

Social Entrepreneurship in Sustainable Tourism: A Bibliometric Analysis of Governance, Resilience, and Regenerative Tourism Research

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Abstract : This study investigates the intellectual evolution of social entrepreneurship research within sustainable tourism through a bibliometric analysis of Scopus indexed publications published between 2019 and 2026. The study aims to identify dominant research themes, conceptual structures, and emerging sustainability trajectories shaping the relationship between tourism and social entrepreneurship. Bibliographic data were collected from the Scopus database using a structured search strategy and screened following the PRISMA 2020 framework. A total of 80 journal articles were analyzed using Bibliometrix, Biblioshiny, and VOSviewer to examine publication trends, keyword co occurrence, citation structures, and thematic interconnections. The findings demonstrate a significant expansion of tourism social entrepreneurship research, particularly following the post pandemic transformation of global tourism systems. The intellectual structure of the field is increasingly dominated by themes related to governance, resilience, social innovation, community empowerment, and regenerative tourism. The co occurrence network further reveals growing interdisciplinary convergence among sustainability science, governance studies, resilience theory, innovation research, and community based tourism perspectives. The findings indicate that social entrepreneurship is progressively evolving from a market oriented entrepreneurial concept toward a governance oriented sustainability mechanism embedded within broader processes of social ecological transformation and adaptive tourism development. The study contributes theoretically by repositioning social entrepreneurship within a sustainability transition and adaptive governance framework while identifying regenerative tourism and resilience based governance as important future research trajectories within sustainable tourism scholarship.

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1. Introduction

Tourism has increasingly evolved into one of the most influential global development sectors, contributing not only to economic growth and employment generation, but also to social transformation, cultural exchange, and regional development. Nevertheless, the accelerated expansion of tourism activities has simultaneously intensified multiple structural challenges, including ecological

degradation, unequal benefit distribution, cultural commodification, governance fragmentation, and the marginalization of local communities. The persistence of these challenges has stimulated growing academic concern regarding the limitations of conventional tourism development models that prioritize destination competitiveness and market expansion over long term socio ecological sustainability. Consequently, sustainable tourism has progressively shifted from a managerial discourse focused on impact mitigation toward a broader paradigm emphasizing resilience, social justice, participatory governance, and community wellbeing (Higgins Desbiolles, 2020; de Bruyn et al., 2023; Miyaki Natanael et al., 2026).

Recent sustainability scholarship increasingly argues that tourism destinations should be understood as complex socio ecological systems characterized by institutional interdependence, environmental vulnerability, and governance uncertainty. Within this perspective, sustainability is no longer interpreted merely as environmental management, but as a broader process of adaptive socio ecological transition requiring institutional transformation, collaborative governance, and long term resilience building. The contemporary sustainability debate in tourism increasingly recognizes that environmental protection alone is insufficient to ensure destination sustainability. Sustainable tourism systems require institutional adaptability, collaborative governance, local legitimacy, and inclusive participation capable of balancing economic objectives with ecological and social priorities. Recent tourism scholarship has therefore moved beyond efficiency based sustainability frameworks toward more transformative perspectives that emphasize regeneration, resilience, and adaptive governance. Within this transition, sustainability is no longer interpreted merely as the reduction of environmental impacts, but rather as a continuous process of socio ecological transformation involving governments, local communities, entrepreneurs, and civil society actors (Dredge, 2022; Liburd & Duedahl, 2025; I Putu Edy Arizona et al., 2026).

At the same time, tourism destinations are experiencing increasing vulnerability under conditions of environmental uncertainty, climate disruption, overtourism, economic volatility, and post pandemic restructuring. These conditions have exposed the fragility of tourism systems that remain highly dependent on external visitor flows, centralized governance structures, and market driven growth strategies. The COVID 19 pandemic particularly intensified scholarly discussions regarding the necessity of more resilient and locally embedded tourism development approaches capable of strengthening adaptive capacity and reducing structural dependence on mass tourism models (Endayani et al., 2026).

This condition has also intensified criticism toward tourism governance models that continue to prioritize destination competitiveness and visitor expansion while paying insufficient attention to social ecological resilience, institutional inclusivity, and community wellbeing. Consequently, contemporary sustainability debates increasingly reflect an unresolved tension between market oriented tourism development and transformative sustainability agendas centered on regeneration, participation, and adaptive governance. Within this broader transformation, social entrepreneurship has attracted substantial scholarly attention as an alternative development mechanism capable of integrating economic activity with social value creation, community empowerment, and sustainability objectives. Unlike conventional entrepreneurship, which primarily emphasizes opportunity exploitation and profit maximization, social entrepreneurship focuses on addressing social problems through innovative and participatory approaches that generate collective value. In tourism contexts, this orientation becomes particularly significant because tourism activities are deeply embedded within local social relations, environmental resources, cultural identities, and governance structures. Social entrepreneurship therefore offers a framework through which tourism development can potentially strengthen local resilience, support community participation, and foster more inclusive sustainability transitions (Dahles et al., 2020; Moriggi, 2020; Dela Laras Sati et al., 2026).

The increasing relevance of social entrepreneurship in tourism research also reflects a broader conceptual shift from individualistic entrepreneurial perspectives toward more collaborative and governance oriented approaches. Tourism sustainability cannot be achieved solely through isolated business initiatives, because destination development inherently depends on institutional coordination, stakeholder collaboration,

social trust, and community legitimacy. As a result, recent tourism scholarship increasingly conceptualizes social entrepreneurship as a socially embedded governance mechanism rather than merely a market based entrepreneurial activity (Sinaulan et al., 2025).

This conceptual transition is important because it repositions entrepreneurship from an exclusively economic activity toward a collaborative sustainability mechanism embedded within wider processes of governance adaptation, institutional learning, and socio ecological transformation.

Furthermore, the growing integration between social entrepreneurship and sustainability discourse has stimulated increasing interest in themes such as social innovation, community based tourism, regenerative tourism, adaptive governance, and resilience oriented destination management. Contemporary tourism studies increasingly argue that sustainability transitions require innovation processes extending beyond technological modernization and commercial expansion. Innovation within sustainable tourism is progressively interpreted as a social and institutional process involving collaborative problem solving, participatory governance arrangements, social value generation, and the reconfiguration of stakeholder relationships.

