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GLOBAL TRENDS IN BUSINESS TOURISM RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Business tourism is a key economic driver in the regions where it is present. In recent decades, the remarkable growth of academic research both in quantity and diversity of articles, makes it necessary to structure and organize this segment of tourism to identify trends in the sector and facilitate the work of the community in the research process. Using Scopus as a bibliographic database, this article performs a systematic analysis of the academic research that has addressed business tourism in the period from 1970 to 2021. Through a robust methodological approach that includes the use of bibliometric tools, the study analyzes data to identify patterns, key actors and emerging trends in the field. It examines the main research trends and provides an analysis through strategic diagrams of the keywords found in business tourism which has not been done to date. The main findings confirm the consolidation of academic research in the meetings industry over the past two decades. We also identify the main trends, including the progressive integration of its activities in line with sustainable development criteria, the use and integration of new technologies, and the increasing need for professionalization in a growing sector.

KEYWORDS

business tourism, meeting tourism, MICE tourism, MICE industry, meeting industry

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1. INTRODUCTION

Business tourism has become an important activity worldwide that has aroused the interest of the international organizations charged with managing

it. In one of its annual global reports, the World Tourism Organization [WTO] places this activity as a key market niche in the tourist activities sector (WTO, 2014). The current concept of business tourism is intrinsically linked to the activities carried out by the



economic agents involved in this segment of tourism and that differ to a certain degree from the traditional holiday tourist. Prominent amongst these activities are meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions, to name but a few (Getz, 1989; Lawson, 1982).

Yet despite the recent interest shown by the literature in this regard, people have been travelling for business reasons since trade and human civilizations first emerged. Marques and Santos (2017) highlight that it was after the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century that an increasing number of business trips were made – and to places further afield – spurred by the development of transport (Borodako & Rudnicki, 2014; Vázquez Varela & Martínez Navarro, 2016). In the late 19th and early 20th century, academic, industrial and political associations began to organise large-scale meetings worldwide, which aroused the interest of the cities chosen to host them, given the benefits which such meetings generated (Hodur & Leistritz, 2006; Ritchie, 1984; Shone, 1998). Yet it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that the trends reflecting this growing business tourism – as both a product and from the perspective of those involved in the sector – were to first emerge (de Lara & Har, 2008; Getz, 1989; Lawson, 1982; Weidenfeld & Leask, 2013). The gradual growth of the airline industry (Derudder et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2008), together with a lowering of the costs involved (Owen, 1992), and coupled with the lucrative business of medical meetings (Carney et al., 2001), established the foundations of what we now know as business tourism and led to its expansion towards new sectors of the economy (Davidson, 1993; Hall & Coles, 2008; Owen, 1992; Smith, 1991).

The number of stakeholders involved in the meetings industry thus grew gradually (Alananzeh et al., 2019; Todd et al., 2017), and came to include more economic agents who offered increasingly comprehensive service packages in an effort to boost the competitiveness of the venues and so attract this business (Jepson & Clarke, 2014; Nelson, 2014). In an attempt to meet this demand, public bodies – such as the convention bureaus in the host cities – began to emerge, charged with promoting business tourism in their area, as did private entities known by their acronym in English DMC (destination management companies), who offered global solutions for organising and hosting an event at a specific location (Nardiello et al., 2017; Rojas Bueno et al., 2020; Smith, 1991; Strick et al., 1993). The key role played by institutions such as convention bureaus in promoting intellectual capital and innovation is reflected in works such as Getz et al. (1998), where convention bureaus contribute to the growth of business tourism, highlighting their role in the creation and dissemination of knowledge in MICE (*meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions*) destinations, or Celuch (2019), which highlights the strategic role as intermediaries that connect local

and international stakeholders, focusing on effective management practices, such as marketing, governance, sustainability and the integration of stakeholders in the tourism ecosystem.

Yet even though over the last few years the scholars involved in the field of the meetings industry have analysed the sector in an effort to define it (Getz, 1989) and to outline the research trends in a growing sector (Getz & Page, 2016; Lawson, 1982; Owen, 1992), these studies have only been partial and have proved insufficient, since they fail to explore the last few decades in which the sector has experienced substantial growth. To date, the academic literature is notoriously lacking in comprehensive analyses that explore the evolution of the field from a longitudinal and global perspective. This research addresses that lack through a systematic review of the literature, providing a comprehensive overview of global trends in tourism research on meetings between 1970 and 2021. This work stands out for its scope and depth, offering a more complete picture that allows us to identify emerging patterns and persistent gaps in knowledge. In this sense, our contribution lies not only in systematizing previous advances but also in contextualizing their inadequacy, highlighting how this analysis fills a critical gap in the existing literature, thus strengthening the foundation for future research in the area. The main objective of this study is to identify global trends in business tourism research during the period 1970–2021 through a systematic bibliometric analysis. This overall objective is broken down into the following key points:

1. Analysis of the historical evolution of academic production around business tourism.
2. Identification of the main actors (researchers, institutions and countries) that have led academic production in this field.
3. Examination of the keywords and emerging themes related to the MICE sector, and to highlight patterns and research gaps.

To achieve these objectives, a modern methodology based on bibliometric tools such as Bibliometrix and VOSviewer has been chosen which, to the best of our knowledge, has not been applied in this particular segment of tourism. This methodology offers advanced capabilities for the analysis of conceptual, intellectual and social structures. These tools have been chosen because of their flexibility and efficiency in the graphical representation of data and in the identification of trends and relationships in academic production. In addition, the use of strategic diagrams has allowed a deeper assessment of central and emerging issues in the field, which reinforces the novelty and relevance of our approach. The relevance of the present research lies in the novelty of the methodology used for the analysis, with the study drawing on modern data processing techniques that have provided the results

and conclusions to emerge (Costa et al., 2017; Maia et al., 2019). This methodology was based on a systematic approach structured in five stages. Search criteria were defined with keywords relevant to the MICE sector, applied in the Scopus database for its broad and multidisciplinary coverage. Subsequently, the database was cleaned to eliminate duplicates and inconsistencies, obtaining a representative sample to which the bibliometric tools already described were applied to obtain the results of the present work.

In order to achieve these goals, the paper is organised as follows. The literature review looks at the state of the art of academic research and the following section puts forward the methodology used in the bibliometric study. This is followed by the results to emerge from the work. We then present the discussion of the results before finally offering the conclusions reached.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The available academic literature related to business tourism reflects a very characteristic development in the period covered by this article. During the 1960s and 1970s, the events sector was not recognised as a field of study in its own right but was explored within the framework of leisure tourism (Getz, 2008). Only in the following decade did academic production in this area really begin to boom (Getz & Page, 2016). The topics addressed by authors evidence a wide array of approaches, and certain works even show diverse simultaneous perspectives within the same study. One frequent approach is to use economic impact studies that examine the economy of a particular region, although studies often explore the different stakeholders involved in the sector in question. Recent decades have also witnessed other kinds of approach, prominent amongst which are those related to sustainable development, the professionalisation of the sector or the inclusion and use of new technologies. There are other approaches which have been applied in a smaller number of associated studies, but which nonetheless display enormous potential, such as those examining the public sector and governance or other more recent works such as those related to exploring how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted business tourism. Whilst by no means offering a fully comprehensive review, the following is, nevertheless, representative of some of the principal topics addressed.

