

INNOVATIVE TOURISM PRODUCTS AS SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS FOR EMERGING ECONOMIES

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ABSTRACT

The current trend in tourism is no longer one of relaxation in the two important seasons but of experiential tourism, developing of new types of tourism, each country identifying (but especially reinventing) its own potential and promoting it below the form of innovative tourist packages and/or products and/or services. Innovation as a concept is setting up the scene for economic growth and is an important tool for economic progress and competitiveness. The aim of this research is to make a bibliometric analysis to find out the most important aspects of innovation linked to tourism as sustainable solutions for tourism in emerging economies. As methods for bibliometric analysis the VOSviewer 1.6.18 software was used on the Web of Science papers to find out the research concepts linked to innovation and tourism. Also, we applied Google Trends search for some of the newest types of tourism to find out the interest of tourists over the last two decades (2010 – 2023) for innovative products from tourism industry (such as: babymoon, adventure, medical, dental, hunting, ecotourism, heritage, museum, etc.). The results emphasize the relation between innovation, tourism, information technology (internet, smart tourism, innovative technology), stakeholders (governments, organizations, municipalities, communities), tourism experience, tourism destination, tourism services, product innovation, competitiveness advantages, economic development, performance, cultural heritage, rural area, ecotourism.

Keywords: innovation, tourism, new type of tourism, qualitative analysis, bibliometric analysis, VOSviewer, Google Trends

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries worldwide (Gabor & Oltean, 2019). In the last two decades, the average growth rate of the tourism sector in the OECD countries has exceeded the GDP growth (OECD, 2010; Costa et al., 2013) and many non-OECD countries have experienced even greater growth in their tourism sectors (Alsos et al., 2014). Tourism is mainly determined by the capacity of the tourism industry to offer new products and experiences (Alsos et al., 2014). The growth is determined not only by the increase of wealth and economic development, but also by the ability of the tourism industry to offer new products and experiences (Alsos et al., 2014).

In 2050, it is predicted that 4.7 billion people or almost 50% of the world's population will benefit from an international vacation (Yeoman, 2012), and in order to compete effectively, the tourism companies must be extremely innovative in either reducing their costs, or by offering new high

quality products that meet the demand of the customers (Alsos et al., 2014). No country or region can rely on its natural endowment or cultural heritage, being forced, in this era of consume, to innovate.

The current trend in practicing tourism is no longer one of relaxation in the two important seasons but of *experiential* tourism, developing of new types of tourism, each country identifying (but especially reinventing) its own potential and promoting it as an umbrella of innovative tourist packages. The field of tourism is a very bidding one, on the one hand, its economic implications, spectacular developments and, on the other hand, its visual impact and - to use terms more and more frequently encountered in the “top” scientific articles, respectively indexed and quoted ISI Web of Science - *experiential*.

People are no longer traveling in the 21st century just for relaxation nor for the traditional Christmas, Easter, May 1st and the long-awaited summer holidays. They want ... experiences, self-knowledge, they want that “*their money to have value*”, adrenaline, “*recharging batteries*” by practicing city breaks, maintaining health by connecting to the best wellness and spa centers, they want for their children modern and practical forms of education, entertainment, etc.

Innovation as a concept and its systems are broadly considered to be essential in setting up the scene for economic growth upon Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI) outcomes (Coca, Gabor & Susanu, 2023) for almost a century, as we have known that innovation is an important tool for economic progress and competitiveness (Coca, Gabor & Susanu, 2023). The competitiveness and management of tourism destinations are important, as countries strive for a bigger market share and the transition from mass tourism to a new age of tourism calls for a customized approach to the specific attitude and needs of tourism (Gabor et al., 2021). The problem of innovation (in mountainous areas, for example) was researched as a factor of sustainable tourism development in Europe and/or worldwide (Bacoş & Gabor, 2020; (Bacoş & Gabor, 2021) usually from a consumer of innovation point of view and/or as social impact of innovation (Costa & Matias, 2020); as a sustainable innovation ecosystem or a regional innovation system (Coca, Gabor & Susanu, 2023).

