

Trends and frontiers in inclusive tourism research: insights from a bibliometric analysis

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Abstract

As an integral part of sustainable tourism, inclusive tourism not only broadens participation and equity but also strengthens the social dimension of sustainability by ensuring that destinations are accessible to all. In this context, this paper presents a bibliometric analysis of 273 publications on inclusive, accessible, and disability tourism indexed in the Web of Science (WoS). The study examines publication trends, leading authors, countries, institutions, and thematic clusters. The results highlight growing scholarly attention since 2020, and emerging research themes such as social inclusion, accessibility in hospitality, and the lived experiences of disabled tourists. These findings provide insights into the development of the field and identify gaps, offering a foundation for future research and practical advancements in promoting accessibility and inclusivity in tourism.

Keywords: inclusive tourism, accessible tourism, disability tourism, bibliometric analysis, sustainable development

1. Introduction

Tourism is recognized as a human right and an important means for individual and collective fulfilment. However, for around 1.3 billion people worldwide (16% of the population) living with disabilities (WHO, 2023), as well as for millions with specific access requirements, participation in tourism remains limited due to infrastructural and service-related barriers. In addition, an even larger number of people such as parents, caregivers, and family members are directly affected by disability in their everyday lives, highlighting the broad impact of this issue. Even though within the EU 70% of persons with disabilities have the purchasing power to travel, many obstacles still prevent equal access. At the same time, accessibility is becoming increasingly important for the ageing population, with one in six people in the EU expected to be over 65 by 2050. Ensuring accessible tourism therefore not only supports inclusivity but also represents a significant economic opportunity, as tourists with disabilities usually travel with family members or caregivers, multiplying the impact of their tourism spending. Making tourism destinations and services accessible today is an investment in the future, securing the right to travel for all (World Tourism Organization et al., 2025).

Tourism, as one of the most significant global economic and social activities (Mihajlović et al., 2025), has the potential to foster economic growth, social cohesion, and intercultural exchange. However, the long-term success of tourism in the region largely depends on sustainability, which is increasingly seen as a central strategy for its continued development (Rakočević, et al., 2025). To fully realize this role in line with principles of sustainability and human rights, tourism must be accessible to all groups of society, including persons with disabilities, older adults, and other vulnerable populations.

Inclusive and accessible tourism not only reduces physical and social barriers, but also contributes to several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, it advances SDG 1 (No Poverty) by generating equitable employment opportunities in vulnerable communities, including people with disabilities; SDG 4 (Quality Education) by fostering training in accessibility, inclusive language, and diversity awareness; SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through labor integration in tourism sectors like hotels, transport, and guiding services; SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by ensuring equal access to leisure and culture; SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) via accessible infrastructure (ramps, signage, audio-guides, inclusive restrooms); SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) by

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promoting participatory policy-making and inclusive legislation; and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through collaborations among governments, businesses, disability organizations, and certification bodies such as AIS (AIS Certificación, 2025).

The terms inclusive tourism, accessible tourism, and disability tourism are often used interchangeably, yet they highlight different dimensions of a shared concept, namely the universal right and ability to participate in tourism. Academic literature has increasingly addressed this topic over the past two decades, reflecting broader societal commitments to equality, inclusivity, and sustainable development. As part of the sustainable tourism concept, inclusive tourism, often referred to as accessible or disability tourism, is a broad approach aimed at ensuring that tourism opportunities are available to all individuals, regardless of gender, age, or physical condition (Münch et al., 2011). Accessible tourism specifically focuses on adapting destinations, products, and services for people with special needs, including individuals with disabilities, elderly tourists, pregnant women, parents with strollers, or those with temporary injuries or chronic conditions. Disability tourism represents a narrower category within this framework, concentrating primarily on tourism experiences designed for people with disabilities (Gillovic et al., 2020; Münch et al., 2011). Overall, these approaches emphasize the importance of removing barriers to participation and promoting social inclusion in tourism.

The subject of this paper is the scientific production in the field of inclusive, accessible, and disability tourism, analyzed on the basis of publications available in the WoS database. The main objective is to identify, through bibliometric analysis, the key trends, leading authors, countries, and institutions, as well as thematic clusters and research gaps in this domain. The study thus seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the evolution of academic knowledge on inclusive tourism and to provide guidance for future research and practice in tourism aimed at greater accessibility and social equity.

2. Research background and related bibliometric studies

Bibliometric studies have increasingly been applied to tourism research, particularly in areas such as sustainability, accessibility, and inclusivity. While sustainable tourism has been widely examined through bibliometric approaches, research specifically focusing on inclusive and accessible tourism remains comparatively limited. As noted by Korbiel et al. (2025), recent efforts highlight the growing academic interest in inclusivity and accessibility, but also reveal that the relationship between inclusive tourism and sustainable development has not yet been systematically explored.

