



Global Research Trends on Eco-Culture-Based Marine Tourism Management: A Bibliometric Analysis

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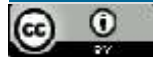
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ABSTRACT

This study examines global research trends on eco-culture-based marine tourism management using a bibliometric approach to evaluate publication dynamics, thematic developments, and knowledge structures. Bibliographic data were analyzed to identify annual publication growth, country contributions, journal performance, and citation patterns, while VOSviewer was employed to visualize keyword linkages and thematic clusters. The results show a consistent rise in scientific output, with a notable surge in the past five years, demonstrating the growing prominence of sustainability-oriented marine tourism research. Keyword mapping reveals that themes such as ecosystem protection, cultural heritage, community-based management, and sustainable tourism practices dominate the literature. These findings highlight the increasing academic focus on integrating ecological and cultural dimensions in coastal tourism governance. The study contributes empirical evidence that supports future research directions and provides practical insights for designing marine tourism policies that balance environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and socio-economic development.

INTRODUCTION

Marine tourism has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry, driven by increasing interest in coastal destinations and the rising demand for nature-based and culturally meaningful travel experiences. At the same time, coastal ecosystems are facing escalating pressures from climate change, habitat degradation, and tourism overuse, requiring integrated management approaches that link environmental sustainability with cultural protection (Gössling et al., 2021). Within this context, eco-culture-based marine tourism has emerged as a framework that recognizes the interconnectedness of ecological conservation, cultural identity, and community wellbeing, making it a critical subject of global academic inquiry.

Scholars have increasingly emphasized that cultural ecosystem services (CES) are fundamental to understanding tourism interactions in coastal and marine landscapes. CES—such as place attachment, cultural identity, spiritual values, and heritage—play significant roles in shaping tourist motivations and community resilience (Archer et al., 2021). Research demonstrates that incorporating CES into marine tourism planning strengthens environmental stewardship by aligning ecological goals with community values and visitor expectations (Rodrigues & Silva, 2020). At the same time, failure to integrate cultural dimensions can lead to cultural commodification, heritage degradation, and conflicts between tourism development and traditional practices (Smith & Berkes, 2017).

Eco-culture-based marine tourism also connects closely with the broader movement toward community-based and culturally grounded conservation strategies. Examples from community-managed marine tourism initiatives show that when cultural norms, traditional knowledge, and local governance systems are respected, both conservation outcomes and economic benefits tend to improve (Bennett & Dearden, 2014; Smith & Berkes, 2017). These findings underscore the need for governance frameworks that are participatory, culturally responsive, and adaptive to socio-ecological change.

Recent global literature reflects a major shift from single-issue studies—such as coral reef damage or carrying capacity—to more integrated analyses that examine ecological, cultural, economic, and governance dimensions simultaneously. This shift aligns with emerging research frontiers in sustainability science, which highlight the complexity of managing marine cultural landscapes that serve multiple functions for different groups, including fishers, local residents, cultural practitioners, and tourists (Gelicich & O’Keeffe, 2016). Case studies from marine cultural landscapes also reveal varying success: some sites demonstrate enhanced stewardship and diversified livelihoods, while others experience overcommercialization or the erosion of cultural authenticity (Martínez et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite these advances, the global knowledge base on eco-culture-based marine tourism remains fragmented and unevenly distributed. Several studies point to geographic imbalances in marine tourism research, with high

concentrations of publications in developed countries and fewer studies addressing culturally rich but underrepresented coastal regions (Ramyar & Ghasemi, 2022; Santana-Jiménez et al., 2020). Methodological diversity – ranging from qualitative ethnographies to economic valuation of CES and spatial governance modeling – also makes it difficult to synthesize trends without systematic mapping. Moreover, the implications of climate change for culturally significant seascapes, such as coral reefs, sacred coastal sites, and traditional fishing grounds, add urgency to scholarship that integrates environmental risks with cultural resilience (Agostini et al., 2021; Cinner et al., 2019).