Despite the expanding body of literature, the intellectual structure of research on social entrepreneurship within sustainable tourism remains conceptually fragmented. Existing studies have generated important insights regarding community participation, rural tourism development, social capital, legitimacy, governance, social innovation, and regenerative tourism. However, these themes are often examined separately within specific empirical contexts and disciplinary perspectives.

As a result, limited understanding still exists regarding how sustainability, governance, resilience, innovation, and social entrepreneurship collectively interact within an integrated sustainability transition framework in tourism scholarship. The rapid expansion of publications has therefore not been accompanied by sufficient conceptual consolidation capable of explaining the interdisciplinary convergence shaping the evolution of sustainable tourism research.

Moreover, previous bibliometric studies have predominantly concentrated on broader domains such as sustainable tourism research, tourism entrepreneurship, or general social entrepreneurship studies. While these studies provide valuable contributions regarding publication trends and thematic development, they do not specifically clarify the strategic role of social entrepreneurship within the intellectual landscape of sustainable tourism scholarship.

More importantly, existing bibliometric studies have rarely examined whether social entrepreneurship operates merely as an entrepreneurial subtheme or functions as an interdisciplinary governance mechanism connecting regenerative tourism, adaptive resilience, collaborative innovation, and participatory sustainability transition discourses.

Bibliometric analysis offers a systematic methodological approach for addressing this challenge because it enables the quantitative mapping of publication trends, conceptual structures, thematic relationships, and citation networks within large bodies of scientific literature.

Beyond descriptive publication analysis, bibliometric mapping is particularly valuable for revealing hidden intellectual structures, identifying interdisciplinary thematic convergence, detecting conceptual fragmentation, and tracing the evolution of sustainability oriented knowledge production across rapidly expanding research domains.

This study therefore aims to examine the intellectual evolution of social entrepreneurship research within sustainable tourism through a bibliometric analysis of Scopus indexed publications published between 2019 and 2026.

Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on general sustainable tourism trends, isolated empirical contexts, or broad entrepreneurship discussions, this study develops an integrated bibliometric mapping that positions social entrepreneurship as an interdisciplinary sustainability governance mechanism embedded within wider processes of resilience building, collaborative innovation, adaptive governance, and socio ecological transition. The novelty of this research lies in its effort to conceptually demonstrate how social entrepreneurship increasingly functions as an intellectual bridge connecting regenerative tourism, governance transformation, community resilience, and participatory sustainability transitions within contemporary tourism scholarship.

Based on these gaps, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: 1) How has social entrepreneurship research within sustainable tourism evolved between 2019 and 2026?. 2) What are the dominant conceptual structures, thematic relationships, and intellectual trends shaping the field?. 3) How are governance, resilience, and regenerative tourism positioned within the intellectual development of sustainable tourism scholarship?

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) combined with bibliometric analysis to examine the intellectual development of social entrepreneurship research within sustainable tourism. Bibliometric analysis is increasingly recognized as an effective quantitative approach for identifying publication trends, conceptual structures, thematic evolution, and citation patterns within interdisciplinary research fields (Zupic & Čater, 2015). In tourism sustainability studies, bibliometric methods are widely used to reveal emerging research trajectories and conceptual convergence that are often difficult to identify through conventional narrative reviews alone (Donthu et al., 2021).

The bibliographic data analyzed in this study were retrieved exclusively from the Scopus database. Scopus was selected because it provides broad multidisciplinary coverage and reliable citation indexing across tourism, sustainability, entrepreneurship, governance, and social science studies (Singh et al., 2020). Data collection was conducted using the TITLE-ABS-KEY search function to ensure the relevance of the retrieved publications to the focus of the study. The search query applied in this study was:

("social entrepreneurship") AND (tourism OR "rural tourism" OR "community based tourism")

The data retrieval process was finalized in January 2026. The initial search identified 198 documents. Several filtering stages were subsequently applied to improve dataset consistency and analytical relevance. First, publication years were limited to the period between 2019 and 2026 because recent years represent the rapid expansion of sustainability transition, regenerative tourism, collaborative governance, and resilience-oriented tourism discussions. This stage reduced the dataset to 139 documents.

Second, document types were restricted to journal articles only, while conference proceedings, book chapters, editorials, review notes, and short communications were excluded to maintain consistency in scientific quality and peer-reviewed publication standards. This procedure reduced the dataset to 82 articles. Third, only English-language publications were included to ensure analytical consistency and comparability across bibliometric studies. Following the final screening stage, 80 articles were included in the bibliometric analysis.

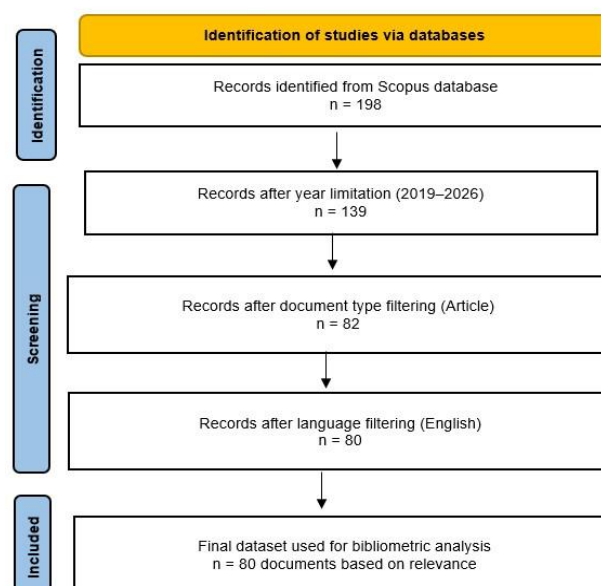


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Article Selection Process
Source: Developed by the author using PRISMA 2020 framework.

The article selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 framework to improve methodological transparency, reproducibility, and systematic rigor. The PRISMA procedure consisted of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion stages. Prior to analysis, data cleaning and keyword normalization were conducted to reduce conceptual fragmentation caused by variations in abbreviations, singular and plural forms, and synonymous keyword terminology.