The first topic offers a regional approach, wherein the literature focuses on three main areas; Europe, Asia-Pacific, and North America. Studies addressing Europe include impact studies at a local or regional scale (Chirieleison et al., 2013; Monge & Brandimarte, 2011; Pechlaner et al., 2007), at a country level (Marques

& Santos, 2016; Pinho & Marques, 2021; Weber & Ladkin, 2003), and adopting a block analysis (Davidson, 1993, 2018). It can be seen how certain authors have taken an interest in exploring this economic segment given its potential economic development in Central Eastern European countries, with studies that look at Romania (Baltălungă et al., 2014), Serbia (Bjeljac et al., 2013; Dragičević et al., 2012; Štetić et al., 2014) and Slovakia (Kasagrande et al., 2017). Prominent amongst the studies addressing the Asia Pacific block are those which examine China, with numerous studies conducted at city level (Go & Zhang, 1997; Iacuone & Zarrilli, 2018; Zhou, 2011), regional level (Long et al., 2009; McCartney, 2008, 2014; Whitfield et al., 2014; Wong, 2011) or national level (Jin et al., 2013; Lu, 2017; Xu et al., 2020). There are also a large number of studies for Thailand (Intapan et al., 2019; Uansaard & Binprathan, 2018), Australia (Gnoth & Anwar, 2000; Mules & Faulkner, 1996; Stokes, 2006b) and New Zealand (Smith, 2007; Tsui et al., 2017; Xie & Gu, 2015), and which reflect to a large extent the business tourism existing in this area. Other countries in the region of Asia that have also attracted the attention of researchers include Singapore (Henderson, 2014b), Korea (Kim et al., 2015), Kazakhstan (Mussina et al., 2019; Ziyadin et al., 2019), and Japan (Ghosh, 2021). In the Americas, the United States has traditionally been the focus of academic inquiry (Daniels, 2007; Paxson, 2009; Pearlman, 2016; Yang & Gu, 2012), with more and more authors now also turning their attention towards Latin-American countries (Bonn & Boyd, 1993; Tejeida-Padilla et al., 2016). Other areas of the world also now merit interest, such as Africa (Matiza, 2020; Mxunyelwa, 2017; Rogerson, 2015a, 2015b) or the Middle East (Abulibdeh & Zaidan, 2017; Henderson, 2018; Monshi & Scott, 2017; Sutton, 2016).

The second topic that merits highlighting is that of impact studies which look at the stakeholders involved in the business tourism industry. This has often led authors to focus on the stakeholders who operate at a specific destination or to approach the subject from a more global development perspective. The main stakeholders who provide the focus for these studies are the event organisers and suppliers, the venues and the participants. Impact studies are common when examining the issue of event organisers and suppliers (Kim & Uysal, 2003; Papadopoulos et al., 2014) and examples of these studies are analyses of the hotel sector, whether by conducting a study at city level (Leslie & Craig, 2000; Wootton & Stevens, 1995), national level (Ali et al., 2017; Fenich, 2014) or for larger regions, such as central and Central Eastern Europe or Australia (Johnson & Vanetti, 2007; McCabe, 2014). Analyses can also be carried out for associated structures (Smith, 1991) and their links to suppliers (Borodako et al., 2015; Kim & Qu, 2012; Shin et al., 2017), as well as the marketing or success factors found in the host cities – from the perspective of

organisers and other stakeholders (Capriello, 2018; Pan et al., 2014). Ultimately, works such as Shaadi Rodriguez et al. (2018), which identifies the stakeholders involved in meetings tourism management and analyzes their interactions in Aguascalientes, Mexico, or Pulido Fernández and López Molina (2023), for four cities in Ecuador, demonstrate the prospects for real collaboration and synergies between various stakeholders in the meetings industry, local governments, and the cities that host them and the enormous potential they harbor.

Often linked to regional impact studies, research into the venues where the meetings take place has emerged as highly relevant in the academic literature, where much attention is devoted to exploring the mechanisms involved in how the host city is selected and how competitive the latter is (Falk & Hagsten, 2018; Fawzy & Samra, 2008; Haven-Tang et al., 2007; Zhou et al., 2017). The concept of brand image for a MICE city has been developed (Hankinson, 2005; Lennon, 1999; Weru, 2021; Ye & Li, 2011) with the aim being to ascertain what the key success factors for business events might be (Chang, 2014; Huang, 2016; Tanford & Jung, 2017) as well as for the cities that host them (Robinson & Callan, 2005). What impact events have on the venue and on local residents is also often the subject of analysis (Chen, 2011; Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Jackson, 2008). Evidence of this can be found in works such as Wahl and Walker (2024) which identify the short-term results and long-term legacies of five national and international conferences held in 2022 in Vancouver, Canada, or those which highlight the impact of business events beyond the economic one on issues such as innovation, education or the establishment of social and commercial networks (Edwards et al., 2011).

Gaining insights into event participants has proved to be of enormous appeal to academic inquiry, where numerous studies can be found that seek to measure participants' levels of satisfaction (Chen, 2011; Li, 2011; Swart & Roodt, 2020), motivation (Egresi & Kara, 2014; Mair, 2015; Millán et al., 2016; Yan & Halpenny, 2019), selection mechanisms (Ariffin et al., 2008; Caber et al., 2017; Carlson et al., 2016; Mody et al., 2016), and profile (Akgunduz & Coşar, 2018; Hamilton et al., 2015; Nicholson & Pearce, 2000; Vila et al., 2020). Other issues – such as what impact distance has on participants (Ho & McKercher, 2014; Nilbe et al., 2014) – have also been explored. The last few years have, however, have witnessed a growing interest in new topics that have given rise to increased academic production in the meetings industry. Amongst other questions, these topics mainly concern sustainable development, the gradual professionalisation of the sector, and integration through the development of new technologies, all of which we now look at. Firstly, the question of sustainable development is becoming

increasingly common, with authors putting forward works that offer general studies on environmental impact (Ahmad et al., 2016; Kim & Ko, 2020; Mair & Jago, 2010) as well as different proposals to include sustainable practices in the industry through various case studies in Asia (Abd Hamid et al., 2013; Buathong & Lai, 2019; Chang & Chang, 2020; Wee et al., 2017), Europe (Cosmescu & Tileagă, 2014; Werner et al., 2017) and Africa (Okech, 2011). The concept of green MICE has recently been developed and is included in the circular economy (Ranacher & Pröbstl-Haider, 2014; Tinnish & Mangal, 2012; Yuan, 2013; Zeng et al., 2013) and corporate social responsibility (Musgrave & Woodward, 2016; Smagina et al., 2017). In recent years, the ESG (environmental, social and governance) framework has gained prominence as a key tool for assessing and guiding sustainability in the meetings industry. In this regard we find works such as Dathe et al. (2024) and Nyurenberger et al. (2022) with a clear practical approach for stakeholders who wish to implement it in their professional activities. Climate change has also been evaluated when deciding how to plan business events (Jones et al., 2006; Pandey & Rogerson, 2019).

Secondly, we see increasing interest in the sector with regard to training professionals who are specialized in the meetings industry (Lee et al., 2020). The literature has put forward a number of country-level case studies aimed at proposing, planning or enhancing training programmes in South Africa (Landey & Silvers, 2004), the USA (Fenich & Hashimoto, 2010), Asia (Tang, 2014) and Australia (Lawrence & McCabe, 2001; McCabe, 2008; Wilson & von der Heidt, 2013). However, from the research perspective, the most relevant topics being proposed concern the perspectives for remodelling the academic paradigm, and educational standards for training new professionals (Hsieh, 2013; Karpova & Khoreva, 2014; Sox & Strick, 2017; Sperstad & Cecil, 2011).

Thirdly, the influence of technology and other technological developments on business tourism has not gone unnoticed (Ergen, 2020; Koba, 2020; Shi et al., 2013). In 2012, the enormous potential for virtual meetings (Flowers & Gregson, 2012), the coming together of electronic commerce and the MICE industry (Lee & Lee, 2014; Wei-ling, 2013), and the use of social networks by event participants came to the fore (Choi, 2005; Lee & Lee, 2014; Unurlu, 2020). Big data technology also emerged (Kim et al., 2016; Ruoxin & Yujun, 2019) and the use of mobile applications began to come under the microscope (Silva-Pedroza et al., 2017). Recent years have witnessed the appearance of the concept of smart MICE, which has gone hand in hand with this gradual integration of the latest technologies (Han et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2020) and the development of new ones for data security and protection, such as blockchain technology (Bodkhe et al., 2020).

Finally, other analytical approaches that merit highlighting include those which focus on the role of the public sector and governance (Burgan & Mules, 2001; Devine & Devine, 2015; Roche, 1994), which can be assessed by conducting a local case study (Stokes, 2006a; Yermachenko et al., 2015), carrying out cost benefit analysis *vis-à-vis* environmental policies (Bovenberg et al., 2017), and more specific or innovative methodological proposals (Morgan & Condliffe, 2006). The last two years of research have produced studies gauging the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as a logical response to the sector's having ground to a halt due to health restrictions (Aburumman, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021; Khalfan & Ismail, 2020; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2021). Other innovative topics include personal data protection (Esen & Kocabas, 2021) and issues related to social inclusion and diversity (Dashper & Finkel, 2020).