At *international level* and especially for Romania in the European and international context, there are publications that have addressed the innovation in tourism, especially for new types of tourism as innovative products/services, finding aspects related to the following new forms of tourism: *dark tourism* (Gabor & Oltean, 2014; Gabor & Oltean, 2015; Conțiu et al., 2016), *red tourism*, *slum & poverty tourism*, *mystery & thriller tourism*, *luxury tourism*, *theme parks tourism*, *spa and wellness tourism*, etc. (Gabor & Oltean, 2015), *uval tourism* (Conțiu et al., 2016) and *wine tourism* (Olteanu & Gabor, 2022), *wildlife tourism*, *gastronomic/food/culinary tourism*, *silver tourism*, etc. (Conțiu et al., 2016), *babymoon* (Gabor & Oltean, 2019; Gabor & Stăncioiu, 2022), *dental tourism* (Oltean et al., 2020), *hunting and trophy tourism* (Olteanu & Gabor, 2021), *mountain and sky tourism* (Bacoş & Gabor, 2021), the main argument being to investigate the use these innovative products to build the county, regional or national brand. At the *international level* there are much more intense concerns, in many other innovative approaches in the field of tourism, respectively: *food and beverage tourism* (Croce, 2017), *sports events tourism* (Higham, 2018; Veal, 2017), *dark tourism* (Sharplay, 2009) or the *tourism practiced in protected areas and national parks* (Brockington, 2008) or *birdwatching tourism* or *wildlife tourism* (Carr & Broom, 2018), *literary tourism* (Agarwal, 2017). There are also preoccupations regarding the solutions and innovation in tourism industry after Covid-19 pandemic in countries with important seasonal tourism in total economy as Montenegro (Ratković et al., 2022) especially to find certain models of implementation of innovative solutions, which could affect the more dynamic development of tourism (Ratković et al., 2022).

Tourism has developed rapidly, in the age of consumerism due to the special interest of tourists for more concentrated activities or tourist experiences based on interests (Agarwal, 2018), due to the mobility of people in urban areas or between cities (Nagy, Gabor & Bacoş, 2022) and recently based on Google Mobility or Apple Mobility data available online, for almost any location in the world, at city, county, or country level the tourists preferences and/or predicted visited place can be modeled

(Nagy, Gabor & Bacoş, 2022).

The Romanian tourism, as emerging market and destination for tourism worldwide, as an economic-social activity, through a good management of the tourism destination, can have an important contribution to GDP, because it benefits from a rich and varied natural, anthropical and historical heritage. It is well known that, in many countries abroad, but also in Romania, museums have “open gates” for children and students, and have successfully and harmoniously combined cutting-edge technology, education, culture and history, i.e. the Chopin Museum in Warsaw is the most modern museum in Europe, the Antipa museum in Romania has its own application for iPhone and tablets, named “Be informed!”, etc. In the last decade, the development of the tourism has been predominantly based on innovations, respectively:

- *conceptual innovations* - *red tourism* in communist China, an economic and educational success... utopian, but... real!
- *scientific innovations* - the establishment of the *Dark Tourism Research Institute* by two of the greatest authors and researchers of the *dark tourism*;
- *product innovations* - unusual museums, luxury fashion or boutique hotels, glamping, culinary festivals, etc.
- *service innovations* - wellness, spa, shopping with personal assistant at Armani, test drive with Ferrari on the Ferragamo circuit, etc.;
- *innovations in the staff approach* - the famous conferences of the Asian smile in the field of tourism;
- *innovations in the tourist approach* - online bookings, blogs, online consulting, complete tours of 360° rooms or accommodation;
- *educational innovations* - combining (successfully) of digital technology with history, culture, legends, myth, literature, best-sellers, etc.
- *innovations in the tourism publications* - the top of the most romantic cities in the world, the top of the most visited museums, the top of the most expensive hotels, the top of the largest amusement park companies, etc., all made by world-renowned publications;
- *organizational innovations* - tour guide services offered, for example, in 19 languages by the Auschwitz - Birkenau Memorial Museum in Poland;
- *financing innovations* - accessing European funding for museums, such as the Auschwitz - Birkenau Memorial Museum in Poland;
- *innovations related to the direct and sustained involvement of a political party* - *red tourism* in China;
- *ethical innovations* - including volunteering as a form of thanatourism support in natural disasters such as: the 2005 Pakistan earthquake and the 2004 Asian tsunami;
- *brand innovations* – the objectives of UNESCO World Heritage type, tangible or intangible, etc.
- *promoting of tourism destination by social media together with the influence of social networks in travel Decisions* (Varga & Gabor, 2021).
- *Using of electronic application for different smart phones like Google Maps and/or Apple to forecast and follow the movement of people to find models and predict the tourism data* (Nagy, Gabor & Bacoş, 2022).

All these innovations in the tourism field, together with numerous other research directly link to innovation in tourism from different perspectives, including the sustainable development and the competitiveness aspects for emerging economies and worldwide have materialized into numerous scientific publications for the last decades if we take into consideration only the renewed scientific platform *Web of Science – Clarivate Analytics*.