Early bibliometric investigations into accessible tourism mapped publications across countries and journals, revealing patterns in research output and emerging topics. Henríquez et al. (2022) analyzed 254 Scopus-indexed articles from 52 countries, identifying Australia as a leading contributor, Tourism Management and Sustainability among the most productive journals, and highlighting the role of emerging technologies such as smartphones and virtual reality in shaping future research directions. Similarly, Gulati et al. (2024) examined Scopus-indexed literature to identify publication trends, highly cited works, and keyword co-occurrences, confirming the increasing scholarly attention in this field. Furthermore, Shekari (2023) conducted a bibliometric and quantitative content analysis of 104 Scopus-indexed publications on inclusive tourism, identifying four main research clusters: sustainability, social entrepreneurship, social inclusion, and accessible tourism.

Qiao et al. (2024) analyzed 322 WoS publications on inclusive tourism from 2008 to 2023 using CiteSpace, mapping knowledge structures, research hotspots, and collaboration patterns. Their findings highlight the growing role of institutions such as Massey University and the University of Gothenburg, the expansion of international collaborations, and emerging topics such as employment, sustainable development, and quality of life, underlining the link between inclusive tourism, social equity, and sustainability. Hernández-Sales et al. (2023) analyzed WoS publications using VOSviewer, noting a significant increase in publications since 2018, a small core of highly productive authors, and the evolution of key terms such as people, disability, and inclusive tourism, often connected with management and sustainable tourism concepts. In addition, Fernández-Díaz et al. (2025) examined the impact of digital communication and technology on inclusive tourism, showing how mobile applications, virtual and augmented reality, and the phygital approach can enhance accessibility and tourist experience, while also identifying slow progress in web accessibility and gaps in stakeholders' awareness.

Finally, research on disability and accessible tourism has been investigated from both terminological and longitudinal perspectives, considering how terms evolve over time and how research output develops historically. Leiras et al. (2024) analyzed 613 publications indexed in the Scopus database and published between 1984 and 2022 to explore the evolution of terminology related to accessible tourism and disability, highlighting the need for standardized language to facilitate communication among stakeholders. Singh et al. (2023) conducted a bibliometric analysis of 105 seminal articles from 2000 to 2019, also drawing on the Scopus database and employing Bibliometrix, with a focus on tourism and disability research.

Although previous bibliometric studies have examined accessible and inclusive tourism, the few studies specifically addressing disability tourism rely exclusively on the Scopus database. This leaves a gap in the literature regarding the

integration of disability within the broader framework of inclusive and accessible tourism. To address this, the present study builds on earlier contributions by employing the WoS database to offer a more comprehensive perspective on interrelated concepts and current research trends.

3. Methodology and dataset description

This study is based on a bibliometric analysis of publications related to inclusive, accessible, and disability tourism indexed in the WoS. Bibliometric analysis involves the rigorous examination of extensive scientific data, such as publications, citations, and keyword occurrences, to map the intellectual structure and development of a research domain. This approach allows researchers to identify trends, uncover gaps in knowledge, and generate directions for future investigation (Donthu, et al., 2021). The first step is to clearly define the research objectives, including the scope of the study and the specific questions to be addressed. Next, relevant data are collected from appropriate scientific databases, such as WoS, using well-defined search queries and inclusion criteria. The third step involves analyzing and visualizing the data through bibliometric techniques, including citation analysis, co-citation analysis, and keyword co-occurrence, often supported by software tools such as VOSviewer or Bibliometrix. Finally, the results are interpreted to provide insights into publication trends, collaboration networks, and emerging research areas, thereby identifying knowledge gaps and guiding future research directions (Öztürk et al., 2024).