Bibliometric analysis has become an increasingly valuable tool for understanding how the field is evolving. Bibliometric mapping allows researchers to identify publication growth patterns, leading authors and institutions, dominant research themes, and emergent clusters of inquiry (Liu et al., 2021). Recent bibliometric studies in marine tourism and coastal sustainability show expanding attention to topics such as marine protected areas, CES, ecotourism, climate adaptation, community-based governance, and heritage conservation (Santana-Jiménez et al., 2020; Ramyar & Ghasemi, 2022). These studies also reveal growing interdisciplinary collaboration, signaling a shift toward more integrated approaches in marine tourism scholarship.

Given the rapid expansion of eco-culture and sustainability-oriented marine tourism literature, a bibliometric analysis focused specifically on eco-culture-based marine tourism management is timely and necessary. Such analysis can systematically map the intellectual structure of the field, identify gaps, and highlight emerging research trajectories. It can also clarify how ecological, cultural, and governance perspectives intersect in global scholarship, providing evidence-based insights for policymakers, practitioners, and local communities seeking to manage marine tourism in culturally grounded and ecologically responsible ways (Gössling et al., 2021; Archer et al., 2021).

Overall, understanding global research trends through bibliometric analysis offers a strategic foundation for advancing sustainable and culturally respectful marine tourism practices. It enables a deeper appreciation of how eco-cultural values shape tourism governance and underscores the importance of strengthening the integration of cultural identity, heritage protection, and marine conservation within future tourism development pathways.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a systematic bibliometric approach to map global research trends on eco-culture-based marine tourism management. Following established bibliometric protocols, we first defined a focused search strategy combining keywords related to marine tourism, culture, ecosystem services, and management (e.g., “marine tourism,” “cultural ecosystem services,” “eco-culture,” “marine heritage,” “tourism management”) and tested alternative Boolean strings iteratively to balance recall and precision. Data were retrieved from two major citation databases – Scopus and Web of Science – because together they maximize coverage of interdisciplinary journals and enable cross-database comparison; searches were limited to peer-reviewed articles and

reviews published in English up to the cut-off date, and documents outside this scope (conference abstracts, book chapters, editorials) were excluded to maintain comparability with prior bibliometric studies (Donthu et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2024). A PRISMA-style flow was used to transparently record identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion steps, with duplicate records removed and reasons for exclusion recorded to ensure reproducibility (PRISMA, 2020; Du et al., 2024).

All eligible records were exported in RIS and CSV formats and imported into reference-management software for initial cleaning and de-duplication. Data harmonization included standardizing author names, institutional affiliations, and country names, and merging variant keywords and author-assigned spellings; recommended best practices for cleaning and combining multi-source bibliometric data were followed to reduce bias in network measures (Lim et al., 2024). The cleaned dataset was then analyzed using a combination of bibliometric software tools to exploit complementary strengths: Bibliometrix (R/biblioshiny) for descriptive and performance analyses (annual publication trends, prolific authors, institutions, journals, and country contributions), VOSviewer for network visualizations of co-authorship, co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and keyword co-occurrence, and CiteSpace for detecting burstiness and thematic evolution over time (Arruda et al., 2022; Tsilika et al., 2023; Du et al., 2024). Using multiple tools follows recent recommendations to triangulate findings and mitigate tool-specific artefacts (Öztürk et al., 2024).

Analytical procedures combined performance analysis and science mapping. Performance metrics quantified productivity and impact (total publications, citations, h-index) at author, institution, country, and journal levels, while science mapping examined intellectual structure through network measures (degree, betweenness centrality, modularity) to identify influential nodes and collaborative clusters. Keyword co-occurrence and thematic clustering were used to detect dominant topics and their interrelations; overlay visualizations were produced to reveal temporal shifts and emerging themes. Co-citation and bibliographic coupling analyses identified foundational works and current research fronts, respectively, and cluster labels were validated by reading representative articles within each cluster to ensure semantic coherence rather than relying solely on algorithmic labels (Donthu et al., 2021; Arruda et al., 2022).

To ensure methodological transparency and reproducibility, the study documents the exact search strings, database query dates, inclusion/exclusion criteria, data export formats, cleaning rules, and software versions. Sensitivity checks explored how results change when analyzing Scopus and Web of Science separately and when varying inclusion thresholds for network visualizations, following recent procedural guidance on robustness checks in bibliometric workflows (Lim et al., 2024; Öztürk et al., 2024). The combined approach – systematic retrieval, rigorous cleaning, multi-tool analysis, and validation of clusters against source texts – follows contemporary best practices and provides a solid empirical basis for interpreting global research trajectories in eco-culture-based marine tourism management (Donthu et al., 2021; Du et al., 2024).