Based on the above-mentioned innovations in tourism industry and the new features for nowadays tourism, the *aim* of this research is *to make a bibliometric analysis to find out the most important aspects of innovation linked to tourism as sustainable solutions for tourism from emerging economies*. The objectives of this research are:

- To apply a specific software for bibliometric analysis (VOSviewer 1.6.18) on the Web of Science papers to find out the researched concepts linked to innovation and tourism;
- To use the Google Trends searches for some newest types of tourism to find out the interest of tourists over last 20 years (2010 – 2023) for innovative products from tourism industry (such as: *babymoon, adventure, medical, dental, hunting, ecotourism, heritage, museum*, etc.).

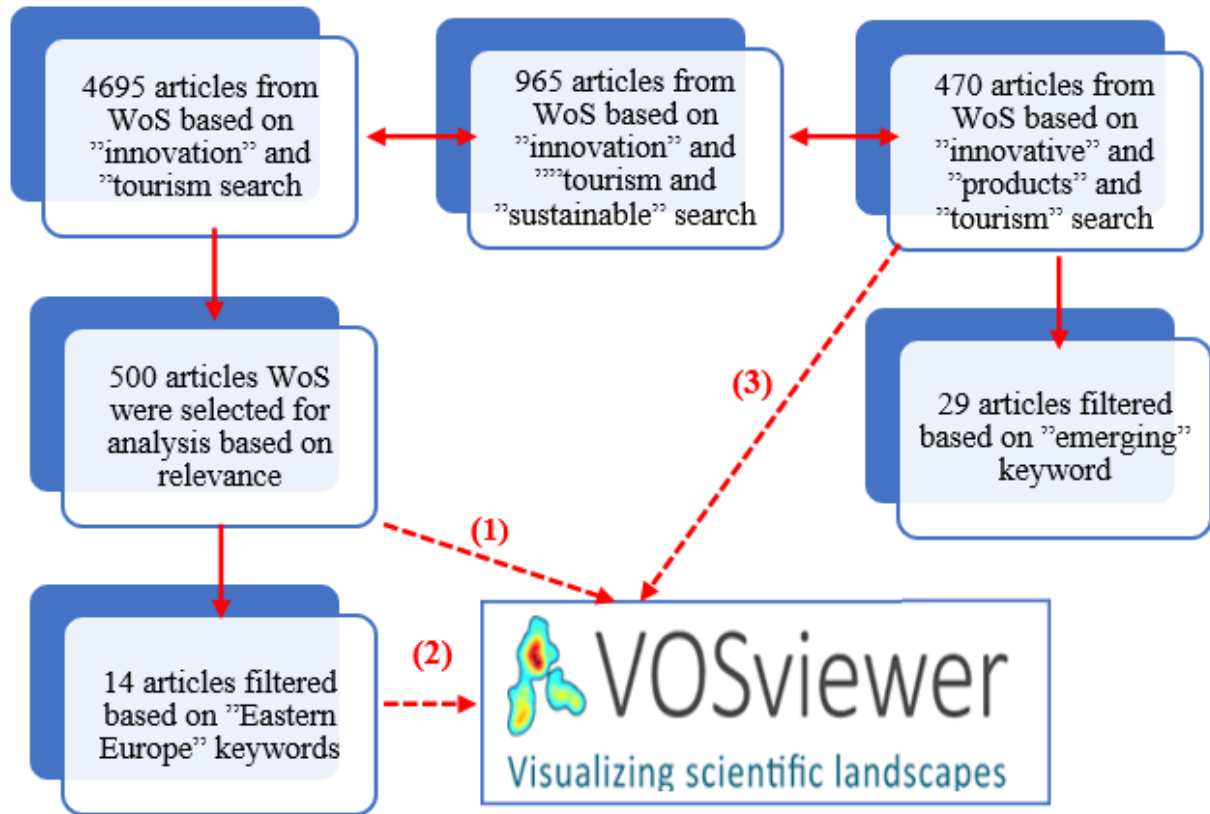
2. METHODS

According to the aim and the objectives of the research we applied a qualitative analysis of the co-occurrence link between terms from Web of Science (WoS) scientific articles and the *Google Trends* (<https://trends.google.com/home>) for some new types of tourism for the period accepted for these terms by Google Trends, respectively from 2010 – 30 March 2023.

The VOSviewer software version 1.6.18 (<https://www.vosviewer.com/>) was used to create the map of the keywords from title and abstracts of the scientific indexed articles (van Eck & Waltman, 2010; van Eck & Waltman, 2014; van Eck & Waltman, 2022) selected based on “*innovation & tourism*”, “*innovation & tourism & sustainable*” and “*innovative & products & tourism*” search.