All bibliographic records were exported in BibTeX format and analyzed using Bibliometrix through the Biblioshiny interface in RStudio. Network visualization and keyword co-occurrence mapping were further analyzed using VOSviewer version 1.6.20. Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny were selected because they provide integrated analytical functions for publication productivity analysis, citation analysis, thematic evolution, conceptual structure mapping, and scientific collaboration analysis (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Meanwhile, VOSviewer was utilized due to its strong capability in constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks, particularly keyword co-occurrence and thematic clustering analysis (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The analytical process consisted of five stages: annual scientific production analysis, keyword analysis, globally cited document analysis, thematic evolution analysis, and co-occurrence network visualization.

The co-occurrence analysis employed full counting and association strength normalization to improve network interpretability. The minimum occurrence threshold was set at three keyword occurrences to enhance visualization clarity and reduce excessive fragmentation within the network structure.

Despite the comprehensive analytical process, several limitations should be acknowledged. The exclusive use of Scopus-indexed and English-language publications may have excluded potentially relevant studies indexed in other databases or published in non-English contexts. Nevertheless, recent bibliometric studies confirm that Bibliometrix, Biblioshiny, and VOSviewer remain among the most reliable analytical tools for science mapping and thematic visualization in sustainability-oriented tourism research (Kapoor et al., 2024).

3 Results

Annual Scientific Production

The analysis of the annual scientific production shows significant growth of the research on social entrepreneurship in the context of sustainable tourism in the observed period (2019–2026). Although not exactly linear, the overall trend reveals a significant rise in the academic attention for sustainability-oriented tourism business since 2021. Only five publications in 2019 and six in 2020 and 2021 each were found in the dataset. In 2022, a remarkable increase was noted, with the number of publications reaching eighteen articles, the largest annual scientific production throughout the monitored era. After this high, the publishing intensity gradually decreased to thirteen publications in 2023 and 10 publications in 2024. However, the scientific production had a resurgence in 2025 with twelve publications, before stabilizing at 10 publications in 2026. The rapid increase in publication intensity after 2021 is indicative of a broader shift in the discourse on tourism sustainability in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic. As this period progressed, tourism scholarship increasingly adopted resilience oriented development models, participatory governance, community empowerment and sustainability transitions as a means of reconciling economic recovery with ecological responsibility and social inclusion. The rise of the research effort also shows that social entrepreneurship has been steadily acknowledged as a crucial strategy for fostering adaptable and community focused tourist development. The publication trend also indicates that current tourism entrepreneurship research is moving beyond traditional market oriented views that mainly link entrepreneurship to destination competitiveness and economic growth. Recent studies are progressively positioning social entrepreneurship as a sustainability oriented governance mechanism related with social innovation, collaborative engagement, community resilience and regenerative tourist change. This conceptual shift indicates that tourism entrepreneurship is no longer solely studied from business performance and commercialization perspectives but increasingly through broader discourses of social ecological sustainability and long term destination resilience. Meanwhile, the variations of the publication intensity beyond 2022 suggest that the field is still in a vibrant phase of intellectual consolidation. While sustainability

oriented tourism entrepreneurship has attracted growing academic interest, the conceptual boundaries of the field continue to evolve alongside emerging debates around regenerative tourism, stakeholder governance, digital innovation ecosystems and resilience based tourism development. This tendency indicates that the literature is moving from fragmented subject debates towards a more integrated sustainability oriented research framework. The increasing number of publications also reflects the growing interdisciplinary character of the tourism social entrepreneurship research. There is a growing interconnection in tourism scholarship between sustainability studies, governance research, innovation studies and community development perspectives, which suggests that social entrepreneurship is increasingly acting as a conceptual bridge between multiple sustainability-related domains. Annual publishing trend is displayed in *Figur. 2*.

Year	Articles
2019	5
2020	6
2021	6
2022	18
2023	13
2024	10
2025	12
2026	10

Figure 2. Annual Scientific Production of Social Entrepreneurship Research in Sustainable Tourism, 2019–2026

Source: Developed by the author using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny based on Scopus dataset.

Most Relevant Keywords

The examination of the most significant keywords gives crucial insights on the prevailing conceptual orientation of research on social entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism. The results indicate that “social entrepreneurship” is the prominent keyword in the dataset, which means it is the core concept in building the intellectual landscape of the area. Other frequently occurring keywords were “sustainable development”, “tourism”, and “sustainable tourism”, followed by “community development”, “social innovation”, “ecotourism”, “social capital”, “community based tourism” and “stakeholder engagement”. The prevalence of sustainability related keywords suggests that modern tourist entrepreneurship research is increasingly situated within larger sustainability transition considerations rather than merely economic development approaches. The strong recurrence of concepts related to community participation, governance and social innovation suggests that the literature is progressively recognizing tourism entrepreneurship as a socially embedded process dependent on collaboration, collective action and locallybased development practices. The prevalence of keywords associated with community development and social capital also suggests that local participation has become a central pillar in the discourse of sustainable tourism. Tourism entrepreneurs are no longer perceived as independent economic agents, and social entrepreneurship is increasingly considered in recent research as a collaborative tool for local people to participate in destination development, resource management, and sustainability governance. This shift is an acknowledgement in academia that sustainability in tourism is highly reliant on community legitimacy, social trust and participatory governance structures. The high frequency of the terms ‘innovation’ and ‘social innovation’ also indicates the increasing importance of adaptive and collaborative innovation processes in sustainable tourism development. Here innovation is no longer restricted to technology advancement or commercial expansion, but it also incorporates novel governance arrangements, participatory methods, processes of social value generation, and collaborative destination management approaches. The finding suggests that sustainability focused tourist entrepreneurship is increasingly linked to transformational innovation