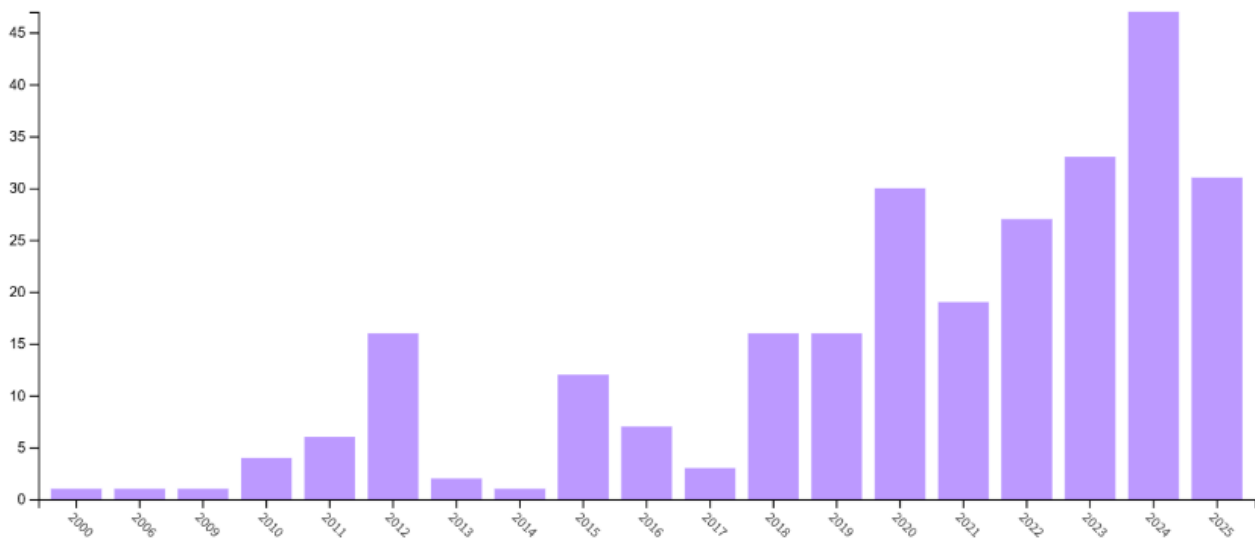
The data for this study were retrieved on August 25, 2025, using the following search query: TS=("inclusive tourism" OR "accessible tourism" OR "disability tourism"). The search covered all available years in the WoS database without time restrictions and included only articles, review articles, early access papers in English. A total of 21 conference papers were identified on this topic, but only 12 of them had more than one citation. As noted by Niñerola et al. (2019), this citation pattern suggests that the research topic has so far received limited scientific attention, and these papers were therefore excluded from the study. The search yielded 428 results in total, with the majority of articles (273) indexed in Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism, followed by 53 in Environmental Studies, 47 in Green & Sustainable Science & Technology, 43 in Management, and 41 in Environmental Sciences. For this study, only the 273 articles from Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism were selected for analysis, as this category best aligns with the scope of inclusive tourism research. Other categories were excluded to ensure relevance and consistency. The dataset was exported in full record and cited references format to enable detailed bibliometric analysis. The choice of WoS as the sole database was based on its rigorous indexing standards and comprehensive coverage of tourism-related journals, while focusing exclusively on the Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism category ensured alignment with the study's objectives and analytical consistency.

Bibliometric indicators such as annual publication trends, most productive authors, institutions, countries, journals, and frequently used keywords were examined. In addition, citation patterns and co-authorship networks were analyzed to identify research clusters and collaboration structures. The analysis was performed using VOSviewer for visualization of bibliometric networks, while Excel was used for descriptive statistics and trend analysis. VOSviewer is particularly suitable for bibliometric mapping due to its user-friendly interface and ability to generate network and density visualizations, which makes it useful for detecting collaboration patterns, thematic clusters, and emerging research areas within large datasets (Kumar, 2025).

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Distribution of papers by year

According to the bibliographic data, the first publication in this field appeared in 2000, followed by very limited activity until 2011. From 2012 to 2019, research output became more consistent, though the number of papers per year remained relatively low. A stronger growth trend is visible after 2020, when the annual number of publications increased significantly. In fact, more than two-thirds of all identified papers were published between 2020 and 2025, with the peak in 2024 (47 papers), followed by 2023 (33) and 2025 (31). This distribution clearly shows that the topic has attracted growing attention in recent years and is becoming a more established field of study (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of publications by year

Source: Web of Science. (2025). Analysis results for TS = ("inclusive tourism" OR "accessible tourism" OR "disability tourism"). Retrieved August 25, 2025, from <https://www.webofscience.com>

4.2. Co-authorship analysis

A total of 273 papers were analyzed in terms of authorship. The distribution of papers by number of authors reveals that single-authored papers are relatively common but not dominant, with 50 papers (18.3%) written by one author. The majority of publications are co-authored: 70 papers (25.6%) have two authors, and 83 papers (30.4%) involve three authors. Papers with four authors account for 45 (16.5%), while five-author papers are less frequent (16 papers, 5.9%). Studies with six or more authors are rare, representing a small fraction of the corpus: six papers with six authors (2.2%), two papers with seven authors (0.7%), and only one paper with eight authors (0.4%). Overall, this pattern indicates that the field is characterized predominantly by small collaborative teams, with three-author papers being the most typical, followed by two-author publications.

4.3. Author performance analysis

A total of 605 authors contributed to the analyzed articles. The field shows a small, highly active core of authors surrounded by a broad base of less frequent contributors (Crane, 1969). Among the six most prolific authors (Table 1), two can be considered high producers (more than 10 papers): Simon Darcy (Australia; 20 papers) and Celeste Eusébio (Portugal; 11 papers). Four others belong to the group of moderate producers (5–9 papers): Elisabeth Kastenholtz (Portugal; 5), Qiao Guanghui (China; 5), Lucía Rubio-Escuderos (Spain; 5), and Leonor Teixeira (Portugal; 5).