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct a thorough analysis of MICE tourism over the last fifty years – highlighting its particular features and the main trends to emerge from this specific area of the tourist industry – we opted to apply a method subdivided into processes or stages, which is very similar to other recent works such as Costa et al. (2017), Maia et al. (2019) and Parrales Choez et al. (2022). Specifically, following the operational diagram set out in the flowchart in Figure 1, our research was structured consecutively in the following differentiated stages or phases: (a) establishing the most relevant bibliographical search criteria associated with

	Business tourism	
Meeting industry	KEYWORDS	MICE tourism
MICE industry		Meeting tourism
MICE sector		Event tourism
Congress tourism		Fair tourism

Figure 2. Keywords
Source: authors

academic research into MICE tourism, (b) applying these criteria to the Scopus database, (c) debugging the database initially developed in the previous phase, (d) applying the bibliometric tools chosen in this research and (e) obtaining the results which are presented later.

Taking Figure 1 as the reference, it can clearly be seen how the different stages of the methodological process have been structured. In stage 1, a pre-selection was made of the key terms related to the business tourism sector. This distinction was made based on the existing literature drawing on those terms which are most often used in research focusing on business tourism – depending on the abstract and title. Figure 2 shows the nine keywords finally used. It should be remembered that the term “MICE tourism” is associated to multiple analogous keywords. It may, to some extent, be considered synonymous with other terms such as “business tourism”, “meeting tourism”, “MICE industry”, etc. Hence the use of the different terms shown in Figure 2.

In stage 2, we then considered on which database to implement our bibliometric analysis. We initially had to opt between Scopus (Elsevier) or Web of Science (WoS – Clarivate Analytics) – the two “titans

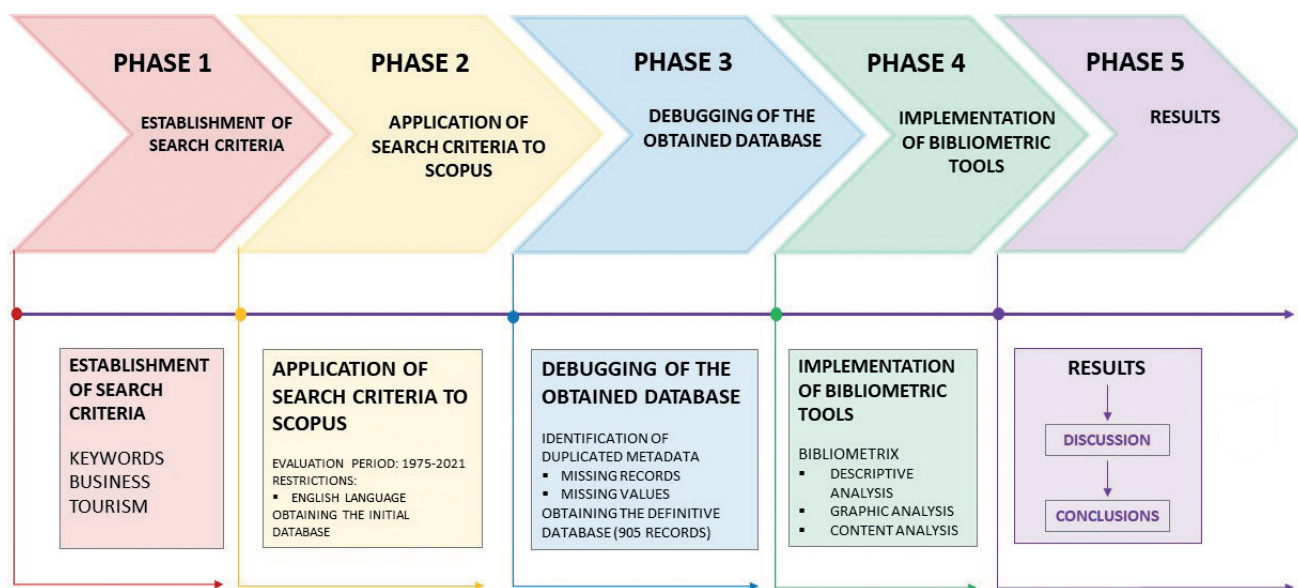


Figure 1. Methodological flow chart
Source: authors

of bibliographic information” as defined by Prancutė (2021). We finally chose the first, which has been collecting bibliographic items from 1788 up to the present day. It also spans a greater number of knowledge domains than WoS (Schotten et al., 2017). In this regard, it should be highlighted that each bibliographic database presents a different structure and categorisation of its metadata (Chadegani et al., 2013) which prevents conducting a joint bibliographic analysis in this research of the WoS and Scopus databases based on Bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Employing Bibliometrix requires using a single specific academic database, given that – as pointed out – the structure of the metadata records is different. The previously selected key terms were then set out in the form of Boolean operators so as to establish a robust search in the Scopus database, as shown below: TITLE-ABS-KEY (“business tourism”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“congress tourism”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“fair tourism”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“mice tourism”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“mice sector”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“mice industry”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“meeting tourism”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“event tourism”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“meeting industry”) AND (EXCLUDE (PUBYEAR, 2022)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, “English”)).

By using this search criterion, we linked all the key terms, pre-establishing a selection of bibliographic items written exclusively in English while setting 2021 as the limit year. We thus obtained an initial bibliographic database spanning the period 1970–2021 which covers

the first works to explore MICE tourism (Haines, 1970) up to the most recent (Yao et al., 2021; Yodsuwan et al., 2021). It should be noted that this period confirms certain sources such as Travel in the Seventies (1970), who point out that tourist activities began to expand worldwide after the 1970s, paradoxically coinciding with events such as the war in Vietnam and the energy crises of the 1970s.

In stage 3, the database initially obtained – and compiled using a BibTeX bibliography archive (Kopp et al., 2023) – was debugged, since academic databases tend to contain duplicate metadata (Beall, 2010), either *vis-à-vis* missing records or missing values (Nutt et al., 2012). As a result, any bibliographic record displaying such problems was deleted. We obtained a final database comprising 905 different bibliographic registers. The process used to create the database is shown in Figure 3, in which the various sub-stages are explained.

In stage 4, we then applied the bibliometric tools chosen for this research. The number of bibliometric applications available to the academic community has obviously increased over the years, particularly between 1990 and 2015 (Cobo et al., 2015), a period which saw the emergence of bibliometric applications such as Ucinet (Borgatti et al., 2002), CiteSpace (Chen, 2004), Pajek (Batagelj & Mrvar, 2004) and HistCite (Leydesdorff et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2020) to name but a few. Nevertheless, this study used Bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) which, in truth, more than a scientometric method or