processes, which can contribute to an increase in the long term resilience of destinations. Moreover, the presence of phrases such as “ecotourism,” “regenerative tourism,” and “community based tourism” indicates an important conceptual movement in modern tourism sustainability discourse. Recent tourism study has been increasingly interested on restoration, regeneration, resilience and social ecological health, rather than simply on the minimization of negative environmental impacts. This change indicates that sustainability is increasingly shifting from a mitigation focused framework to a more transformative paradigm of restoration and community based resilience. However, the organization of the keywords also indicates an essential conceptual contradiction in the literature. While sustainability, innovation and community participation are increasingly advocated as strategic tourist development priorities, many tourism systems continue to be highly driven by commercialization pressures, destination branding agendas and market competitiveness. Thus, the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship may be limited if sustainability initiatives stay embedded in growth-oriented tourist organizations that prioritize the expansion of visitors rather than long-term social-ecological transformation. The keyword structure also mirrors a persistent conceptual shift in the scholarship of sustainable tourism. Whereas earlier discourses on sustainable tourism have been mainly about environmental management and destination competitiveness, contemporary ones are increasingly oriented towards resilience, participatory governance, regeneration and social innovation in collaboration. The growing visibility of regenerative tourism and governance related concepts suggests that future research trajectories may increasingly focus on restorative sustainability models that can integrate environmental recovery, community wellbeing and adaptive governance within tourism systems..

The most relevant keywords identified within the dataset are presented in Figure 3.

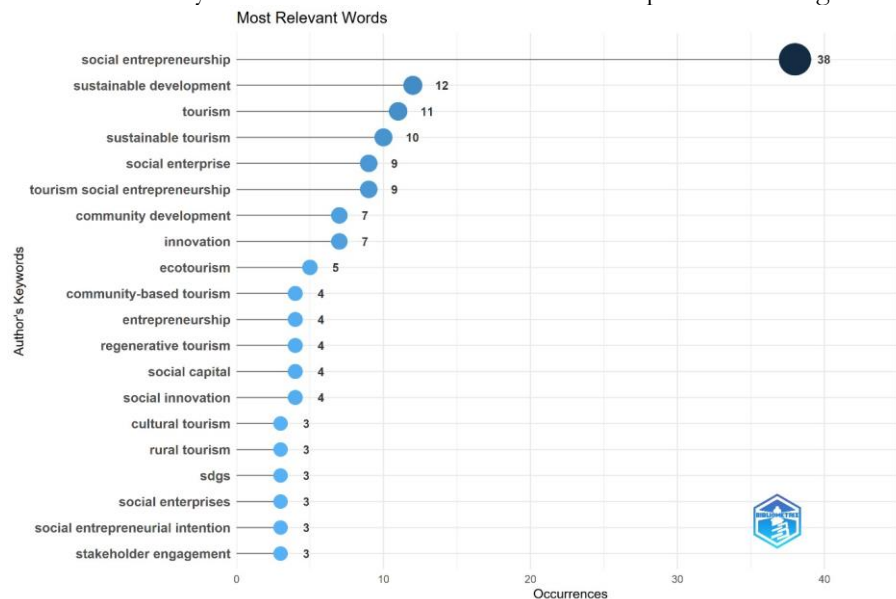


Figure 3. Most Relevant Keywords in Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Tourism Research

Source: Developed by the author using Biblioshiny and Scopus data

Overall, the keyword analysis demonstrates that tourism social entrepreneurship research has evolved into a highly interdisciplinary domain that simultaneously integrates sustainability, governance, innovation, entrepreneurship, and community development perspectives. The conceptual interconnections among these themes indicate increasing convergence toward an integrated sustainability oriented tourism research framework

Globally Cited Documents

The analysis of the globally cited documents allowed to determine the publications that have exerted the greatest intellectual influence on the development of research on social entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism. The highly cited publications in the dataset were mainly focused on sustainability transitions, collaborative governance, community empowerment, social innovation and resilience oriented tourism development, revealing the conceptual priorities that are shaping the contemporary intellectual structure of the field. The citation pattern reveals that important research

increasingly considers social entrepreneurship as a means to link tourism development to wider sustainability goals. Highly cited publications do not focus on entrepreneurship as an economic growth instrument only, but also on the role of entrepreneurial activities in fostering community participation, enhancing local resilience, promoting collaborative governance, and facilitating socially embedded tourism transformation. The pattern of citation also uncovers the slow development of a sustainability governance paradigm in tourist social entrepreneurship research. The highly referenced publications are increasingly looking at collaborative governance, stakeholder participation, resilience development, and social innovation rather than the traditional views of tourism competitiveness and market expansion. This pattern points to a gradual change in the intellectual direction of the industry from talks of tourism entrepreneurship focused on expansion to sustainability transition frameworks focused on governance. Furthermore, sustainability governance, regenerative tourism, and community resilience views in highly cited papers indicate that tourism social entrepreneurship research is slowly aligning with the broader socio-ecological transition paradigm. The influence of these interconnected paradigms is growing and this suggests that future tourism entrepreneurship scholarship may shift more towards long term resilience, restoration and participatory governance than traditional destination growth models. The prevalence of highly cited publications in sustainability and tourism journals further confirms the interdisciplinary nature of the research on tourism social entrepreneurship. The field has moved beyond being a clearly defined subdomain of entrepreneurship to progressively overlap with sustainability science, governance studies, innovation research, and community development scholarship. This intellectual convergence reflects a growing awareness that sustainable tourism development requires integrated approaches to balance economic, environmental and social objectives concurrently. The citation network further indicates that studies on governance, stakeholder collaboration, and participatory sustainability frameworks are particularly impactful in the literature. This result suggests that current talks about tourist sustainability are moving towards joint institutional frameworks and not isolated individual entrepreneurial activities. Therefore, sustainable tourism entrepreneurship is becoming more understood as a governance-oriented process including interactions between communities, policy actors, tourism organizations and social businesses. Also, citation analysis shows an important tendency, i.e. growing importance of works related to the paradigms of regenerative tourism and resilience based sustainability. Highly cited publications tend to address the need to go beyond traditional sustainability approaches focusing exclusively on impact reduction, towards more transformative models emphasizing restoration, rejuvenation and long term social ecological resilience. This pattern suggests that research in tourism social entrepreneurship is gradually becoming part of larger conversations about sustainability transitions and regenerative development. At the same time, the citation structure reveals that the intellectual development of the area is still largely influenced by sustainability oriented theoretical frameworks rather than exclusively entrepreneurial based models. This means that social entrepreneurship in tourism is increasingly being considered as part of wider systems of sustainability governance, including institutional collaboration, innovation ecosystems and processes of community participation.