Citation patterns (excluding self-citations) confirm the importance of this core. Darcy has the highest number of citations (1,129), showing both visibility and long-term engagement with the topic. When considering citations per paper, however, impact is more evenly spread: Kastenholtz (about 45.2 per paper) and Qiao (around 41.2 per paper) come close to Darcy's average (around 56.5 per paper) and rank above Eusébio (about 20.2 per paper). Rubio-Escuderos (about 12.2 per paper) and Teixeira (around 8.6 per paper) show lower citation averages, which may be linked to more recent publications, specific subfields, or different collaboration networks. From a geographical perspective, Portugal is the most prominent hub, with three of the six most prolific authors, followed by contributions from Australia, China, and Spain. Overall, the results suggest that research in this field is shaped by a relatively small group of prolific scholars, complemented by a large number of occasional contributors.

Table 1. Most productive authors

Author	Country	Number of papers	Times cited (without self-citations)
Simon Darcy	Australia	20	1,129
Celeste Eusébio	Portugal	11	222
Elisabeth Kastenholtz	Portugal	5	226
Qiao Guanghui	China	5	206
Lucía Rubio-Escuderos	Spain	5	61
Leonor Teixeira	Portugal	5	43

Source: Author

4.4. Institution analysis

The institutional data reveal that the University of Technology Sydney leads with the highest output and impact (21 articles, 1,249 citations), followed by the Universidade de Aveiro with 17 publications and 358 citations. Other institutions, such as the University of Johannesburg, the State University System of Florida, and the Universitat d'Alacant, contribute fewer papers and demonstrate more modest citation levels, yet their involvement reflects the geographically diverse nature of the field (Table 2). This distribution suggests that while research excellence is concentrated in a few leading institutions, a wider network of universities is gradually expanding the knowledge base, thereby fostering international collaboration and enhancing the global visibility of inclusive tourism studies.

Table 2. Number of papers per institution

Institution	Number of papers	Citations
University of Technology Sydney	21	1,249
Universidade de Aveiro	17	358
University of Johannesburg	11	173
State University System of Florida	11	126
Universitat d'Alacant	7	131

Source: Author

4.5. Country analysis

The analysis of publications by country shows clear differences in both productivity and impact. Australia leads with the highest number of articles (40) and citations (1,825). Spain and Portugal have a similar number of publications (39 and 37), but Spain's research is more cited. The USA, England, and China publish slightly fewer papers, with China showing relatively strong citation results. New Zealand, despite only 14 articles, achieves high impact with 549 citations. Sweden also performs well, while South Africa and Italy have lower citation counts and thus less influence (Table 3).

Table 3. Number of papers per country

Country	Number of articles	Citations
Australia	40	1,825
Spain	39	662
Portugal	37	487
USA	28	333
England	25	484
China	24	493
New Zealand	14	549
Sweden	14	385
South Africa	13	180
Italy	10	125

Source: Author

4.6. Journal analysis

As part of the performance analysis, the distribution of publications across journals provides insight into the productivity and visibility of research on the observed topic. The 273 articles were published in **79 different journals**, which indicates that the field is widely disseminated and not limited to a small number of specialized journals. The most productive journal is *Current Issues in Tourism*, with 21 published articles (7.69% of the total), followed by *Tourism Review* (16 articles, 5.86%) and *Aspects of Tourism* (15 articles, 5.49%). Other leading outlets include *Tourism Recreation Research* (14 articles, 5.13%), *Tourism Management*, *Tourism Geographies*, and *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (13 articles each, 4.76%).

Specialized journals focusing on accessibility and inclusion, such as *Best Practice in Accessible Tourism: Inclusion, Disability, Ageing Population and Tourism*, also made a significant contribution with 12 articles (4.39%). The same number of articles was published in *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, while the *Journal of Tourism Futures* published 11 articles (4.03%). A moderate level of output is observed in journals such as *European Journal of Tourism Research* (8 articles, 2.93%), *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* (7 articles, 2.56%), and *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* (7 articles, 2.56%) (Table 4). At the same time, a considerable number of journals published only one or two articles on the topic.