The VOSviewer software was used to create a map for scientific database based on network data. The bibliographic database files from WoS were used as inputs to VOSviewer. The items were created starting with the keywords/term *innovation, tourism, sustainable, innovative products* in the topic field of the publication from this database. Several (4695) articles from WoS were found for words “*innovation & tourism*” but we keep according to the relevance filter, only the first 500 articles. For words “*innovation & tourism & sustainable*”, 965 papers were founded and a 470 paper for “*innovative & products & tourism*” (Figure 1). Those 4695 of papers were filtered based on “Eastern Europe” and only several 14 papers remain. We opted to retain the main fields of the results, that is, the title and the abstracts, respectively, due to the full text of the articles not being freely available. We followed all recommendations of the VOSviewer software’s authors (van Eck & Waltman, 2010; van Eck & Waltman, 2014; van Eck & Waltman, 2022), which are described in the software manual.

Figure 1. The flowchart for bibliometric analysis.



Source: made by the authors.

For the bibliometric map analysis we opted for the association strength for normalizing the strength of the links between items according to equation (1) (van Eck & Waltman, 2014):

$$s_{ij} = \frac{2ma_{ij}}{k_i k_j} \quad (1)$$

where k_i (k_j) denotes the total weight of all edges of node i (node j) and m denotes the total weight of all edges in the network.

The motivation for this analysis is to demonstrate the lack of scientific research for emerging economies especially for Easter Europe for innovative products in tourism and to justify the necessity of our study. The results of the analysis are presented in the next section of the paper as *network visualization*, *overlay visualization*, *item* and *cluster density visualization*.

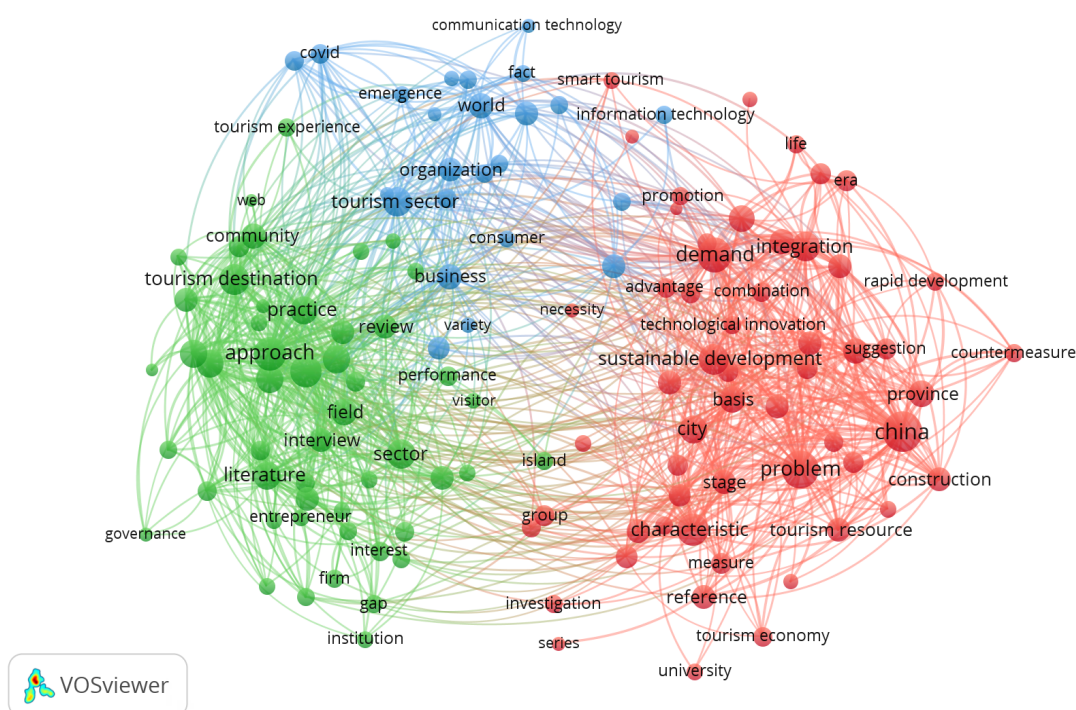
To analyze the dynamic of searches for new types of tourism by using Google Trends (<https://trends.google.com/home>), the authors used randomly some keywords, the majority being link to published papers by the authors, respectively: *culinary tourism*, *wine tourism*, *dark tourism*, *medical tourism*, *dental tourism*, *hunting tourism*, *trophy tourism*, *heritage*, *museum*, *halal tourism*, *luxury destinations*, *luxury tourism*, *adventure tourism*. Some of the words/expressions were choose to represent the most recent types of tourism, like halal tourism or adventure tourism, some of them to be associated with core tourism, such as heritage, museum, medical and luxury. The results are presented graphically in the next section, comparatively by the appropriate field of type of tourism.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to the steps from Figure 1, the co-occurrence link between terms by using VOSviewer