Source: Developed by the author using Bibliometrix citation analysis.

The globally cited publications shaping the intellectual structure of the field are presented in Figure 4.

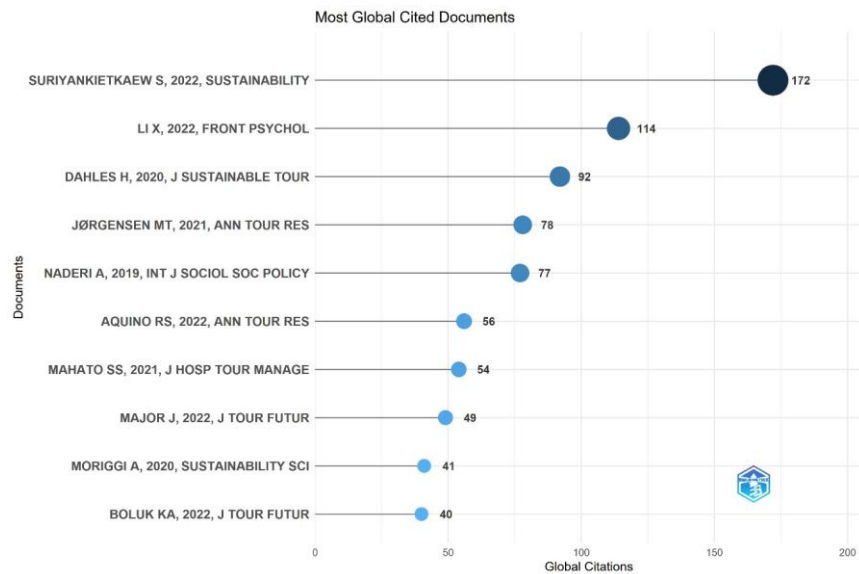


Figure 4. Most Globally Cited Publications in Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Tourism Research

Source: Developed by the author using Bibliometrix citation analysis.

Overall, the globally cited document analysis reveals that the intellectual foundation of tourism social entrepreneurship research is progressively evolving toward an integrated sustainability framework that combines governance, innovation, resilience, and community centered development perspectives. This evolution demonstrates the growing maturity of the field as an interdisciplinary sustainability oriented research domain.

Co-occurrence Network Analysis

The intellectual structure and conceptual association of dominant themes in the research of social entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism are visualized by the co-occurrence network analysis performed by VOSviewer. This visualization shows the field is structured as a number of interrelated thematic clusters, each reflecting different, but interrelated, conceptual orientations within the larger sustainability discourse. The first cluster is mostly dominated by the keywords “social entrepreneurship”, “stakeholders”, “tourism development”, “tourism management”, and “tourism economy”. The cluster highlights the growing significance of governance oriented approaches in tourism entrepreneurship research. The strong conceptual proximity among these keywords indicates that stakeholder collaboration, participatory governance and institutional coordination have become central concerns in sustainability oriented tourism development. The second cluster comprises of keywords such as “sustainable tourism”, “innovation”, “social innovation” and “tourism”. This thematic structure underscores the increasing importance of innovation-led sustainable change in tourist systems. The cluster implies that innovation is more and more understood not only as technological advancement, but also as collaborative problem solving, participatory governance mechanisms and adaptive sustainability practices able to enhance destination resilience and long term sustainability capacity. The third cluster contains issues such as “community development”, “social capital”, “rural tourism” and “community based tourism”. This cluster shows that the research on social entrepreneurship in tourism is still very important for the perspectives on local empowerment, participatory development and community resource management. The intimate link between social capital and community-based tourism also implies that sustainable tourism increasingly depends on locally grounded governance systems and cooperative engagement among community actors.

Source: Developed by the author using VOSviewer co-occurrence network visualization.

The conceptual relationships among dominant themes are visualized in Figure 5.

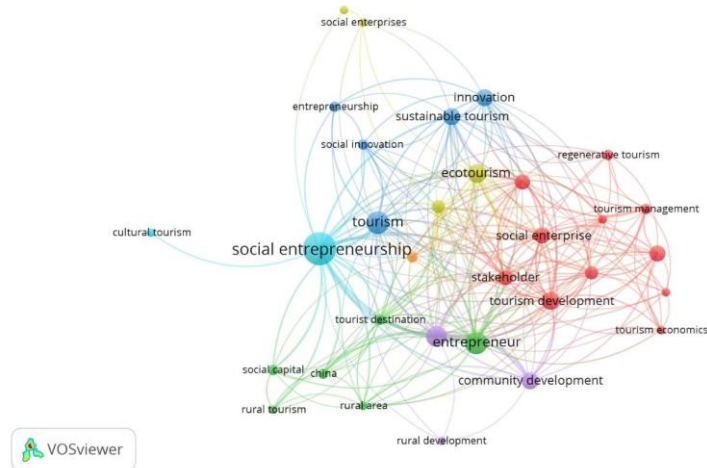


Figure 5. Co-occurrence Network Visualization of Social Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Tourism Research Using VOSviewer

Source: Developed by the author using VOSviewer co-occurrence network visualization.