Table 4. Most productive journals publishing on the observed topic

Journal title	Number of articles	% of total	Citations
Current Issues in Tourism	21	7.69%	358
Tourism Review	16	5.86%	450
Aspects of Tourism	15	5.49%	49
Tourism Recreation Research	14	5.13%	188
Tourism Management	13	4.76%	806
Tourism Geographies	13	4.76%	566
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	13	4.76%	465
Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes	12	4.39%	83
Best Practice in Accessible Tourism: Inclusion, Disability, Ageing Population and Tourism	12	4.39%	19
Journal of Tourism Futures	11	4.03%	294

Source: Author

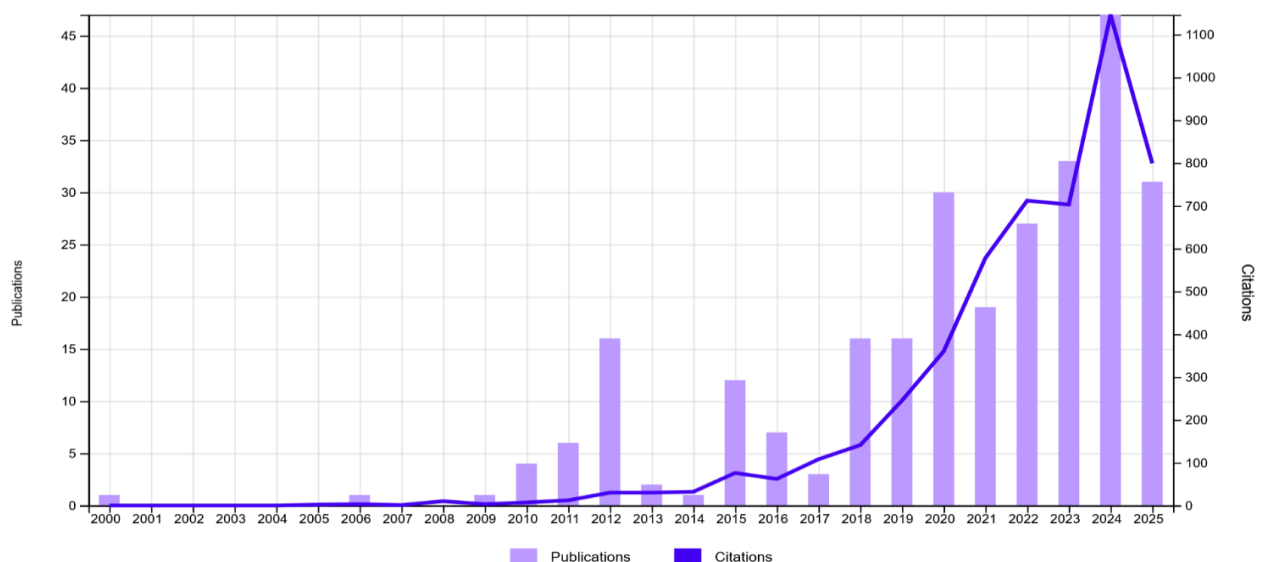
4.7. Citation analysis

The analyzed publications on this topic have accumulated a total of 5,074 citations, with an average of 18.59 citations per item, and an h-index of 40, indicating a considerable level of recognition and influence within the research field. The most cited publications in the field highlight key contributions to inclusive and accessible tourism. The top-cited work is by Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018) with 225 citations, followed closely by Darcy and Dickson (2009) with 220 citations. Other highly cited studies by Darcy (2010), Small et al. (2012), and Darcy et al. (2010) also demonstrate significant influence, reflecting ongoing research interest in accessibility, disability, and sustainable tourism practices (Table 5). Research on this topic has steadily increased over time, with minimal activity before 2010. Both publications and citations grew from 2011, peaking in 2024, indicating rising interest and impact in recent years (Figure 2).

Table 5. Top-cited articles

Publication	Total citations	Average per year
Scheyvens, R., & Biddulph, R. (2018). Inclusive tourism development. <i>Tourism Geographies</i> , 20(4), 589-609.	225	28.13
Darcy, S., & Dickson, T. J. (2009). A whole-of-life approach to tourism: The case for accessible tourism experiences. <i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i> , 16(1), 32-44.	220	12.94
Darcy, S. (2010). Inherent complexity: Disability, accessible tourism and accommodation information preferences. <i>Tourism Management</i> , 31(6), 816-826.	200	12.5
Small, J., Darcy, S., & Packer, T. (2012). The embodied tourist experiences of people with vision impairment: Management implications beyond the visual gaze. <i>Tourism Management</i> , 33(4), 941-950.	173	12.36
Darcy, S., Cameron, B., & Pegg, S. (2010). Accessible tourism and sustainability: A discussion and case study. <i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i> , 18(4), 515-537.	138	8.63

Source: Author

Figure 2. Citation per year

Source: Web of Science. (2025). Analysis results for TS = ("inclusive tourism" OR "accessible tourism" OR "disability tourism"). Retrieved August 25, 2025, from <https://www.webofscience.com>