1.6.18 software was applied in different situations. The first one (marked with (1) on the Figure 1) started with search toolbar from Web of Science (WoS) for terms: “innovation” and “tourism”, in the Figure 2 being presented the network visualization. As inputs, the bibliographic database files from WoS and Scopus were used as inputs to VOSviewer. From WoS we opted to generate the map only by using the abstract of the papers and only for the first 500 of papers from total of 4695 selected by relevance not the most recent published papers in the field. The items were created starting with the keywords/terms “innovation” and “tourism” in the topic field of the publication from these databases. We opted to retain the main fields of the results, that is, the title and the abstracts, respectively, due to the full text of the articles not being freely available. We followed all recommendations of the VOSviewer software’s authors (van Eck & Waltman, 2010; van Eck & Waltman, 2014; van Eck & Waltman, 2022), which are described in the software manual.

Figure 2. Map based on Web of Science articles for “innovation” and “tourism”.



Source: made by the authors.

Figure 2 shows the results for the WoS articles. Several (4695) articles were identified but only 500 was retain for analysis. The terms were grouped into three clusters as follows:

Cluster 1 (red color) that includes the central expressions “*sustainable development*” and “*problem*” directly link, based on *overlay visualization* from software, with *technological innovation, integration, tourism resources, tourism economy, promotion, advantages, China, integration, demand, city, province*. These terms defined all the researched concepts of sustainable tourism through some specific innovation solutions.

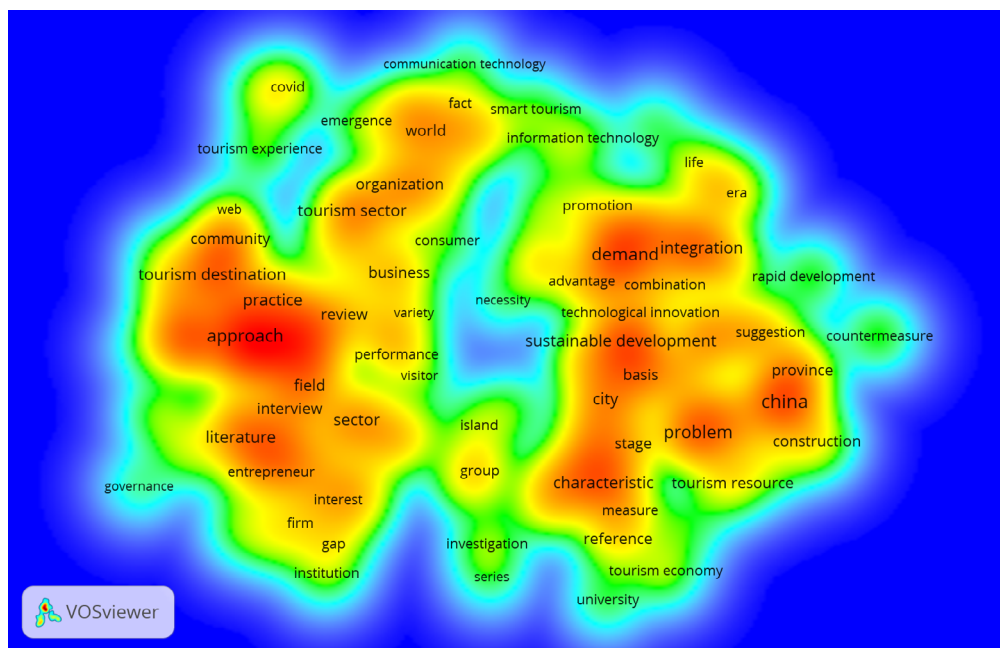
Cluster 2 (green color) has a central term/expression “*tourism destination*” directly link to *community, practice, smart tourism, tourism experience, organization, governance, entrepreneurs, web, sustainable development, interest*; practically the main concept that reflect the recent trends of the researched concepts be aware as directly linked to development of tourism with all the stakeholders involved for its development: tourism organization, governments - tourism strategies and policies. Also this cluster reflect the nowadays tourism based on experience, smart solutions, internet of things (IoT) and social network and web for promotion and accommodation search

such as Airbnb, Booking, etc. assimilated as good innovations and good and fast solutions for a dynamic tourism.