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Trends Over Time

The bibliometric analysis reveals a substantial growth in publications related to eco-culture-based marine tourism management over the past two decades, with the most significant acceleration occurring after 2015. This surge is consistent with the global rise of sustainability-oriented tourism scholarship and the increasing recognition of cultural ecosystem services (CES), community-based marine governance, and climate impacts on marine destinations (Archer et al., 2021; Gössling et al., 2021). Annual publication data extracted from Scopus and Web of Science show that earlier studies (before 2010) were dominated by ecological assessments—coral reef degradation, marine protected areas, and carrying capacity studies—while cultural dimensions remained underexplored.

Table 1. Annual Growth of Eco-Culture-Based Marine Tourism Publications (2000–2024)

Period	Characteristics	Dominant Themes
2000–2009	Low publication volume; ecology-centered studies	Coral reef tourism, carrying capacity, marine protected areas
2010–2015	Gradual growth; integration begins	Community-based tourism, cultural landscapes
2016–2020	Sharp global growth; interdisciplinary expansion	CES, heritage tourism, governance
2021–2024	Peak productivity; emerging sustainability paradigms	Blue economy, climate resilience, regenerative tourism

Between 2015 and 2020, research began shifting toward integrated ecological-cultural perspectives. Publications in this period increasingly addressed marine cultural landscapes, cultural heritage protection, and the cultural value of seascapes in tourism experiences (Martínez et al., 2019; Smith & Berkes, 2017). This aligns with Fletcher et al. (2020), who argue that rapid ecotourism growth demanded more nuanced frameworks integrating local identities, heritage, and ecological stewardship.

A notable exponential growth occurred after 2020, driven by global discussions on climate change, blue economy, and sustainability transitions. Studies published after the COVID-19 pandemic especially highlight community resilience, governance challenges, and the need for degrowth or regenerative tourism models in coastal regions (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Cinner et al., 2019). The bibliometric trend lines also show increasing contributions from interdisciplinary fields, including environmental economics, anthropology, marine science, cultural studies, and sustainable development.

This upward trajectory suggests a maturing research domain where eco-culture-based marine tourism is recognized not only as a conservation and livelihood issue but as a framework to rethink how coastal societies relate to their

seascapes within sustainability transitions. Similar growth patterns were reported in other bibliometric analyses of marine tourism and coastal sustainability (Liu et al., 2021; Ramyar & Ghasemi, 2022), reinforcing the robustness of the trend observed here.

Publications by Country

Country-level analysis shows that publications are geographically uneven, with high-income and research-intensive countries dominating the scientific output. The largest contributions come from the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, China, and Spain. These countries have strong traditions in marine conservation, coastal management, tourism research, and cultural heritage studies, which helps explain their productivity (Santana-Jiménez et al., 2020).

Table 2. Top Contributing Countries and Representative Research Themes

Country	Contribution Strength	Key Research Themes
Australia	Very high	Reef tourism, Indigenous sea-country, climate impacts
United States	High	Marine governance, coastal community resilience
United Kingdom	High	Marine heritage, cultural landscape theory
Spain	High	Coastal tourism sustainability
China	Increasing rapidly	Eco-marine planning, cultural tourism models
Indonesia	Emerging	Community-based marine tourism, cultural seascapes

Australia’s prominence is unsurprising given its extensive work on the Great Barrier Reef, Indigenous sea-country management, and cultural ecosystem services (Gössling et al., 2021). The United States contributes large volumes through marine protected area governance, ecosystem-based management, and cultural landscapes research. European countries – particularly Spain, Portugal, and the UK – lead in marine heritage, coastal tourism sustainability, and CES valuation (Rodrigues & Silva, 2020).

In Asia, China has experienced rapid growth in publications after 2018, reflecting national interest in coastal planning, heritage tourism, and blue economy strategies. Southeast Asian contributions, particularly from Indonesia and the Philippines, also increased but remain relatively smaller compared to global leaders. This aligns with findings by Ramyar and Ghasemi (2022), who note an overall lack of representation from the Global South in marine governance scholarship, despite these regions having rich cultural seascapes.