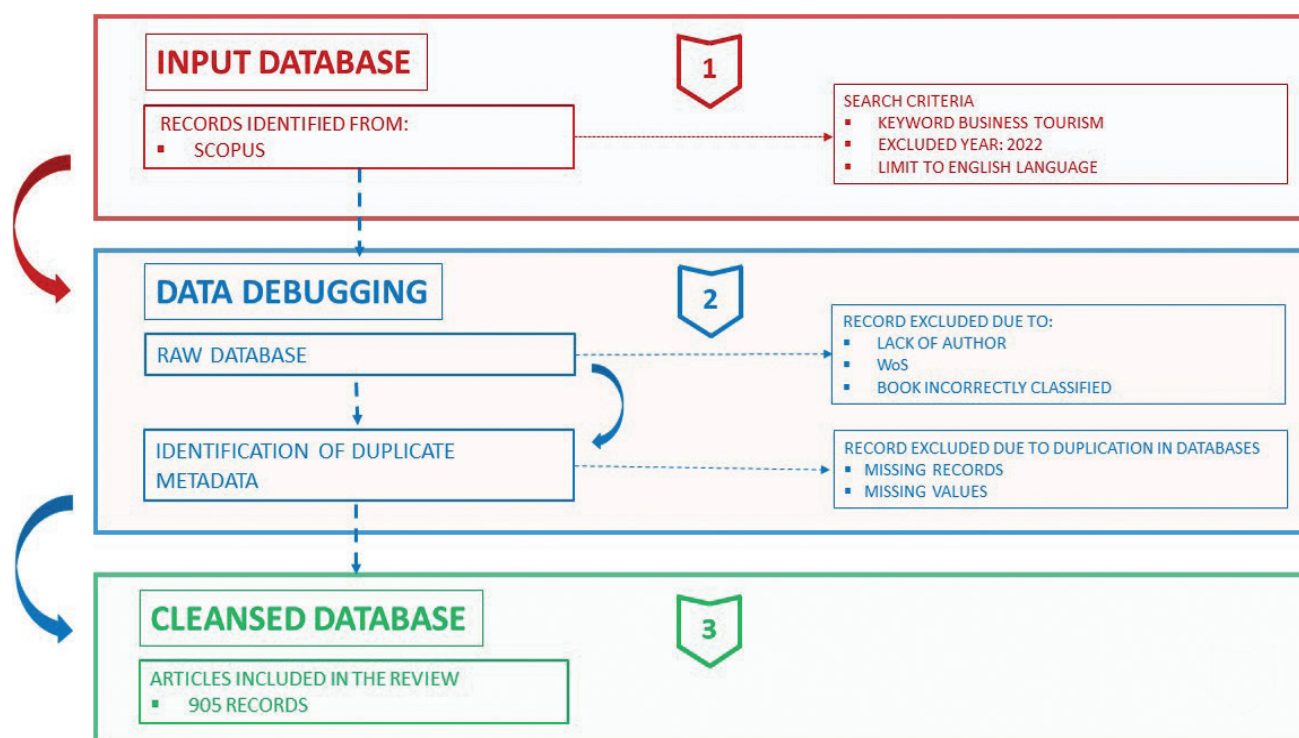


Figure 3. Flow diagram for systematic review
Source: authors

bibliometric tool is in itself a set of procedures that helps to analyse knowledge structures (K-structures) in three key dimensions: conceptual, intellectual, and social. Such characteristics significantly improve the previously described bibliographic tools and are in fact key to analysing any aspect of the tourist sector from a bibliometric perspective. It was therefore decided to use Bibliometrix in this study, given its versatility, as evidenced in other works in which it has previously been applied to the bibliometric analysis of the tourist industry and which attest to its flexibility when exploring and comparing different knowledge domains. Such bibliometric studies include Palácios et al. (2021) who examine the degree of final user confidence in tourist firms, and Singh et al. (2023) who study the tourist phenomenon from the perspective of disabled users' needs in tourist services. Mention should also be made of works that draw on Bibliometrix to reflect some of the concerns of modern-day society, such as the gradual decarbonisation of economies, a process in which the tourist sector must also become involved (Mishra et al., 2022).

In sum, the use of Bibliometrix has enabled three kinds of analysis to be obtained. First, descriptive, through data and key parameter tabulation for bibliometric research into MICE tourism, e.g. the number of citations, type of academic production and the bibliographic impact of the main studies and researchers in accordance with the performance of the *h*-index (Hirsch, 2005) and other indices derived from this such as the *g*-index (Egghe, 2006) or the *m*-index (Guo et al., 2021). It was also possible to conduct a graphic analysis (Sajovic & Boh Podgornik, 2022) based on the visualisation of certain key magnitudes, such as the progress of academic production in this field over the period analysed. The final type of analysis carried out was content analysis (Bhandari, 2023). In other words, we performed a contextualised study of the prevalence of a given number of keywords so as to obtain relevant conclusions from a bibliometric standpoint. To achieve this – in addition to Bibliometrix – we also made occasional use of VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2007, 2010), an application derived from multidimensional scale techniques and which provided academic mapping of the various pre-existing relations and interactions between the keywords defined during the first stage of the research. Finally – and given that this study focused on examining the global trends of MICE tourism – we used a strategic diagram developed on the basis of the fuzzy sets theory (Cobo et al., 2011) which, drawing on Callon's co-word analysis (Callon et al., 1983, 1991) and, based on predetermined dimensions (centrality and density), allows for a full dissection of trends in MICE tourism in terms of the keywords observable in each quadrant.

4. RESULTS

The main features of this study are listed in Table 1. As can be seen, for the established period (1970–2021), there are 905 documents from 476 different sources covering the contributions of 1,886 authors. It can be seen that the majority of works are single-author studies, compared to those by more than one author, and that the number of international contributions is relatively small as a percentage of the total (17.4%).

Table 1. Main information about data

Main information about data		
General data	Timespan	1970–2021
	Sources (journals, books, etc.)	476
	Documents	905
	Document average age	7.97
	Average citations per doc	15.73
	References	242
Document contents	Keywords plus (ID)	2,296
	Author's keywords (DE)	2,279
Document types	Articles	595
	Books	23
	Book chapters	97
	Conference papers	147
	Editorials	5
	Errata	1
	Letters	1
	Notes	6
	Retracted	1
	Reviews	26
	Short surveys	3
	Number of authors	1,886
Authors	Authors of single-authored docs	224
	Single-authored docs	256
	Co-authors per doc	2.41
	International co-authorships (%)	17.4
	Annual growth rate (%)	9.53

Source: authors.

Research has mainly been reflected through articles as well as book chapters and conference papers, in which the number of author's keywords (DE) and keyword plus (ID) is practically the same, although this is not fully representative, given that keyword plus (ID) corresponds to an *ad hoc* algorithm developed for terms from WoS (Garfield & Sher, 1993), and that this research was grounded on the Scopus database. It can be seen how studies focusing on MICE tourism stem from a relatively high number of citations (15.73). Nevertheless, this average number of citations also requires a high average age per document (almost eight years). That said, the growing annual academic production (9.53%) does point towards increased interest in this branch of knowledge, given that – should this rhythm continue – it would take a little over seven years for the total number of publications focused on MICE tourism to double.

Figure 4 shows how academic production over the period considered has evolved and reflects the relatively scant production during the three first decades. We

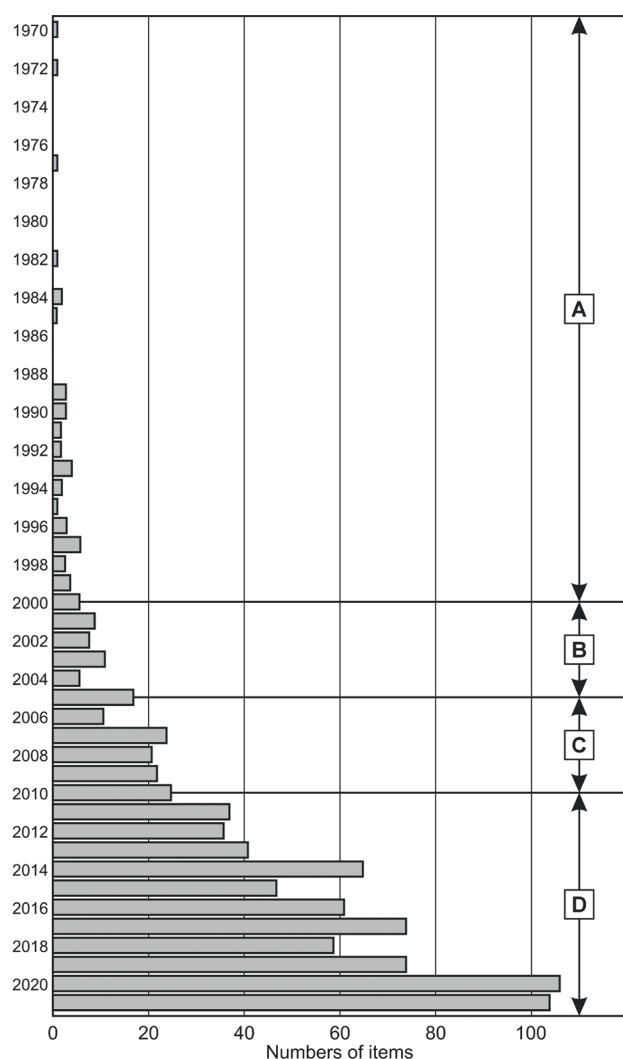


Figure 4. Annual academic production per year
Source: authors

can also split the time period into four distinct stages: 1971–2000 (A), in which a small number of studies began to define the particular characteristics and trends of an economic segment that has gradually acquired its own identity within the economy of tourism (Getz, 1989; Lawson, 1982; Owen, 1992). Academic production over this period was only between 0 and 6 documents per year; 2000–2005 (B), a period in which growing research interest in the area of MICE tourism can be seen, such that academic production increased substantially; 2005–2010 (C), saw an even greater increase in academic production, with studies addressing stakeholders becoming popular (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005), as well as seminal works examining factors of success and the consolidation of the sector (Hankinson, 2005), and which serve as the theoretical-empirical foundation for subsequent inquiry.