Cluster 3 (blue color) includes terms that refer to the “world” and most of the terms refer to worldwide connections such as: *communication technology*, *information technology*, *tourism sector*, *emergence*, *covid*. The co-occurrence link emphasizes practically the online communication during the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of online communications and online tools for worldwide tourism.

In the Figure 3 we present the *map of density visualization* of the co-occurrence link between terms “innovation” and “tourism” for most 500 relevant WoS papers. From the Figure 3 it is obvious the clusters size, the large one is around the terms “sustainable development”, followed by “tourism destination” and “world” and “tourism sector” for small one.

Figure 3. Density visualization based on WoS papers for “innovation” and “tourism”.

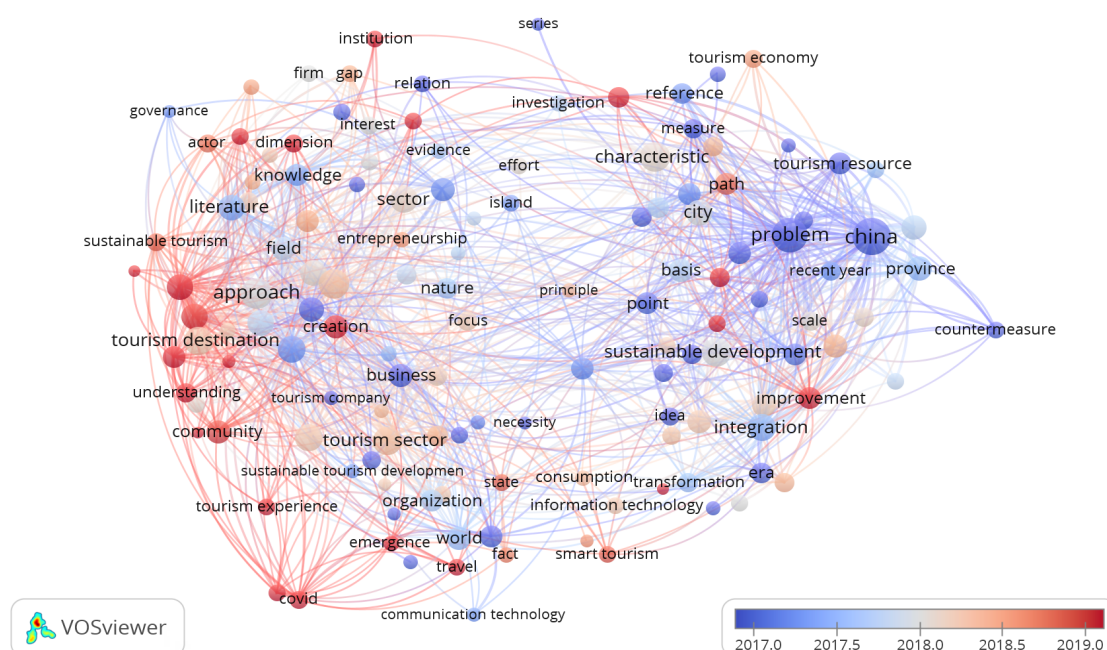


Source: made by the authors.

In Figure 4 we present the *network visualization* based on average number of papers per years, from 2016 to 2019 according to the number of published papers in the field of innovation and tourism. This map helps us to visualize the main theoretical and practical concepts linked to “innovation” and “tourism”, respectively: *entrepreneurship*, *firm*, *interests*, *covid*, *community*, *emergence*, *tourism experience*, *tourism sector*.

The 500 articles have been filtered by keywords “Eastern Europe” (code with (2) in Figure 1), resulting 14 papers with only three terms: *innovation*, *destination* and *paper*. No map will retain for this finding.