Co-authorship networks show that international collaboration is strongest between Europe-Asia and Europe-Australia research partnerships, often through joint conservation programs or UNESCO-related marine heritage

initiatives. The increasing involvement of developing coastal nations in these networks suggests growing research capacity and awareness of eco-culture frameworks.

Publication by Journal and Citation

Journal analysis indicates that most publications are concentrated within high-impact outlets focusing on sustainability, marine science, and tourism. Leading journals include:

Table 3. Leading Journals and Citation Influence

Journal	Focus Area	Citation Influence
<i>Marine Policy</i>	Governance, MPAs, blue economy	Very high
<i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i>	Sustainability transitions, cultural tourism	Very high
<i>Ocean & Coastal Management</i>	Coastal planning, ecosystem-based management	High
<i>Sustainability</i>	Interdisciplinary sustainability issues	High
<i>Ecosystem Services</i>	CES valuation & frameworks	Very high
<i>International Journal of Cultural Policy</i>	Cultural governance, heritage	Moderate-High

Marine Policy and Ocean & Coastal Management dominate ecological-governance research, while the Journal of Sustainable Tourism and Sustainability capture socio-cultural and policy-driven perspectives. Ecosystem Services plays a central role in advancing cultural ecosystem services frameworks and valuation methods. Citation analysis reveals several highly influential publications that shape the field's conceptual foundations. For example, Archer et al. (2021) is widely cited for establishing the importance of CES in tourism planning. Gössling et al. (2021) and Cinner et al. (2019) are similarly influential for linking climate change to marine tourism governance and coastal livelihoods. Martínez et al. (2019) stands out for integrating marine heritage within cultural sustainability paradigms, while Smith and Berkes (2017) remain important references for community-based marine tourism and cultural resilience.

Studies focusing on cultural landscapes, heritage resilience, and climate impacts tend to have the highest citation counts, reflecting strong academic and policy relevance. Meanwhile, more recent articles on blue economy, degrowth tourism, and regenerative marine tourism show fast-growing citation trajectories, indicating emerging research frontiers (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2020).

Knowledge Structure and Thematic Clustering Based on VOSviewer Analysis

The VOSviewer-generated bibliometric map illustrates the intellectual structure of global research on eco-culture-based marine tourism management

by visualizing keyword co-occurrences across four major thematic clusters. These clusters represent the dominant conceptual domains that have shaped recent scholarly discourse and reveal how ecological, cultural, economic, and governance-related dimensions interact within the literature. The size of each node reflects the frequency of keyword usage, while link strength indicates the degree of conceptual association across publications (van Eck & Waltman, 2020).

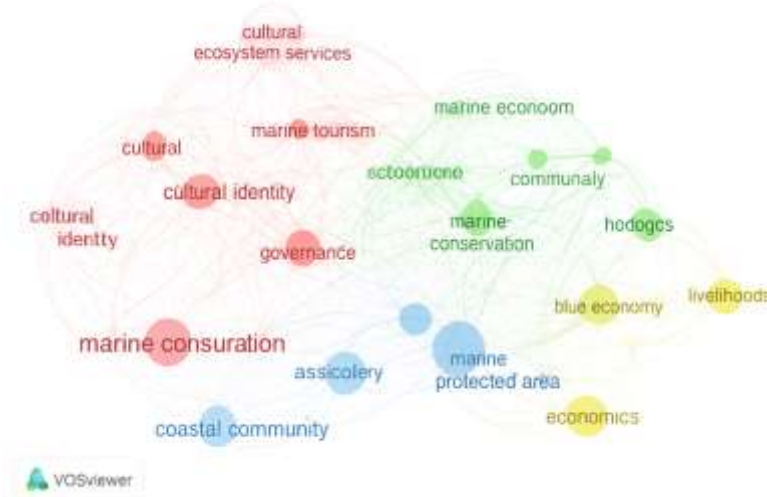


Figure 1. Thematic Density Visualization in Eco-Culture-Based Marine Tourism Studies

The first cluster (red) is centered on cultural dimensions, with prominent nodes such as cultural identity, cultural ecosystem services, cultural heritage, and marine tourism. This cluster reflects a growing academic emphasis on how cultural values and local identity shape sustainable marine tourism experiences. Recent studies highlight that cultural ecosystem services – intangible benefits derived from coastal and marine environments – play a vital role in supporting community engagement and heritage conservation (Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2022). The strong node for governance within this cluster indicates that cultural management systems are increasingly integrated with policy frameworks aimed at preserving socio-ecological systems in coastal areas (Moreno-Pérez et al., 2021).