The period 2010–2020 (D) saw the consolidation and final establishment of MICE tourism. Predominant here are studies focusing on modelling the sector (Fenich & Hashimoto, 2010; Mair & Jago, 2010). As can be seen in Figure 4, the years 2014, 2017 and 2020 represent the maximum values of the series analysed, and correspond to the development of research based on key issues in business tourism performance, such as economic impact studies and analysis of the stakeholder perspective (Nicholson & Pearce, 2000; Shin et al., 2017). The range of topics dealt with by business tourism is also seen to have expanded through the inclusion of innovative issues such as sustainability (Ahmad et al., 2016; Dauti et al., 2021; Mykletun et al., 2014; Ranacher & Pröbstl-Haider, 2014), new technologies (Ruoxin & Yujun, 2019; Unurlu, 2020) and the professionalisation of the sector (Lee et al., 2020; Sox & Strick, 2017). Inevitably, the last two years of the period studied have been dominated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global economies, and the negative effect this had (Aburumman, 2020; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2021).

In order to compare performance, we evaluated the relevance of various groups of academic actors (countries, universities, researchers, etc.) and the impact of their academic production, based on the bibliographic data obtained (Cobo et al., 2011). Table 2 lists the ten most prolific researchers at an individual level and by nationality as well as the most cited articles over this period related to business tourism, the ten most cited articles in the study period, and the main journals, universities and countries related to this area of knowledge.

By using mainly quantitative data (total number of citations, the year in which publications commenced, *inter alia*), we conduct an analysis of productivity. We present the impact factor of the various researchers through the *h-index*, which crosses the number of citations received by a researcher and their published articles, previously ordered from highest to lowest

Table 2. Ranking of the top ten authors with the highest impact factor, country by author and the most cited papers

Panel (A): Top ten impact authors							
Ranking	Author	PY_start	NP	TC	<i>m</i> -index	<i>g</i> -index	<i>h</i> -index
1.	Getz D.	1989	15	2,359	0.382	15	13
2.	Rogerson C.M.	2002	10	289	0.429	10	9
3.	Rogerson J.M.	2011	6	124	0.417	6	5
4.	Saayman M.	2012	5	57	0.455	5	5
5.	Anderson T.-D.	2014	4	68	0.444	4	4
6.	Forsyth P.	1997	4	285	0.154	4	4
7.	Henderson J.C.	2007	5	92	0.250	5	4
8.	Jago L.	2004	4	272	0.211	4	4
9.	Kim M.	2010	5	40	0.308	5	4
10.	Lee S.-S.	2012	4	38	0.364	4	4
Panel (B): Top ten countries by author							
Ranking	Country by author	Articles	SCP	MCP	MCP ratio	Frequency	
1.	USA	112	110	2	0.018	0.124	
2.	Australia	91	60	31	0.341	0.101	
3.	United Kingdom	70	67	3	0.043	0.077	
4.	China	50	41	9	0.180	0.055	
5.	South Africa	44	40	4	0.091	0.049	
6.	Canada	21	13	8	0.381	0.023	
7.	Malaysia	21	19	2	0.095	0.023	
8.	Italy	20	15	5	0.250	0.022	
9.	Korea	18	12	6	0.333	0.020	
10.	Poland	18	15	3	0.167	0.020	
Panel (C): Top ten papers							
Ranking	Paper	Normalized TC		TC per year	TC		
1.	Event tourism: Definition, evolution, and research (Getz, 2008)	15.56		78.80	1,182		
2.	Progress and prospects for event tourism research (Getz & Page, 2016)	22.80		53.67	483		
3.	Host community reactions: A cluster analysis (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000)	4.12		18.04	415		
4.	Creating an academic landscape of sustainability science: An analysis of the citation network (Kajikawa et al., 2007)	10.04		14.06	225		
5.	Differentiation of rural development driven by industrialization and urbanization in eastern coastal China (Long et al., 2009)	7.92		15.36	215		
6.	Blockchain for Industry 4.0: A comprehensive review (Bodkhe et al., 2020)	27.28		70.00	2,020		
7.	Destination brand images: A business tourism perspective (Hankinson, 2005)	4.97		11.56	208		
8.	Bundling sport events with the host destination (Chalip & McGuirty, 2004)	3.63		10.16	193		
9.	Sport event tourism and the destination brand: Towards a general theory (Chalip & Costa, 2005)	4.56		10.61	191		
10.	Special events. Defining the product (Getz, 1989)	2.97		5.38	183		

Note: PY – year of start of publications, NP – number of publications, TC – total citations, SCP – single country publication, MCP – multiple country publication.

Source: authors.

(Hirsch, 2005), the *g*-index – a variant of the *h*-index – through the decreasing ranking of the number of citations – an index obtained through the largest (single) number of the group of articles studied (Egghe, 2006) – and the *m*-index, which is another variant of the *h*-index that assesses this index by year from the first day of publication and which provides a comparison between researchers who have very different careers (Guo et al., 2021). Amongst those showing the greatest impact *vis-à-vis* business tourism, Getz (2008) leads this ranking. His works can be found throughout this period – both as a single author (Getz, 1989) and as a joint author (Lundberg et al., 2017). The approach he adopts in his works established the foundation in the definition and analysis of trends in the sector in the early works and in the gradual diversification in the fields of study in recent years. The two most cited articles are his, and he also leads the ranking of the most cited. The first bibliographic item shown in the table serves as a reference for research into business tourism, describing and distinguishing between events concerned with business, sports, culture or other large-scale events (Henderson, 2014a). Also evident is the increasingly broader scope of topics addressed in academic analysis and which go beyond the conventional economic impact studies within this emerging sector. The second most cited work (Getz & Page, 2016) expands and deepens the new lines of research that were predominant at the time, concerning who is who in business tourism and their motivation (Getz, 2008; Getz & Page, 2016). He is therefore the author with the

highest *h*-index in the whole table, reaching a score of 13. The next most prominent is Rogerson (2002), whose works are both single-author (Rogerson, 2014) and joint (Pandy & Rogerson, 2019). This researcher focuses on the impact of the business tourism sector for South Africa within the historical framework of apartheid (Rogerson, 2019). The author examines the perspective of various stakeholders, such as cross-border shoppers in Johannesburg (Rogerson, 2018) or looks at business mobility from the standpoint of the meetings industry (Rogerson, 2015b) – obtaining the second highest score. Most of the remaining academics' works are published after 2000, which is when research began to take off. The *h* and *g*-index impact values they achieve range between 4 and 5, and there is a wide array of topics addressed. Some authors focus their research in terms of geographic impact analysis – such as Marques and Santos (2017) in Portugal and Rogerson (2002) for South Africa – whereas others open up the spectrum towards methodological studies (Fenich & Hashimoto, 2010) or major sporting events (Henderson, 2014a). Lekgau and Tichaawa (2021) explore the impact of COVID-19 in the *African Journal of Hospitality*, a journal which also ranks high in terms of published works. The following papers in this ranking reflect some of the emerging future lines of research concerning stakeholders, such as sustainability or integration with new technologies, and the development of mechanisms aimed at boosting competitiveness. The third most cited deals with the use of major events within the marketing strategies of host cities as a way to attract tourism, and the impact

Table 3. Ranking of the top ten authors and sources with the most articles and the most relevant affiliations and countries

Panel (A): Top ten of the most cited authors and sources					
Top ten most cited authors				Top ten sources	
Ranking	Authors	Articles	Articles fractionalized	Sources	Articles
1.	Getz D.	15	9.58	<i>Journal of Convention and Event Tourism</i>	48
2.	Rogerson C.M.	10	8.00	<i>Event Management</i>	33
3.	Marques J.	7	3.50	<i>Tourism Management</i>	23
4.	Kim Y.	6	2.08	<i>Journal of Sport and Tourism</i>	22
5.	Rogerson J.M.	6	5.00	<i>Sustainability</i>	14
6.	Fenich G.	5	3.83	<i>African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure</i>	13
7.	Henderson J.C.	5	4.25	<i>International Journal of Event and Festival Management</i>	10
8.	Kim M.	5	1.83	<i>Tourism Analysis</i>	10
9.	Saayman M.	5	1.75	<i>Accelerating Knowledge Sharing. Creativity and Innovation through Business Tourism</i>	9
10.	Tichaawa T.M.	5	3.00	<i>Current Issues in Tourism</i>	9