Figure 5 also shows different levels of theme density and conceptual proximity within the detected clusters. The relatively high density around keywords such as sustainability, governance, and social entrepreneurship suggests a mature and strongly connected conceptual core in the literature. In contrast, the themes of regenerative tourism and digital sustainability innovation are more loosely connected, indicating that these are still emerging but quickly increasing study horizons in tourist sustainability studies. The co-existence of governance oriented and community oriented clusters indicates a significant ideological contradiction within modern tourism sustainability discourse. Institutional tourist governance tends to be concerned with destination competitiveness and economic performance while community-centered sustainability models place emphasis on participatory governance, local autonomy, social inclusion and socio-cultural preservation. This dynamic shows that sustainable tourism entrepreneurship is increasingly operating under competing sustainability aspirations, encompassing both market-driven tourism development and community-based change goals. The network structure also shows an increasing process of intellectual consolidation in sustainable tourist entrepreneurial research. sustainable, governance, innovation, community empowerment and regenerative tourism are no just conceptual areas of individual subject conversations, but are increasingly realized as interrelated within a broader framework of sustainable transition. The high centrality of “social entrepreneurship” in the visualization network suggests that the concept is increasingly acting as an intellectual bridge across the dispersed sustainability conversations in tourism governance, resilience, innovation, and participatory development research. At the same time, some peripheral themes are still present within the network structure, in particular those related to regenerative tourism and digital sustainability innovation . The comparatively weaker network density of these themes indicates that these subjects are still in an initial developmental stage compared to more established sustainability governance and community based tourism conversations. This tendency suggests that future tourist entrepreneurship research may further broaden toward resilience-oriented governance systems, regenerative tourism transformation, and digitally mediated sustainability innovation ecosystems. The visualization also shows strong conceptual interconnections between the clusters of sustainability, innovation, stakeholder engagement and community development, indicating the increasing convergence in tourism social entrepreneurship research. This confluence shows that issues formerly studied individually are slowly converging towards a more integrated sustainability oriented tourism framework that may link governance, resilience, innovation and socio-ecological change views simultaneously. In conclusion, the co-occurrence network analysis supports the strategically central role of social entrepreneurship within sustainable tourism scholarship. It increasingly acts as an interdisciplinary sustainability mechanism combining governance change, collaborative innovation, community resilience,

regenerative tourism and participatory sustainability transitions in current tourism research.

Discussion

The Expansion of Social Entrepreneurship Research within Sustainable Tourism

The results show a significant increase in the amount of research on social entrepreneurship in sustainable tourism during the period of observation (2019–2026), especially from 2021. This development reflects a wider shift in tourism scholarship towards sustainability as more than a strategy of environmental management, but rather as a multidimensional governance challenge incorporating resilience, participation, equity and long term social ecological adaptation. Tourism research increasingly acknowledges the significance of destination sustainability as a research domain. However, the understanding of tourism destination sustainability remains limited to tourist growth, economic competitiveness or market performance. Instead, modern sustainability discourse increasingly foregrounds institutional adaptation, community legitimacy, collaborative governance and social resilience as essential cornerstones of sustainable tourist systems (Price, 2025). The sharp increase in the publication intensity after 2021 seems to be closely related to the discussions on post-pandemic tourism restructuring. It was in this period that scholars started to question the vulnerability of tourist systems highly dependent on markets and to highlight the structural fragility of locations greatly dependent on external tourism flows. Social entrepreneurship has therefore steadily garnered more scholarly attention since it provides an alternative logic of sustainability that can combine economic activity with the creation of social value, democratic governance and community based resilience. In this context, tourism social entrepreneurship is rapidly taking on the role not only as an entrepreneurial activity, but also as a vehicle for destinations trying to boost adaptive capacity and minimize dependence on exclusively growth-oriented tourism models. More recent tourism studies also argue that post-pandemic tourism restructuring has expedited the move towards resilience-oriented and regenerative sustainability frameworks, as traditional tourism growth models have become increasingly vulnerable to environmental uncertainty, institutional disruption, and social instability (Iddawala, 2025). The findings also imply that tourist entrepreneurship research is at an important conceptual juncture. Previous research on tourism entrepreneurship has mainly focused on innovation, competitiveness and destination growth as the main measures of tourism success. However, modern literature has increasingly situated social entrepreneurship within wider sustainability transition debates connected with governance reform, collaborative engagement and resilience oriented development. This change implies an increasing appreciation of the social as opposed to the market-based nature of entrepreneurial governance processes in tourism, involving the interactions between communities, institutions, policy actors and local stakeholders. This conceptual shift is a sign of a wider intellectual change in sustainability focused tourism research. The debate on the sustainability of tourism is no longer limited to efficiency oriented frameworks that seek to minimize environmental effect while maximizing economic growth. Instead, the literature increasingly focuses on restoration, regeneration, institutional resilience and social-ecological transformation. Thus, social entrepreneurship is more and more perceived as a governance instrument that may foster more flexible and participative forms of destination development. Recent regenerative tourism scholarship also highlights that the transition to sustainability is more and more underpinned by governance systems that are capable of embedding restoration, renewal and collaborative resilience into destination management practices instead of impact reduction approaches (Liburd & Duedahl, 2025). At the same time, studies show an ongoing contradiction of unresolved sustainability in tourism systems. Whilst sustainability oriented entrepreneurship is advocated as a transformative mechanism for tourism development, tourism governance structures in many destinations are still heavily influenced by commercialization pressures, branding agendas and destination competitiveness priorities. As a consequence, sustainability initiatives may still function within institutional systems that prioritize growth expansion over long term social ecological transformation. Within this context, the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship may be limited by governance arrangements that privilege economic accumulation over participatory sustainability transitions. The results therefore indicate

that the success of tourist social entrepreneurship may be less reliant on the entrepreneurial efforts themselves and more upon the institutional and governance settings within which such initiatives are executed. Community engagement, quality governance, stakeholder legitimacy, institutional adaptability, and collaborative policy arrangements may increasingly determine whether social entrepreneurship contributes to substantive sustainability transformation or simply reinforces existing models of tourism growth under sustainability discourses. This finding is in line with recent claims that the success of sustainability transitions in tourism destinations are increasingly determined by quality of governance and institutional inclusion (Raman, 2025). Another key implication of the findings relates to the expanding interdisciplinarity of tourist sustainability scholarship. Tourism entrepreneurship study is increasingly associated with sustainability science, governance studies, innovation research, resilience theory and community development views. This convergence shows that discussions on tourism sustainability are rapidly shifting towards integrated conceptual frameworks that may handle simultaneously governance complexity, environmental vulnerability, institutional adaptation and social engagement in tourism systems. Theoretically, the results suggest that tourism social entrepreneurship should be increasingly considered through a sustainability transition and adaptive governance lens rather than through traditional entrepreneurial growth frameworks. This view presents social entrepreneurship as an institutional and collaborative sustainability mechanism entrenched in wider processes of governance reform, resilience building and social ecological adaptation. From a practical perspective, the findings point to the possibility that tourism policy makers and destination managers may need to strengthen participatory governance arrangements, collaborative institutional structures and locally embedded innovation ecosystems in order to support long term sustainability transformation. Destinations that prioritize economic competitiveness over governance resilience and community participation will likely encounter more challenges in maintaining tourist systems under times of environmental and institutional unpredictability.