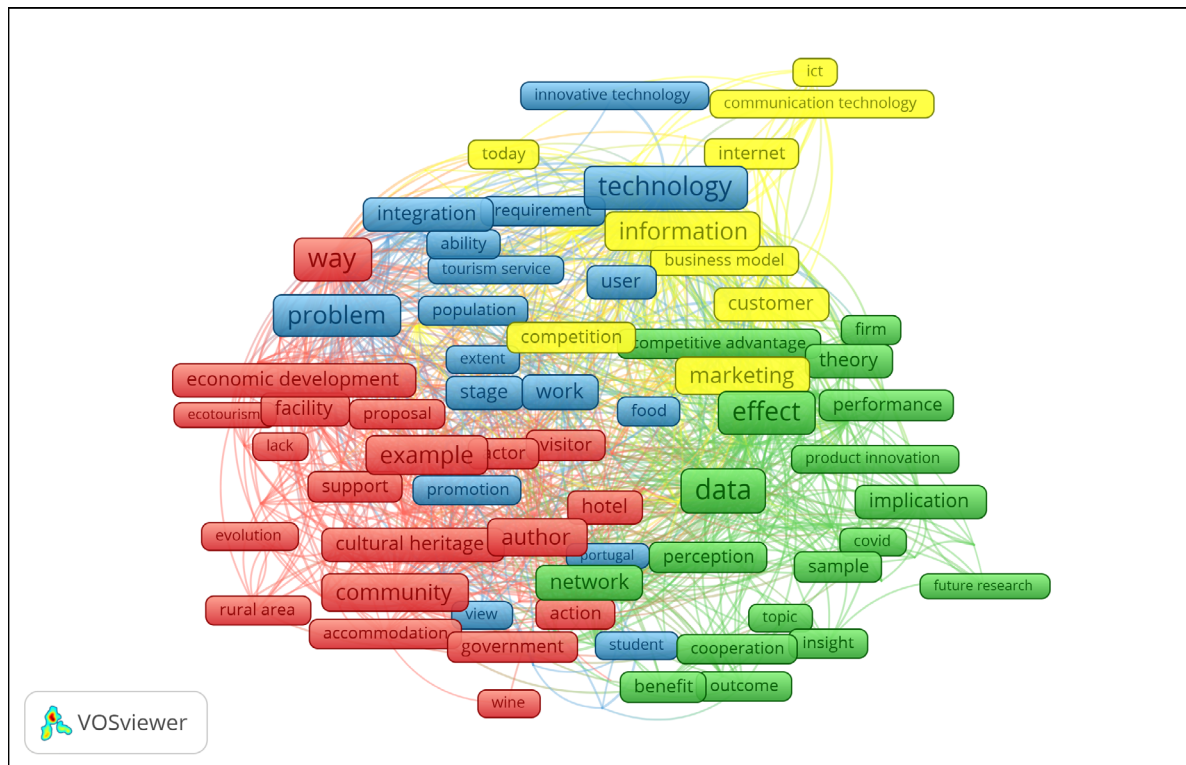
Figure 4. Network visualization of WoS papers according to average per year.



Source: made by the authors.

For the third analysis (code with (3) in Figure 1), the co-occurrence link between terms by using VOSviewer 1.6.18 software was applied for terms “*innovative*”, “*products*” and “*tourism*” resulting 470 scientific WoS papers that were retain for bibliometric analysis. The Figure 5 presents the network visualization of these results. We opted also, as the first analysis (1) to retain the main fields of the results, that is the title and the abstracts, respectively.

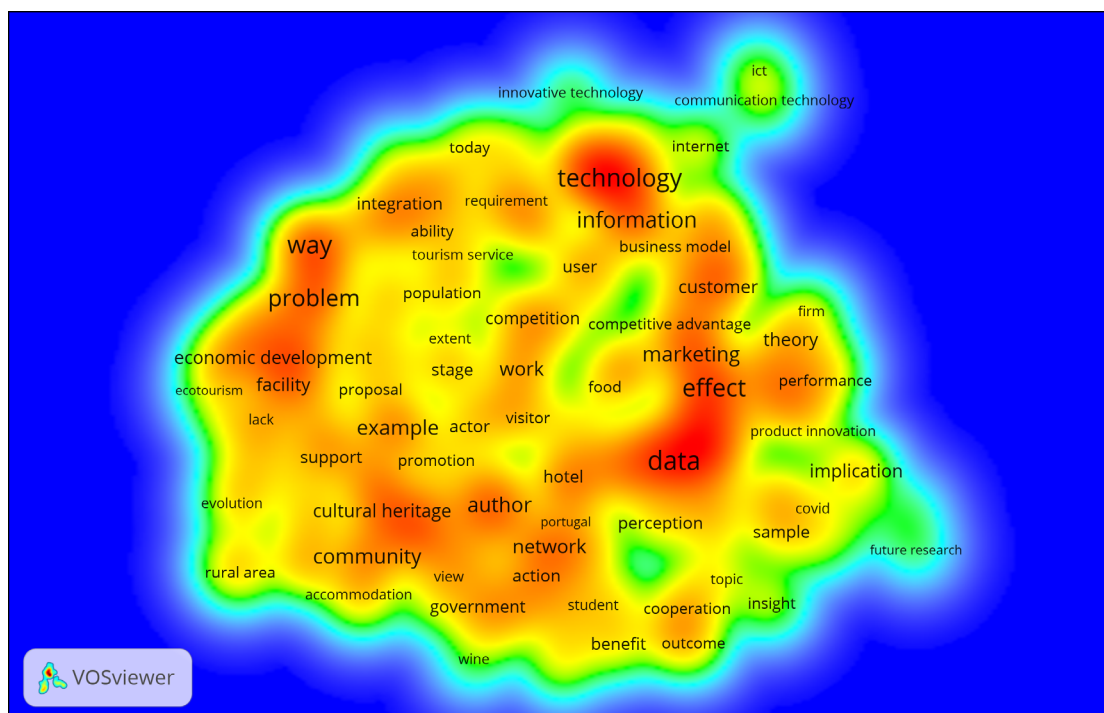
Figure 6. Terms related to “innovative”, “products” and “tourism”.