Panel (B): Top ten affiliations and countries					
Top affiliations			Top country		
Ranking	Affiliation	Articles	Country	Average article citations	TC
1.	University of Johannesburg	26	Australia	36.10	3,285
2.	Griffith University	13	USA	12.96	1,451
3.	Bournemouth University	12	United Kingdom	17.60	1,232
4.	University of Gothenburg	10	Canada	51.10	1,073
5.	University of North Texas	10	South Africa	12.18	536
6.	Southern Cross University	9	China	10.36	518
7.	Edith Cowan University	8	Hong Kong	32.90	329
8.	George Mason University	8	Italy	16.10	322
9.	North-west University	8	Germany	21.93	307
10.	University of Central Florida	8	Japan	42.67	256

Source: authors.

on residents (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000). The next is Long et al. (2009) who look at the effects on the rural economy of China stemming from the development of various types of industry including business tourism. The fifth article examines strategies used to create a brand image at the chosen destinations (Hankinson, 2005). Table 3 shows the ten most cited authors, the most prolific journals in the field as well as the universities and countries that have focused most attention on exploring this economic sector.

Amongst the ten most cited journals, one particularly noteworthy fact to emerge throughout the analysis period is that this group of publications is reduced to only ten monographs that are confined to four countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, Singapore, and South Africa, with the Americans and the British accounting for over 80% of the publications in the ranking. The two that head the list – *Journal of Convention and Event Tourism* and *Event Management* – both of which are American, specialise in business tourism. However, it is common to find publications related to the meetings industry in journals devoted to the tourism sector in general, such as *Tourism Analysis* and *Current Issues in Tourism*. In fact, it is the third publication in the ranking – *Tourism Management* – that boasts the two articles ranked first and second amongst the most cited (Getz, 2008; Getz & Page, 2016). The gradual incorporation of the concept of “sustainable development” in this economic sector has enabled journals specialising in sustainability – such as *Sustainability* – to join this list.

Worthy of note amongst the most prolific countries is the leadership of Australia *vis-à-vis* its immediate

followers in the ranking, which are the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada (in that order). The number of citations for Australia is over twice that of these three countries, and is five times greater when compared to countries such as South Africa or China. Australia accounts for over 35% of citations, such that the four first countries absorb over 75% of all the citations in this list. Amongst the principal universities to have carried out research into business tourism, worthy of note is the research conducted by the University of Johannesburg and by Griffith University, located in South Africa and Australia, respectively. The University of Johannesburg has performed numerous studies compared to the rest, since it has twice as many as the second most highly ranked – Griffith University – with the two together accounting for 60% of this ranking. This reflects the growing interest in research from South Africa and is evidenced by its ranking fifth in terms of the most cited countries. Likewise, the interest of Griffith University reflects Australia’s leadership in this regard, including recent sustainability studies in events tourism (Li et al., 2021). The remaining universities in this ranking display similar levels of research to one another, with a number of published articles ranging between 8 and 12. Prominent in this regard is the University of Bournemouth (United Kingdom) which ranks third in terms of defining terminology, the characteristics of the sector and the research challenges (Getz & Page, 2016; Ladkin, 2014). Figure 5 presents the concurrence of keywords found in the documents compiled. As can be seen, the importance of each term is directly proportional to the size of the bubble within the relational network in which it is included.

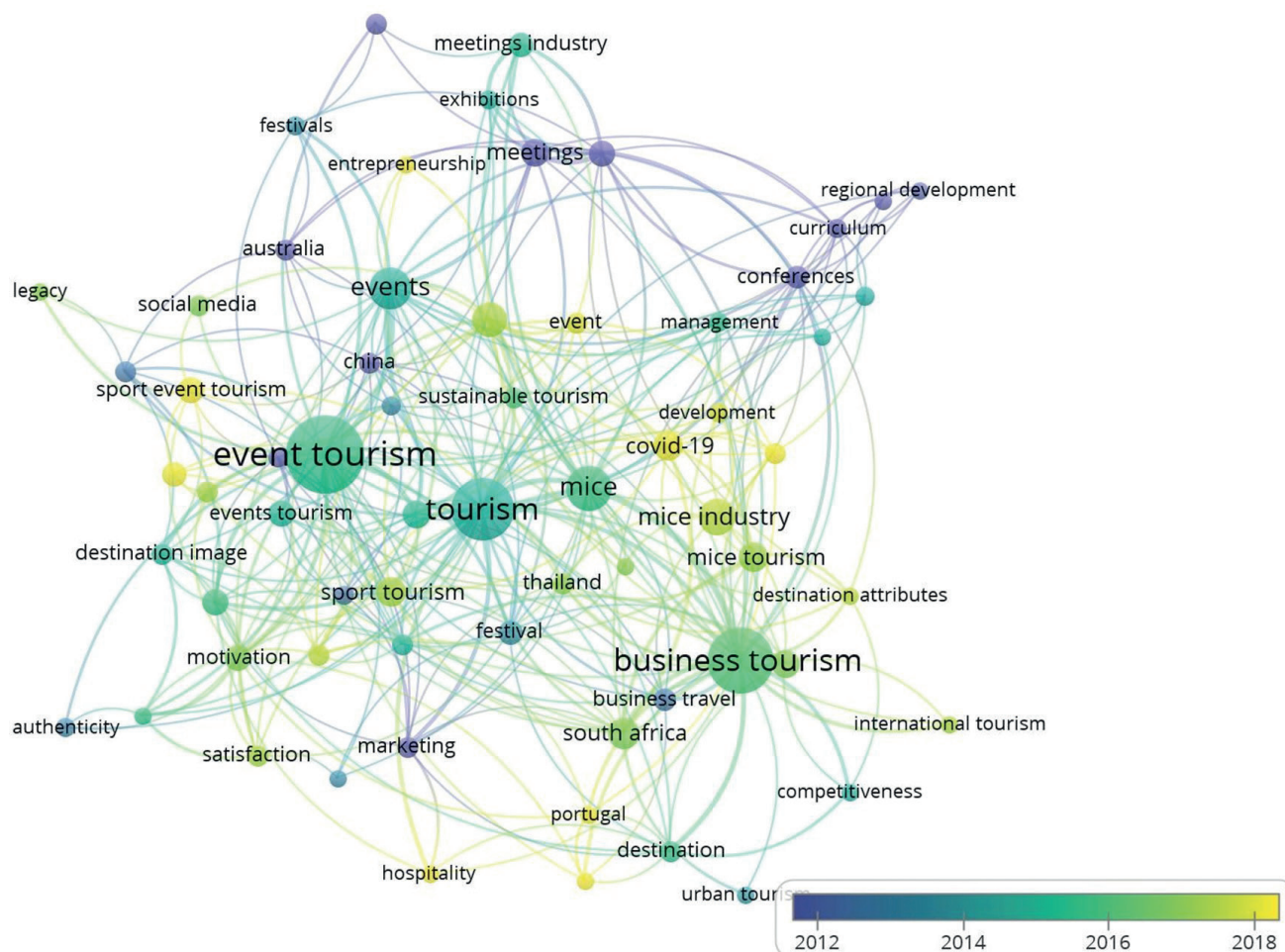


Figure 5. Most frequent words
Source: authors

Framed within the cluster linked to basic and transversal themes we find terms such as “management”, “development” and “MICE industry” which refer to traditional studies that describe the meetings industry and its economic potential for development. Within the cluster linked to *highly developed* and isolated topics of less relevance can be found terms such as “Delphi technique”, “business travel” and “motivation”, related to specific techniques or to profiling attendees (e.g. age, sex, etc.). Contained within the fourth cluster are terms such as education, curriculum, skills and technology, reflecting topics that display an increasing degree of relevance in the sector. The cluster associated to motor themes evidences the strong link between the meetings industry and the tourist sector, which is reflected in the most frequently used words in the documents. Terms such as business or events tourism – related to economic impact studies – are common here. Emphasis is often placed on the increasing competitiveness of the cities hosting the meetings, as well as the impact these events can have on local economies, such that we find terms associated to this cluster like competitiveness, marketing, destination attributes and destination image.