Dominant Themes and the Transformation of Sustainability Discourse

The keyword analysis shows that sustainability, governance, innovation, community development, and stakeholder participation are the prevailing conceptual orientations in the research of tourism social entrepreneurship. The prominence of terms such as “community based tourism”, “social capital”, “collaborative governance” and “stakeholder engagement” suggest that the contemporary discourse on tourism sustainability is increasingly about collective participation and locally embedded governance rather than entrepreneurial activity in isolation.

The findings show that the sustainability of tourism is increasingly seen as a relational and collaborative process that is contingent on societal trust, institutional collaboration and participatory governance. From this perspective, social entrepreneurship is not so much an individual business initiative as a socially embedded mechanism through which communities negotiate development priorities, sustainability objectives and resource allocation systems. This change reflects the rising realization that the sustainability of tourism rests largely on local legitimacy, social engagement and long term governance adaptation. Recent sustainability governance studies also argue that collaborative participation and social capital are increasingly important dimensions of destination resilience, as sustainability challenges often surpass the capacity of market oriented tourism systems alone (Sumandi, 2024).

The high prominence of innovation-related concepts further indicates that tourism sustainability increasingly relies on adaptive and collaborative innovation processes. Innovation here is more than technology or market extensions. The findings show that innovation is more and more perceived as a wider process of institutional and social transformation including participatory governance, collaborative issue solving, social value generation and adaptive destination management methods. This reading makes social innovation a vital mechanism in sustainability transitions, as it redefines the interactions between stakeholders, communities, entrepreneurs and tourism governing institutions. Recent tourism innovation literature emphasizes more and more that sustainability oriented innovation ecosystems depend strongly on governance flexibility, institutional collaboration and participatory experimentation that can incorporate

ecological restoration and social inclusion in tourism development systems (Tsekouropoulos et al., 2022). The emergence of regenerative tourism related themes more generally confirms the existence of a wider conceptual shift within the discourses of tourism sustainability. Initial sustainability paradigms concentrated on ecological efficiencies and impact mitigation techniques to support tourism expansion with less ecodamage. On the other hand, current tourism discourse increasingly centers on restoration, resilience, regeneration and social ecological health. This change indicates that tourism sustainability is slowly shifting from a mitigation oriented paradigm to a more transformative one focusing on renewal and adaptive resilience. In recent academic work on regenerative tourism, it has been argued that the transitions to sustainability are increasingly dependent on place based governance systems that can restore ecological integrity, bolster social health and foster long term destination thriving (Iddawala, 2025).

Findings also highlight major structural disparities embedded in sustainability oriented tourist innovation systems. Collaborative innovation and participatory governance are increasingly promoted as strategic sustainability mechanisms, but the capacity to implement such approaches is not evenly distributed across destinations. Areas that are more developed, with better institutional support, governance quality, technology infrastructure and social capital, may be more equipped to carry out collaborative sustainable innovation than marginalized rural or peripheral tourism areas. As a result, sustainability innovation discourse may inadvertently reinforce institutional disparities in contexts where governance capacity and resource accessibility are concentrated among already advantaged locations.

The results also show that tourist sustainability rhetoric is becoming more future oriented and resilience centered. Regeneration, restoration, resilience, adaptive governance and collaborative sustainability are terms that are appearing more and more often in the literature. This trend points to the potential for future tourism entrepreneurship research to increasingly focus on resilience based sustainability governance frameworks which can accommodate ecological restoration, community wellbeing, institutional flexibility and participatory destination management. The findings also indicate a slow shift in tourism sustainability scholarship towards systems oriented sustainability thinking where governance, innovation, resilience and community participation are increasingly perceived as interdependent dimensions of long term tourism transformation. Such conceptual integration may be increasingly crucial as tourism destinations experience increased environmental uncertainty, governance instability and fast social ecological change.

Intellectual Structure and Interdisciplinary Convergence

The co occurrence network analysis indicates that social entrepreneurship has a strategic position in the intellectual structure of sustainable tourism research. The map shows significant conceptual links across topics including sustainability, governance, innovation, community development, resilience and participatory tourism, suggesting rising interdisciplinary convergence in the tourism sustainability scholarship. The recent tourism sustainability literature recognizes the increasing complexity of tourism systems as social ecological networks with institutional interdependence, environmental vulnerability and governance uncertainty. The need for more integrated interdisciplinary analytical approaches is expressed (Price, 2025).

The governance focused cluster emphasizes the increasing importance of stakeholder cooperation and institutional coordination in sustainable tourism entrepreneurship research. The strong correlations between themes of governance, tourism management and stakeholder suggest that tourism sustainability is increasingly framed as a collaborative governance process rather than an isolated entrepreneurial activity. This trend parallels wider concerns on sustainability transition on institutional adaptation, multi actor collaboration and participatory governance in complex social ecological systems.

The innovation focused cluster, however, indicates that the sustainability of tourism increasingly relies on collaborative innovation ecosystems capable of creating both social and environmental value. The conceptual integration of social innovation, sustainability and tourism entrepreneurship suggests that future tourism systems may largely depend on adaptive governance arrangements and participatory innovation mechanisms capable of responding to environmental uncertainty, social vulnerability and

destination instability. This finding further supports recent assertions that the sustainability innovation within tourism is increasingly grounded on collaborative experimentation, institutional learning, and adaptive governance flexibility rather than on the technological modernization or market expansion strategies (Tsekouropoulos et al., 2022). The community development cluster also demonstrates that social capital, local engagement and collective governance are still core components of sustainable tourism rhetoric.