Source: made by the authors

In Figure 7 we present the *map of density visualization* of the co-occurrence link between terms “innovative”, “products” and “tourism” for 470 WoS papers. From the Figure 7 it is obvious the clusters size, the large one is around the terms “data”, “technology”, “way”, “problem”, “effect”, “community”.

Figure 7. Density visualization for “innovative”, “products” and “tourism”.



Source: made by the authors

For *Google Trends* analysis the results for each keywords from basic/core concept from tourism industry are presented in the Figures 8 (a- j). And for the new types, innovative products from tourism are presented in the Figure 8 (a- j). For all searches the period was 2010 – 30 March 2023 for worldwide and/or particularly for Romania.

Figure 8. The Google Trends results for some new types pf tourism.



Source: made by the authors based on Google Trends searches.

According to the results from Figure 8 it is obvious the increasing interest for potential tourists for all these new types of tourism based on positive trends, especially for *babymoon tourism*, the recently approach in the scientific literature *halal tourism* and *dark tourism*. Also, a decreasing trend and/or maintain trend for the following types of tourism can be observed: ecotourism and agritourism, adventure tourism, dental, medical and wellness tourism, hunting and trophy tourism, heritage and museum tourism, luxury destinations and luxury tourism.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has an important impact because the tourism plays an important role in economic development by supporting employment and by collecting foreign currency. The growth is determined not only by the increase of wealth and economic development, but also by the ability of the tourism industry to offer new products and experiences. Tourism companies operate in a competitive market, characterized by high turbulence and rapid change. In order to compete effectively, tourism companies must be extremely innovative; either in reducing costs or offering new high quality products that meets the demand of customers. No country or region can rely on its natural endowment or cultural heritage.

Innovation support strategies are needed to remain competitive in the global tourism market (OECD, 2010). The tourism sector is currently undergoing extensive change due to the transition to more experience-based products (Sundbo et al., 2007) and due to the strong market growth (Lordkipanidze et al., 2005). This transformation causes even more tourism organizations to innovate. The product life period is becoming shorter, which requires companies to introduce new, innovative and better products more frequently. The ability of the tourism organizations to change, develop new and innovative products and/or services and adapt to market changes is therefore crucial to the performance of the company and tourism industry.

Knowledge based on research on tourism innovation is almost non-existent worldwide, general research on innovation rarely includes tourism, and tourism research has examined only a small innovation within companies. The dominant theories regarding innovation refer primarily to the production of goods and technology and, to a lesser extent, to the innovation of services (Djellal & Gallouj 2012) and of products in the tourism industry.

If we look at national level and take the example of Romania and the Romanian potential and ability to innovate in tourism, in the foreign specialized literature, many authors exemplify that our country “has made progress in marketing adequate to promote the legend of Vlad Țepeș nicknamed Dracula” (Minić, 2012), recommending the promotion of dark tourism for Romania. Also, the Romanian hotels focused on the development and diversification of auxiliary services in hotels as a direct measure to mitigate seasonality and to ensure cash flow, by providing services of wellness, fitness, spa, etc., which have lately increased the demand from the locals. These are just two examples that demonstrate the innovative potential at national level.

In this digital age, consumers have become prosumers (active internet users), that is, in specialized terms: online tourists (Romina et al., 2013). This aspect is being confirmed by our results upon the relation of the terms innovative, products and tourism with information technology, smart tourism, innovative technology.

All these innovative tourism products (referring to the new type of tourism such as: babymoon tourism, dark tourism, culinary and wine, etc.) and services can be promoted as niche tourism (Robinsom & Novelly, 2005; Novelli et al, 2006) which, according to the World Tourism Organization and World Travel & Tourism Competitiveness, are much more beneficial to the former emerging economies such as Romania, compared to the promotion of a ‘traditional’ mass tourism, being able to set up a real tool of building and implicitly the management and promotion of the country brand for such countries. Our research results will be interesting as outputs for tourism destination management and marketing, to find the rank of tourism in emerging economies in the European and international context but also will open new research directions for other perspectives of innovation in the tourism field.

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