The gradual development over the last few years of activities linked to this segment of tourism is reflected in this relational diagram (see Figure 5) with the terms associated to its acronym MICE, such as MICE industry, MICE tourism, as well as terms such as meetings, exhibitions and festivals. The importance of geographic impact studies is reflected through the presence of terms such as Australia, China or South Africa, or terms like destination image or destination attributes. This research uses academic mapping to represent the cognitive structure in events tourism. The technique used is co-word analysis (Callon et al., 1983; Cobo et al., 2011) and seeks to delimit a field of study as well as to visualise and conceptualise the sub-fields found when comparing co-words or co-citations (Callon et al., 1991; Small, 1973).

Figure 6 presents the strategic diagram of key words. Each topic has been characterised through two dimensions: centrality and density. Centrality reflects the relevance of each topic by measuring one network’s degree of interaction with another’s, while density indicates the latter’s degree of development by measuring the internal strength of the network. Each

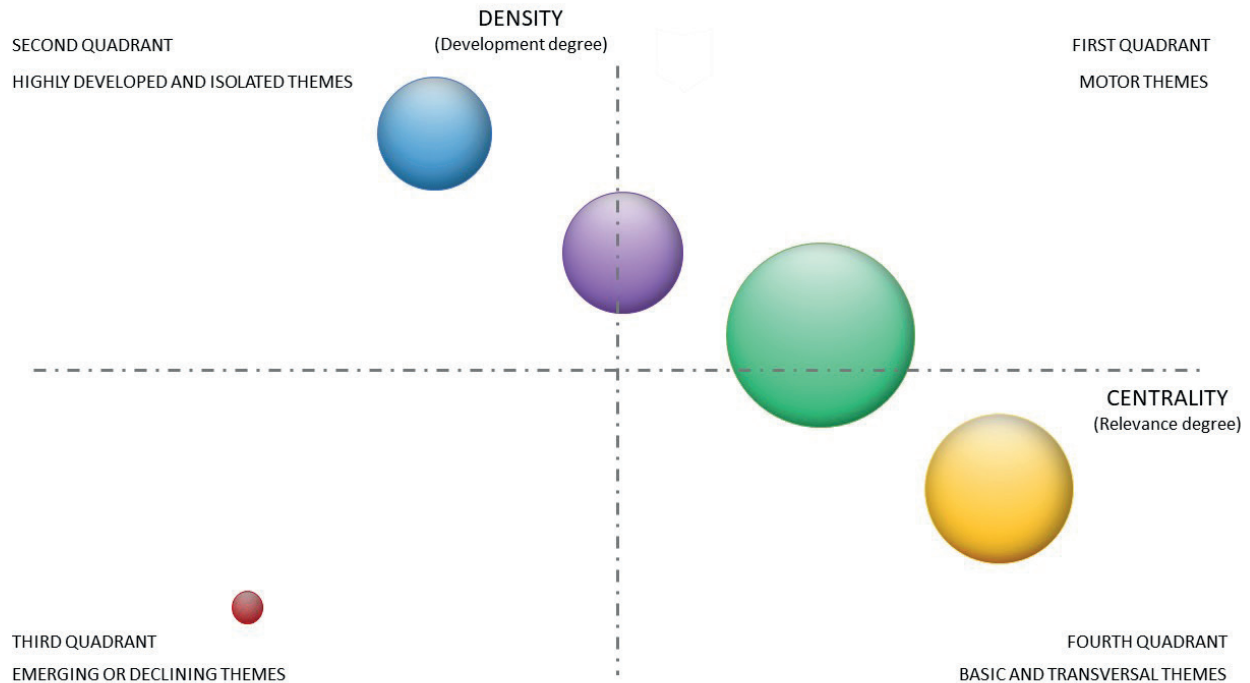


Figure 6. Strategic diagram of keywords
Source: authors

cluster is thus represented graphically on two axes that delimit four major thematic categories through four quadrants. The topics considered to be motor themes within business tourism are located in the upper right quadrant – and are amply developed and essential. The highly developed and isolated themes in the upper left quadrant are considered to be less relevant. The lower left quadrant contains emerging topics or declining topics that are also deemed to be of little relevance and underdeveloped. In the final quadrant – the lower right one – we find topics that have greater relevance, but which are less developed, and that might be considered general, transversal or basic topics related to the meetings industry.

The first cluster (yellow bubble) is located in the fourth quadrant of basic topics addressing issues such as the very industry of business tourism itself and the activities carried out, such as meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions. It also involves issues related to management, such as the social and economic effects of the MICE industry or the creation of surveys. Within the third quadrant, an area of topics that are emerging or declining, we find the second cluster (red bubble) where the only topic studied concerns “industry requirements”, which is currently the least relevant with regard to the rest of academic inquiry. The third cluster (blue bubble) is located in the second quadrant of isolated topics related to less pressing research topics within business tourism, such as methodological or organisational issues and aspects

related to travel and attendee profiles. Between the first quadrant of issues concerning motors and the second quadrant of isolated topics is located the fourth cluster (purple bubble), which looks at questions such as the professionalisation of the sector, education and matters concerning society and institutions. These issues attract the attention of academic research to a notable degree. The fifth and final cluster (green bubble) is also located between two quadrants – the first quadrant of motors and the fourth of basic topics – and addresses issues that reach the core of business tourism. It is the most relevant of all, not due to its size but because it explores key issues in the meetings industry, prominent amongst which are economic analysis, management, sustainable development and marketing.

5. DISCUSSION

Analysis of the above results reveals a significant increase in academic studies addressing the meetings industry, a rise that has been particularly evident over the last two decades. During the period 1970–2000 (A), research trends in business tourism focused on identifying activities carried out in the context of the meetings industry and on pinpointing its general characteristics (Getz, 1989; Lawson, 1982). Researcher interest in this stage increased as the number of events

held also rose, with this expansion going hand in hand with the boom in mass tourism, as pointed out by Travel in the Seventies (1970), after the 1970s. This growth has been driven by the various social actors involved (enterprises, public entities, associations, etc.) as a result of their having realised the benefits to be derived from developing the sector (Getz & Page, 2016; Lawson, 1982; Mules & Faulkner, 1996; Tanford & Jung, 2017).

General agreement can be found amongst authors when defining the activities and characteristics related to business tourism and which, to a certain degree, set it apart from conventional tourism and which has led to analysis revolving around the activities undertaken by event participants, such as meetings, incentive trips, conferences and exhibitions (Getz, 1989; Lawson, 1982; Owen, 1992; Tanford & Jung, 2017). Nevertheless, this consensus disappears when it comes to which term to use when referring to business tourism, and which depends to a large extent on the activities and events involved in the particular case study and even on authors' preferences.

At the end of this period – and moving into the period 2000–2005 (B) – we see a proliferation of economic impact studies exploring business events (Wootton & Stevens, 1995). The general consensus is that there is a positive impact (Burgan & Mules, 2001; Dwyer & Forsyth, 1997), although certain studies do warn of the possible negative effects for some stakeholders (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Jackson, 2008) or for the environment (Dauti et al., 2021; Moisesescu et al., 2019; Mykletun et al., 2014). Indeed, the various stakeholders involved in the event tend to be the key issue in research (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000). Occasionally, the analysis focuses on the consequences for the particular stakeholder in question (Johnson & Vanetti, 2007), whereas other studies look at several different stakeholders at the same time. On many occasions, the research examines those affected in a specific geographic area (Bradley et al., 2002) which leads us to draw attention to another common focus of economic impact studies – analysis of a case study for a specific geographic region (Akin Aksu et al., 2004; Campiranon & Arcodia, 2008; Hanly, 2012). In the analysis by geographic blocks, the areas in which academic research has had the greatest presence and which set the global trend in the meetings industry are Europe, Asia-Pacific, and North America. In these areas, we can find all the relevant and pioneering trends surrounding business tourism, whether through impact studies at a geographic level (Jin et al., 2013; Stokes, 2006b), from the stakeholder perspective (McCabe, 2014), through sustainable development (Wilson & von der Heidt, 2013), the professionalisation of the sector (Fenich & Hashimoto, 2010) and when addressing integration with new technologies (Davidson, 2018). Worth highlighting in this regard are other regions such as

South Africa, where the research efforts of authors such as Rogerson (2014) evidence a commitment to this segment of tourism as an economic driver in the region.

