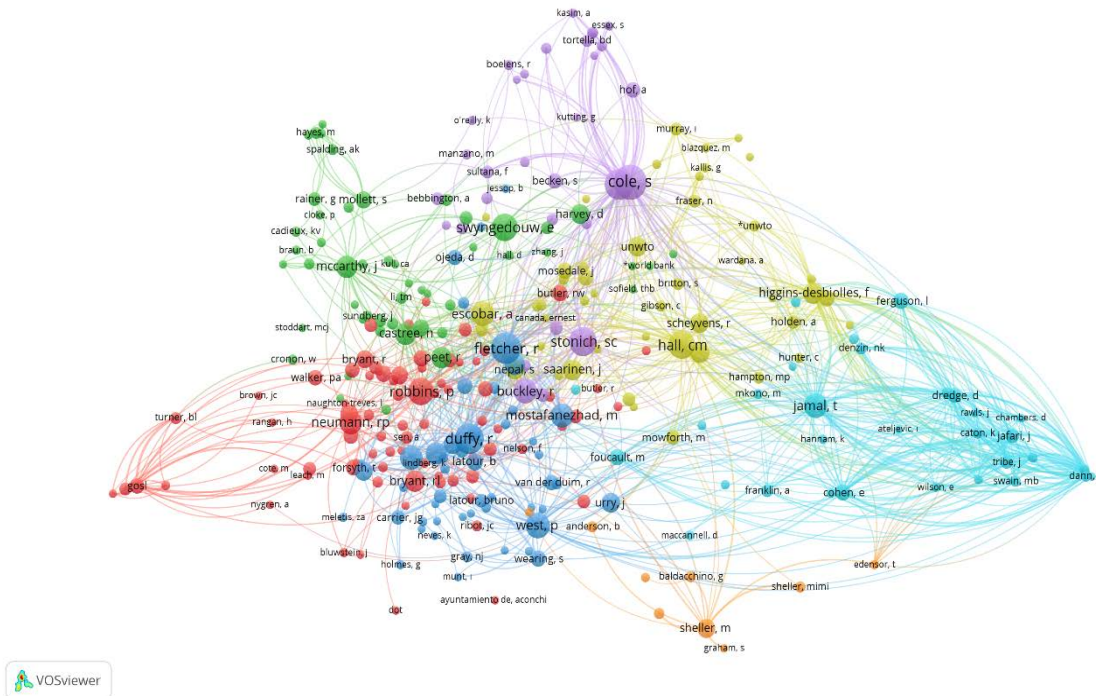


Figure 14. Visual Map of Co-citation of Cited Authors

In the co-citation analysis, the chosen unit of analysis is the “author,” and the minimum citation count criterion for the author is determined as at least 5. Meeting this criterion, 297 authors, forming 7 clusters with connections among them, have been identified. It is noted that the author with the highest co-citation frequency is Cole, S. (74). Other contributing authors include Fletcher, R. (61), Gössling, S. (56), Duffy, R. (56), and Stonich, S.C. (51).

CONCLUSION

The bibliometric analysis conducted in this research provides an evaluation of the scientific literature on political ecology in the field of tourism, revealing academic developments in this area. A total of 192 studies related to the subject were examined in terms of publication years, journals, and authors. Advanced bibliometric analyses were employed to identify the most significant works, prolific authors, and collaborations among authors. The primary limitation of the study is the limited use of field parameters to achieve a precise focus on as many of these studies as possible, due to the limited number of studies focused on political ecology in tourism. This is because the disciplines of tourism and political ecology each encompass broad areas of study. This study aims to specifically focus on political ecology studies within the field of tourism as a research area.

It was observed that the political ecology approach within tourism research emerged around 1998. The United States appeared to be the most influential country contributing to the development of the subject. Additionally, it was noted that academic studies on the topic are predominantly published in journals related to tourism. Stonich, S.C, emerged as the first author to adopt the political ecology approach in tourism research, while Cole, S. stood out as the most prolific author. In recent times, the political ecology approach in tourism has focused on issues related to development, gender, and governance. Based on the findings obtained, it is possible to assert that the relevant literature is rich and demonstrates a growth trend concerning the topic.

Based on the findings presented in Figure 2, which demonstrates the increase in the number of political ecology studies in tourism over the years, and Figure 8, which illustrates the

areas where political ecology studies in tourism are conducted, it is possible to say that there is increasing momentum and interdisciplinary collaboration in political ecology studies in tourism. Researchers predominantly focus on diverse topics such as water issues, globalization, neoliberalism, protected areas, sustainability, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, gender issues, and governance (Figure 6). The findings of this study (Figure 6) demonstrate that the literature on political ecology in the field of tourism encompasses a broad scope and various focus areas. However, as seen from the trend topics presented in Figure 6, there are still some gaps that require further research. In particular, the interactions between economic structures and environmental change, as well as the implications of these interactions for tourism practices, need more in-depth examination. Future studies should also aim to explore the impacts of political ecology on tourism from a broader perspective, delving deeper into power relations and social inequalities. Studies adopting a political ecology perspective can help in gaining a more nuanced understanding of the socio-environmental impacts of tourism, uncovering how power, politics, and economics intersect to affect both people and the environment. Such insights are crucial for developing more equitable and sustainable tourism practices, particularly for those most vulnerable to the negative impacts of tourism. The concentration of studies on a wide range of subjects indicates the broad scope of the field. The bibliometric analysis of publications on tourism and political ecology is deemed to provide a valuable contribution to assessing researchers' progress in this field and developing a more comprehensive understanding.

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