4.8. Integration of the SDGs in inclusive tourism studies

The analysis of SDGs associated with the reviewed publications reveals a strong concentration on **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities**, which accounts for 90.11% of the total records. This finding is expected, as inclusive tourism is predominantly framed through the lens of urban development, accessibility, and sustainable community planning. In contrast, the connection to other SDGs, such as **SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being)**, **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)**, **SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure)**, and **SDG 1 (No Poverty)**, remains marginal, each representing less than 2% of the total sample. These limited occurrences suggest that the broader multidimensional contributions of inclusive tourism to the 2030 Agenda are still underexplored, highlighting potential avenues for future research. *In addition, 6.23% of the records lacked SDG information, pointing to database gaps and emphasizing the need for more consistent reporting of SDG linkages in academic publications (Table 6).*

Table 6. SDGs and inclusive tourism studies

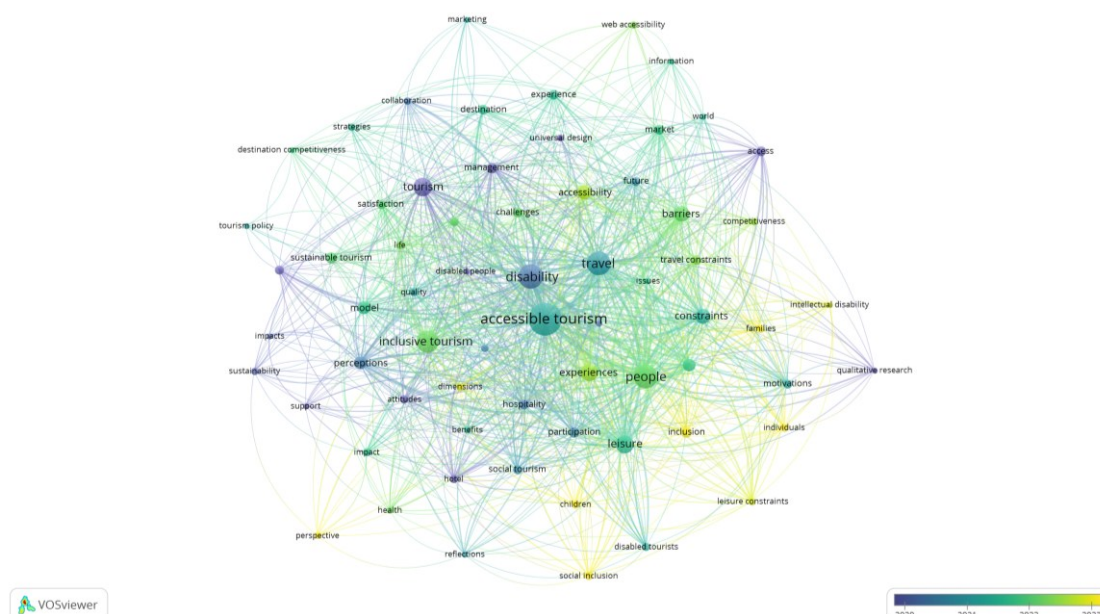
SDG code	Sustainable development goal	Record count	% of 273
01	No Poverty	2	0.73
02	Zero Hunger	1	0.37
03	Good Health and Well-Being	5	1.83
04	Quality Education	2	0.73
05	Gender Equality	4	1.47
09	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	4	1.47
10	Reduced Inequality	1	0.37
11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	246	90.11
12	Responsible Consumption and Production	2	0.73
–	Records without SDG information	17	6.23

Source: Author

4.9. Keywords analysis

The overlay visualization map (Figure 3) generated using VOSviewer presents the co-occurrence of keywords related to accessible tourism, with colors indicating the average publication year of each term. The color gradient ranges from purple and blue (indicating older terms, around 2020–2021) to green and yellow (representing more recent terms, from 2022 to 2023). This visualization provides insight into the temporal evolution of research themes. For example, terms such as *accessible tourism*, *inclusive tourism*, and *sustainability* appear in darker shades (blue to green), suggesting they were more prominent in earlier studies. In contrast, more recent topics such as *social inclusion*, *disabled tourists*, and *web accessibility* appear in yellow, reflecting increasing scholarly attention in the last few years. It is important to note that while the overlay visualization shows when certain concepts gained prominence, it does not reflect thematic groupings. Terms from different thematic clusters may appear in similar colors if they became relevant around the same time. Therefore, the temporal distribution should be interpreted independently from the conceptual clustering, which is presented in the following section.