The strong conceptual links between community based tourism, rural tourism, social capital and community empowerment suggest that the sustainability of tourism increasingly depends on locally embedded governance structures that can build collective resilience and foster participatory destination management. Crucially, the network structure demonstrates a growing tendency of intellectual consolidation within tourism social entrepreneurship research. Previously considered in isolation, themes such as governance, resilience, innovation, sustainability and community engagement are increasingly merging into a more holistic sustainability transition paradigm. This convergence shows that tourist sustainability studies is slowly exiting fragmented academic boundaries and heading towards broader interdisciplinary topics of governance transformation and social ecological resilience. The prominent centrality of social entrepreneurship in the visualization network further suggests that the concept is emerging as an intellectual bridge among previously disconnected sustainability discussions in tourism governance, participatory development, resilience theory, and collaborative innovation research. Social entrepreneurship is no longer confined to the entrepreneurship scholarship, but strongly linked to the discussions about adaptive governance, regenerative tourism, institutional resilience, and sustainable transformation. Meanwhile other emergent themes are still somewhat peripheral to the network structure. The network density is less pronounced for concepts related to regenerative tourism, digital sustainability innovation and resilience based governance than for existing governance and community based tourist conversations. This pattern demonstrates that although these topics are gaining increasing scholarly interest, they are still in an early stage of growth. The relative peripheral location of these notions indicates that future tourist sustainability research could gradually expand towards digitally mediated sustainability systems, resilience oriented governance frameworks and regenerative tourism transformation models. Similarly, recent studies imply that regenerative governance and digitally mediated sustainability systems may be increasingly relevant future study horizons as tourism destinations continue to face environmental upheaval and institutional uncertainty (Almeida et al., 2025). The existence of both governance oriented and community oriented clusters at the same time indicates that tension still exists in tourism sustainability transitions. Institutional tourist governance is inclined towards destination competitiveness, branding strategies and economic performance. Community oriented sustainability initiatives focus on local autonomy, participatory governance, social inclusion and cultural preservation. This paradox indicates that tourist sustainability transitions may become more dependent on the ability to align institutional development agendas with community based sustainability aspirations. The results of the study show that social entrepreneurship research in tourism is gradually becoming an interdisciplinary research field focused on sustainability. Social entrepreneurship is increasingly functioning not just as an entrepreneurial notion but as a governance oriented sustainability mechanism that is able to connect resilience, regeneration, collaborative innovation, community empowerment and social ecological transformation within contemporary tourism scholarship. Taken together, the results suggest that the intellectual development of tourism social entrepreneurship research resonates with a broader change in tourist sustainability scholarship as a whole. The field is shifting more and more away from growth-based tourist development paradigms towards more adaptive, participatory, resilience-oriented and regenerative sustainability frameworks. This trend suggests that future debates on tourist sustainability might increasingly focus on governance adaptation, institutional resilience, collaborative innovation and social ecological restoration as essential underpinnings of long term destination sustainability.

4. Conclusion

This paper aims to investigate the intellectual development of social entrepreneurship research in sustainable tourism using a bibliometric analysis of literature indexed in Scopus from 2019 to 2026. The results suggest a marked rise of academic interest in tourism social entrepreneurship, especially following the post-pandemic restructuring of global tourist systems. In the literature, social entrepreneurship is increasingly conceptualised not only as an entrepreneurial activity but also as a governance-oriented sustainability mechanism that is strongly related with resilience, collaborative innovation, community empowerment, and adaptive tourism development.

The findings also further evidence increasing multidisciplinary convergence across sustainability science, governance studies, innovation research, resilience theory and community-based tourism perspectives. Governance, social innovation, regenerative tourism, stakeholder engagement and resilience themes have increasingly gained salience in the intellectual structure of the area. This pattern suggests a broader conceptual shift away from market-driven tourist development towards more participatory, adaptive and resilience-oriented sustainability frameworks.

The co-occurrence network analysis further underlines the strategic importance of social entrepreneurship as an intellectual bridge integrating governance reform, collaborative sustainability, community resilience, and regenerative tourism discourse in contemporary tourism study. The findings also underscore the ongoing tensions between tourism systems driven by commodification and those guided by communitybased sustainability agendas. They suggest that the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship remains highly dependent on the quality of institutions, the inclusiveness of governance, the legitimacy of stakeholders, and participatory policy arrangements.

Importantly, the findings suggest that sustainable tourism transitions increasingly depend on governance systems able to integrate social innovation, collaborative resilience and long-term socio-ecological adaptation rather than on market-oriented tourism expansion alone. This shows that future discourses around tourism sustainability may gradually move away from destination competitiveness frameworks to regenerative and adaptive governance paradigms, which emphasise repair, flexibility of institutions and wellbeing of communities.

Theoretically, this study contributes by framing social entrepreneurship in a sustainability transition and adaptive governance framework rather than just in terms of entrepreneurial growth. This repositioning broadens the conceptual understanding of social entrepreneurship as an integrated institutional and collaborative sustainability mechanism within broader processes of governance reform and socioecological resilience. Methodologically, the study illustrates the efficacy of bibliometric analysis, Biblioshiny and VOSviewer to detect conceptual frameworks, thematic convergence and developing research paths within interdisciplinary tourist sustainability research.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that policymakers, destination managers and tourism institutions may need to reinforce participatory governance arrangements, locally embedded innovation systems and collaborative policy mechanisms to support long-term sustainability transformation. Destinations that focus on short-term competitiveness and visitor growth without improving governance resilience and community participation may be increasingly vulnerable to environmental uncertainty, institutional instability and socio-ecological disruption.

In spite of the contributions of this review, the study is confined to English language papers indexed in Scopus, which may exclude significant studies from other databases and geographical contexts. Future research are recommended to adopt comparative empirical methodologies, qualitative systematic reviews and multi-database bibliometric analyses to enhance contextual understanding and increase conceptual coverage. Future study may also go further into the topics of regenerative tourism governance, digitally mediated sustainability innovation, resilience-based destination transformation, and governance inequalities across peripheral and community-based tourism destinations.

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