It is the combined effect of the whole array of transversal approaches together with the emergence of new research trends in the periods 2005–2010 (C) and 2010–2020 (D) that explains the substantial growth of academic production compared to the first stage. With authors such as Deery et al. (2004) considering events and sports tourism as sub-groups of tourism (Getz & Page, 2016), the development of the industry has given rise to the emergence of new needs – such as professionalisation of the sector – that have led to it being treated separately from traditional tourism. The period 2000–2005 (B) saw the first efforts in this sense (McCabe, 2008), although it was the period 2005–2010 (C) when specific training programmes were carried out in universities in countries where this economic activity is highly developed (Fenich & Hashimoto, 2010; Hsieh, 2013; Lee et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2017). Even though training formed a key part of the training framework of tourism (Getz & Page, 2016), this circumstance was consolidated as a natural trend in the sector in the following years.

Throughout these two stages, problems persisted concerning definitions and terminology, as well as with regard to the high degree of fragmentation in the industry, which led to difficulties in terms of processing data statistically (Ladkin, 2014; Pearlman, 2008). Academic literature continued with the already referred to approaches, including the geographic issue of the cities hosting the events (Del Chiappa, 2012; Getz & Page, 2016; Kerdpitak, 2019), a line of research which continued to increase in subsequent years (Millán et al., 2016; Sutton, 2016). New technologies and, in general, research related to the application of technical and social progress in the meetings industry, gained particular relevance in the period 2010–2020 (D). Stakeholders became aware of how to benefit from the competitive advantages afforded to them by websites (Davras, 2020; Koba, 2020) and by new communication and information systems (Ergen, 2020; Han et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2016; Shi et al., 2013; Ziyadin et al., 2019) and which enabled them to generate synergies so as to successfully hold their business events. Sustainable development – which is also present throughout the period 2010–2020 (D) gradually came to form part of the growth of the meetings industry and its corresponding academic analysis through the use of sustainable practices when holding events (Bovenberg et al., 2017; Dauti et al., 2021; Kajikawa et al., 2007; Wee et al., 2017). The development of sustainable models (Chang & Chang, 2020; Mair & Jago, 2010) as well as others related to the concept of green MICE (Mykletun et al., 2014; Ranacher & Pröbstl-Haider, 2014) will likely continue in the future, given society's

ever-increasing concern for the impact of human activities on the environment.

To the best of our knowledge, the academic literature has approached business tourism research in a partial and narrowly focused manner. The results of this study offer a new critical perspective on emerging trends in the sector. Previous research, such as that conducted by Getz (1989) at an early stage as well as its characterization almost a decade later in relation to the economic dynamics of the sector (Getz & Page, 2016), or that of Zeng et al. (2013) in relation to sustainability in the MICE sector confirms this limitation in terms of temporal and methodological scope. Our bibliometric analysis extends this body of knowledge by integrating modern tools and a systematic approach to identify key patterns, key players and thematic connections in business tourism.

This approach not only fills an important gap in the literature but also has important practical applications. Works such as Mair and Jago (2010) provide a guide to event organizers for the implementation of sustainable practices taking into account issues such as understanding the motivating factors of this type of policy, overcoming economic and social or cultural barriers as well as taking advantage from the point of view of communication and brand image. In this contemporary practical line, Sox and Strick (2017) examine both the integration of new technologies for the realization of hybrid meetings and the need for professionalization and training in the growing sector to meet the need to improve the skills of these professionals, as well as Lee et al. (2016) offering valuable technological tools to improve the planning, marketing and evaluation of meetings and events in the 21st century, such as social networks, mobile applications or virtual meetings. In this sense, he highlights the potential of incentive travel, which from an academic point of view has not been analyzed in-depth and yet has a remarkable potential for practical application for managers in the meetings industry who can take advantage of its effects on the productivity and motivation of their employees. Mair (2015) discusses this issue in depth and suggests in his conclusions how incentive travel is seen as an important and meaningful reward by organizations and their employees. These results highlight the reality of a sector that is consolidating year after year and becoming an attractive focus for investment in human capital, as well as in goods and services, which benefits society as a whole. These conclusions not only enrich academic knowledge but also offer practical tools to optimize and improve the competitiveness of destinations and promote the sustainable development of the sector, identifying the main actors, authors, journals and institutions and facilitating collaboration among them for the growth of the sector.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides a bibliometric analysis of the academic articles published over the last fifty years on the topic of business tourism. The main findings reflect the current situation of the sector as well as the trends followed by research on the issue. It should first be pointed out that academic studies exploring business tourism are often related to its economic impact. In methodological terms, works can focus on a particular aspect of the economic activity in question, on the region hosting the events, or can examine cases by transversally looking at both the actors involved as well as the venues. It should also be highlighted that the increased research activity has been concentrated over the last twenty years.

Stemming from this economic interest – and seen from the academic perspective – there has been a diversification in approaches to the meetings industry over the last two decades. Prominent in this regard are the issues of sustainable development, the professionalisation of the sector and the use of so-called new technologies. As regards the first of these, growing social awareness *vis-à-vis* protecting the environment has triggered greater interest in issues related to corporate social responsibility and the circular economy. As for professionalisation, the consolidation of the sector as a profitable economic activity for a region and the increased demand for activities linked to MICE tourism have turned the demand for specialised professionals into a labour market need. Finally, use of so-called new technologies has boosted the quality of the services provided and has enhanced management efficiency, which has positively impacted performance and the anticipated synergies. The consolidation of business tourism as a relevant economic driver suggests that impact studies will continue to be a relevant issue motivating researchers, managers and organizers in the meetings industry. However, it is the conclusions drawn in this article in relation to the challenges of sustainability, professionalization and technology that will continue to contribute to academic research in the sector. The findings of this study have significant implications for key players in the MICE sector, including event organizers, destination policymakers and service providers. The trends identified, provide a solid basis for developing practical strategies, such as the alignment of industry players with ESG principles to minimize environmental impact and position themselves as responsible destinations, the progressive implementation of technological solutions to improve the user experience and optimize the productivity of business events, and the implementation of educational programs aimed at training industry professionals, thus strengthening the competitiveness of MICE destinations. Not all the implications are economic. The

legacy of business tourism has proven to have an impact on the society that hosts such events. From a social and cultural point of view, the benefits it can bring to the destination cities are remarkable, and social, public and private agents should take advantage of these for the benefit of all. Together with these innovative study approaches, questions related to governance and the public sector as well as to new methodological proposals applicable to business tourism have served to complement and enrich potential lines of future research. Furthermore, given the impact which the COVID-19 pandemic had – paralysing business tourism for two years due to health restrictions and triggering a decline in academic production – comparative studies addressing academic production pre- and post- pandemic are more than justified, with such works likely to be confined to studies exploring the impact of the pandemic as well as to issues concerning preventive methods.

As regards the limitations of the present study, mention should be made of the fact that we failed to use all the existing databases. The work is grounded on Scopus, considered the most all-encompassing database, given that it covers more years in its references and spans a larger number of disciplines than others. Nevertheless, our analysis may have overlooked works from authors included in other databases – such as the also well-known WoS – and which would possibly have helped to carry out a more thorough analysis. We are also aware that there a good number of approaches that can be adopted to examine the meetings industry – perhaps as many as there are researchers and fields of inquiry in which to apply them. We opted to present the principal trends and to group them in accordance with the points of view taken by the authors themselves, although we do recognise that – given the transversal nature of this economic activity – many other methodological (Martín et al., 2017a, 2017b; Rojas Bueno et al., 2020) or other approaches related to the public sector are feasible (Dredge & Whitford, 2011). In this sense, another of the limitations to highlight lies in the exclusively quantitative approach, based on bibliometric analysis. Although this methodology is robust and widely accepted by the academic community, qualitative methodological approaches would allow us to explore the perspectives of the actors involved, such as managers, organizers and participants in the MICE sector. Future research could integrate qualitative methodologies, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and case studies, to enrich knowledge on the practical application of emerging trends in the industry. This combined approach would allow us not only to confirm the dynamics identified in this analysis but also to better understand the specific needs and challenges faced by the sector in real contexts.

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