Figure 3. Keywords analysis - overlay visualization map



Source: Author

Based on the network visualization, five distinct clusters were identified using VOSviewer's clustering algorithm. Each cluster represents a group of closely related concepts, reflecting different thematic focuses within the broader field of accessible tourism

- Cluster 1 focuses on strategic and conceptual foundations of accessible tourism, including keywords such as accessible tourism, inclusive tourism, sustainability, universal design, satisfaction, and policy.
- Cluster 2 centers around accessibility and social dimensions, with terms like accessibility, challenges, web accessibility, inclusion, and social tourism. This cluster bridges both digital and social aspects of access.
- Cluster 3 emphasizes barriers and constraints that limit participation in tourism for people with disabilities, focusing on structural and psychological limitations (barriers, constraints, participation).
- Cluster 4 relates specifically to the hospitality sector, including keywords such as hospitality, hotel, industry, and disabled people, highlighting how the service industry addresses accessibility.
- Cluster 5 addresses the individual experience of disabled tourists, particularly in terms of social inclusion and identity (disabled tourists, social inclusion), pointing to a growing focus on the lived experience and empowerment of tourists with disabilities.

4.9.1. Cluster 1: Strategic foundations of accessible tourism

Tourism has the potential to generate substantial benefits for local communities. However, as Beeton (2006) emphasizes, these benefits can only be fully realized if the principle of inclusivity is integrated into tourism strategies, ensuring that tourism development genuinely contributes to community well-being. Inclusive and accessible tourism is frequently discussed within the context of sustainable tourism and the European Agenda for Tourism 2030, as it promotes equitable access, social inclusion, and community well-being, making it a key consideration for tourism policy aimed at fostering sustainability (Saleem Wani 2024; Shahzalal et al, 2023; Torres et al., 2025). *Accessible tourism is commonly defined in the academic literature as a form of tourism that ensures equality and dignified participation for people with diverse physical, sensory, and cognitive access needs. Nevertheless, previous research has pointed out that such definitions often remain abstract, as the practical conceptualization of accessible tourism is still underdeveloped* (Leiras et al., 2025). One of the recurring strategic challenges identified in this cluster relates to **stakeholder collaboration**. Earlier research, such as Nyanjom, et al. (2018), highlighted that stakeholder engagement in accessible tourism development is often minimal and fragmented, suggesting the need for coordinated, communicative, and clearly structured approaches. This issue remains relevant in more recent studies, including Leiras et al. (2025), which emphasize the importance of understanding how stakeholders define accessible tourism and its benefits. Together, these studies indicate that fostering effective collaboration among diverse stakeholders is a key strategic consideration for developing inclusive and sustainable tourism practices.

4.9.2. Cluster 2: Digital and social accessibility challenges

Cluster 2 centers on the challenges of accessible tourism, particularly at the intersection of technology and social inclusion. Research identifies barriers ranging from knowledge constraints faced by visually impaired tourists (Lam, et al., 2020) to the limited functionality and compliance of mobile and web-based applications (Ribeiro et al., 2018; Fernández-Díaz et al., 2024). Emerging studies also highlight challenges in adopting immersive technologies such as virtual reality, which can enhance participation for people with mobility impairments or the elderly, but cannot fully substitute the multi-sensory richness of real travel (Saltık et al., 2025; Sirih et al., 2025). Beyond physical and technological barriers, broader social challenges remain, including a lack of awareness and preparedness in the tourism sector to accommodate diverse needs. In this regard, **social tourism is discussed both as a conceptual framework within welfare policy aimed at enabling participation for disadvantaged groups** (McCabe et al., 2020), **and as an applied practice through inclusive initiatives such as social camps, supported by sustainable finance and volunteer engagement** (Akdemir, 2021). Thus, this cluster reflects how digital and social challenges intertwine, positioning innovation, compliance, and stakeholder engagement as key conditions for advancing accessible tourism.

4.9.3. Cluster 3: Barriers and participation constraints

Cluster 3 emphasizes **barriers, constraints, and participation** in tourism for people with disabilities, addressing structural, psychological, and social dimensions. Socio-anthropological and scenario-based studies highlight how economic fears, prejudice, and lack of cooperation continue to obstruct the development of accessible tourism (Fuchs, 2023; Portales, 2015). Empirical research on wheelchair tourists in Indonesia shows that while there is enthusiasm for visiting natural destinations, barriers related to accessibility, service quality, and cultural attitudes limit participation, emphasizing the need for a cultural shift toward inclusivity (Perangin-Angin et al., 2024). Studies on travel constraints demonstrate that psychological factors such as learned helplessness and self-efficacy significantly influence leisure travel participation among people with disabilities (Priyanto et al., 2025). Furthermore, research on travel motivations indicates that people with disabilities are primarily driven by **intrinsic motives** such as personal development, autonomy, competence, socializing, and closeness to family, while well-being represents a secondary extrinsic motivation (Moura

et al., 2023). Additionally, the inclusiveness of tourism services, marketing, and communication also affects participation (Cloquet et al., 2018). Collectively, this cluster underscores that participation in tourism is constrained not only by physical or technological barriers but also by psychological, social, and cultural factors, highlighting the multifaceted challenges that must be addressed to advance accessible tourism.