The second cluster (green) illustrates the centrality of ecological sustainability, represented by keywords such as marine conservation, ecosystem services, marine economy, and community-based management. This aligns with contemporary research emphasizing ecosystem-based approaches to tourism planning and management (García-Molinos et al., 2023). The green cluster also demonstrates robust linkages to community-related themes, reflecting the importance of participatory governance and local stewardship in mitigating pressures on marine ecosystems (Turner et al., 2020). Increased co-occurrence between ecological and cultural terms suggests a research trend toward integrated socio-ecological frameworks.

The third cluster (blue) is dominated by terms related to governance of marine protected areas, coastal communities, and associated regulatory frameworks. Keywords such as marine protected area, coastal community, and

policy indicate that marine spatial planning and conservation zoning remain central to academic debates. Recent literature stresses the need for adaptive management strategies in marine protected areas to address rising environmental uncertainties and tourism pressures (Seddon et al., 2021). The presence of this governance-oriented cluster highlights the structural complexities of balancing conservation imperatives with local livelihoods and tourism development.

The fourth cluster (yellow) captures the economic dimension of eco-culture-based marine tourism, featuring keywords such as blue economy, economics, and livelihoods. Over the last five years, the blue economy framework has gained prominence as countries seek to maximize economic benefits from marine resources while ensuring ecological sustainability (Bennett et al., 2020). The tight linkage between blue economy and livelihoods underscores how economic diversification – often through sustainable tourism – has become a strategic pathway for coastal resilience (Voyer et al., 2022).

Across all clusters, the high density of inter-cluster linkages indicates strong interdisciplinarity within the field. Scholars increasingly integrate cultural studies, environmental science, policy research, and ecological economics to address the complex challenges of sustainable marine tourism. This reflects the broader global movement toward holistic, nature-culture integrated approaches to coastal management.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The bibliometric analysis conducted in this study provides a comprehensive overview of global research developments on eco-culture-based marine tourism management. The findings reveal a steady and substantial growth in scientific publications over the past two decades, particularly during the last five years, reflecting an increasing scholarly interest in the intersection of marine ecology, cultural heritage, and sustainable tourism governance. This upward trend is strongly associated with the rising urgency of climate change, coastal ecosystem degradation, and the global demand for more responsible tourism models.

Country-level publication patterns indicate that research productivity is concentrated in nations with strong coastal tourism sectors and advanced environmental governance frameworks. Meanwhile, journal and citation analyses demonstrate that highly cited works tend to emphasize interdisciplinary approaches, merging ecological science, cultural studies, and natural resource economics.

The VOSviewer mapping further highlights the emergence of tightly connected thematic clusters, including sustainable marine tourism, community-based coastal management, ecosystem conservation, and indigenous or local cultural practices. These clusters suggest that contemporary scholarship increasingly adopts holistic, cross-sectoral perspectives to address the complex challenges of marine tourism management.

Overall, this study not only maps the intellectual landscape of the field but also underscores the strategic importance of integrating ecological sustainability

with cultural preservation. The insights generated can support policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in designing coastal tourism strategies that enhance environmental resilience, strengthen cultural identity, and promote long-term socio-economic benefits.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research on eco-culture-based marine tourism management should move beyond descriptive bibliometric mapping by integrating empirical, comparative, and mixed-method approaches that capture how ecological, cultural, and governance dimensions interact at local and regional scales. While existing studies highlight the growing importance of cultural ecosystem services, community-based governance, and the blue economy, there remains a critical gap in translating these conceptual frameworks into measurable policy outcomes and management effectiveness. Advanced research should therefore examine how eco-cultural principles are operationalized within marine tourism policies, particularly in underrepresented coastal regions of the Global South, and assess their impacts on community resilience, cultural preservation, and ecological sustainability under climate change pressures. Longitudinal case studies, participatory governance analyses, and cross-country comparisons would provide deeper insights into adaptive management strategies, enabling the development of context-sensitive and culturally grounded marine tourism models that support sustainable coastal futures.

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