4.9.4. Cluster 4: Accessibility in the hospitality industry

Cluster 4 focuses on the hospitality sector and examines how hotels and service providers address accessibility for disabled and elderly travelers. Studies highlight that accessible tourism is not only a social responsibility but also a growing market opportunity for the industry. Research consistently shows that hotel website accessibility remains low, with critical shortcomings in compliance with international standards, often making it difficult for disabled travelers to access essential information. Paradoxically, higher-category hotels sometimes perform worse (Teixeira et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2025). Beyond digital access, employee attitudes toward guests with disabilities are also decisive: frontline staff can be empathetic accommodators, but also apathetic or egoistic non-accommodators, with implications for service quality and inclusivity (Adam, 2019). Technological innovations, such as avatar-based virtual tours in the metaverse, show promise in enhancing travel confidence and reducing stress for older adults (Hao et al., 2025). Similarly, accessible information and services provided online can reduce uncertainty among travelers with disabilities and improve their decision-making (Park et al., 2025). Collectively, this cluster underscores the dual importance of technological solutions and human attitudes in advancing inclusivity within the hospitality sector.

4.9.5. Cluster 5: Social inclusion and the disabled tourist experience

Cluster 5 emphasizes the lived experiences of disabled tourists, with a particular focus on social inclusion, identity, and empowerment. Research highlights the diversity within the community of tourists with disabilities, pointing to differences in travel behaviors, motivations, and needs depending on the type of impairment (Figueiredo et al., 2012) or perceived travel barriers (Tao et al., 2024). Other studies focus on specific groups, such as blind and vision-impaired tourists, where psychological perceptions and social intentions strongly shape travel behaviors (Qiao et al., 2023), or on families traveling with children on the autism spectrum (Freund et al., 2019). Tourism experiences are often framed as pathways to self-efficacy, normality, and stronger social connections, especially for groups such as adults with intellectual disabilities (Gillovic et al., 2021) or people with reduced mobility (Rubio-Escuderos et al., 2024). Scholars also underline the importance of inclusion in marketing and communication strategies, noting that disabled tourists are still frequently underrepresented or ambiguously portrayed (Cloquet et al., 2018). In parallel, methodological advances highlight the value of co-design with the disability community to ensure authentic representation and accessibility at every stage of the trip (Dickson et al., 2024). Increasingly, qualitative and digital approaches are increasingly used to collect their experiences, whether through analysis of disability travel blogs (Hefny, 2024) or sensory experiences of visitors with hearing impairments (Chan et al., 2025). Altogether, this body of literature underscores a shift in accessible tourism research from focusing solely on barriers to highlighting individual autonomy, empowerment, and the transformative role of inclusive tourism in the lives of disabled tourists.

5. Conclusion

The bibliometric analysis shows that the 273 identified articles are dispersed across a broad range of journals, confirming that research on the observed topic is not concentrated in a few specialized outlets, but rather extends to a wide spectrum of tourism-related publications. Research in this field has grown rapidly since 2020, with a small core of highly productive authors and leading institutions. Five thematic clusters were identified, focusing on strategic foundations, digital and social accessibility, participation barriers, hospitality, and the lived experiences of disabled tourists. While accessibility and social inclusion are increasingly emphasized, research remains concentrated in certain countries and journals, and multidisciplinary perspectives are still limited.

Despite significant advances, accessible tourism research still faces several limitations. Current studies reveal gaps in the practical implementation of accessibility across tourism services and hospitality, limited participation of disabled individuals in designing services, fragmented collaboration among stakeholders, and insufficient understanding of psychological, social, and cultural barriers that affect participation. In addition, digital and technological solutions, such as online platforms or virtual reality tools, are not always easy for all users to access or use, and they cannot fully replace the experience of real travel. At the same time, these limitations point to important opportunities for future research. These include improving digital and technological solutions, integrating inclusive tourism into sustainable development policies, involving disabled people in service design, and focusing on empowerment and meaningful participation. Addressing these areas is crucial for creating more inclusive, equitable, and socially impactful tourism experiences.

This study has some limitations. It only examines articles from the Web of Science in the Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism category and excludes conference papers, which means some relevant global research may be missing. In addition, only publications in English were considered, potentially omitting important studies in other languages. Moreover, by concentrating exclusively on the Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism category, interdisciplinary

perspectives from fields such as sociology, education, or health may be underrepresented. Despite these limitations, the study offers a clear mapping of key trends in accessible tourism research and provides practical guidance for policymakers, tourism organizations, and service providers aiming to develop more inclusive tourism strategies.

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