Research Paper

Digital Accessibility and Emerging Technologies in Cross-border Tourism: A Bibliometric Review for the Euroregion of Northern Portugal and Galicia

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the evolution of research on digital accessibility and emerging technologies applied to tourism, with a special focus on their framework in cross-border regions, namely in the Northern Portugal and Galicia Euroregion. Based on a systematic search in Web of Science (2020-2025), 268 articles were identified and subsequently processed using bibliometric methods with Bibliometrix R/Biblioshiny. The results show a sharp increase in scientific production, strongly focused on topics such as inclusion, technology, tourism experiences, and barriers to access. The analysis of networks and thematic structures reveals a scientific field in consolidation, where digital transformation and accessible tourism take centre stage, although gaps remain in the articulation between emerging technologies and cross-border tourism. This study contributes to an updated mapping of the field, identifying trends, the most influential authors and institutions, as well as opportunities for future research aimed at developing and promoting more inclusive and digitally accessible destinations.

Keywords: Digital Accessibility, Bibliometric Analysis, E-Tourism, Cross-Border Regions, Emerging Technologies, Accessible Tourism, Destination Marketing, Tourism Management.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has taken on a central role in reshaping tourism experiences, significantly influencing management models, information systems, and the dynamics of interaction between destinations, organisations, and visitors. Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, big data analytics and accessible digital interfaces have contributed to expanding the possibilities for planning, mediating and experiencing tourism, promoting new consumption patterns and differentiating the competitiveness of destinations (Fernández-Díaz et al., 2022). At the same time, digital accessibility has become increasingly relevant in academic and political debate and is now recognised as an indispensable condition for ensuring equitable access to information and tourism services, especially in the case of visitors with specific needs (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020).

In the European context, cross-border regions are particularly challenging and, at the same time, promising areas for the implementation of inclusive digital solutions. They are characterised by distinct administrative, linguistic and infrastructural dynamics, which require institutional coordination and technological interoperability to ensure cohesive and accessible tourism experiences (Medeiros, 2015). The Northern Portugal and Galicia Euroregion represent a paradigmatic case, bringing together territorial cooperation efforts focused on mobility, complementarity and service integration. However, despite growing political and institutional interest, scientific knowledge on the link between digital accessibility, emerging technologies and cross-border tourism remains fragmented and scattered across different disciplinary fields.

In this sense, the existing literature reveals important advances in the understanding of accessible tourism, technologies applied to tourism and the challenges of cross-border governance but does not yet offer a consolidated framework that integrates these three dimensions. A bibliometric approach thus allows us to identify patterns of scientific production, the most influential authors, institutions and countries, as well as to map conceptual developments and existing gaps, offering a systematic overview of the state of the art (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The lack of bibliometric reviews that simultaneously address these dimensions justifies the relevance and timeliness of the present study.

Thus, the objective of this article is to analyse scientific production on digital accessibility and emerging technologies applied to tourism, with special attention to their framework in cross-border contexts, through a bibliometric review based on the Web of Science (WoS). The aim is to identify the main research trends, the most relevant contributions and the thematic structures that shape the field, contributing to a more integrated conceptual understanding and the identification of opportunities for future research, particularly with relevance to the Northern Portugal and Galicia Euroregion.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Digital accessibility has become a central dimension in the evolution of accessible tourism, accompanying the growing digitisation of information, services and tourist experiences. Traditionally associated with the elimination of physical barriers, the concept of accessible tourism has progressively evolved towards a more holistic approach, integrating informational, communicational and digital dimensions, which are fundamental to ensuring the autonomous and informed participation of tourists (Darcy & Dickson, 2009; Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). Contemporary literature recognises that exclusion in tourism manifests itself not only at the physical level, but also through limitations in access to information, communication and digital technologies, making digital accessibility a structuring element of tourism inclusion (Darcy, Cameron & Pegg, 2010; Buhalis & Darcy, 2011).

In this context, digital accessibility refers to the ability of individuals with different functional profiles (including people with motor, sensory or cognitive disabilities, older people or people with temporary limitations) to access, understand and independently use digital content, online platforms and technological services associated with tourism (Eichhorn & Buhalis, 2011; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020).

Tools such as destination websites, booking platforms, mobile applications, tourist information systems and multimedia content thus play a decisive role in mediating the tourist experience throughout its entire cycle, from trip planning to the post-visit period.

Several studies show that the lack of digital accessibility is a significant factor of exclusion, even in destinations with high levels of physical accessibility. The unavailability of clear, reliable and accessible information can compromise the decision-making of tourists with specific needs, reducing their autonomy and increasing their perception of risk associated with travel (Buhalis &

Darcy, 2011). More recent research reinforces this perspective, demonstrating that digital accessibility directly influences satisfaction, trust and visit intention, assuming a critical role in determining the quality of the inclusive tourism experience (Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Rizova & Dimova, 2025).

At the same time, accessible tourism has evolved from a predominantly regulatory and welfare-based approach to a more strategic and market-oriented perspective. The literature recognises that tourists with specific needs constitute a growing, heterogeneous and economically relevant segment, with high potential for loyalty, especially when they encounter inclusive, consistent and reliable physical and digital environments (Darcy et al., 2020; Buhalis, Darcy & Ambrose, 2012). In this context, accessibility is no longer understood solely as an ethical or legal obligation, but rather as a factor of competitiveness for tourist destinations and organisations.

The digital transformation of the tourism sector has been strongly driven by the adoption of emerging technologies, which are redefining the processes of planning, promoting and experiencing tourism. In terms of accessibility in tourism, these technologies are particularly relevant as they create new opportunities to mitigate physical, informational and communication barriers, reinforcing the autonomy and inclusion of tourists with different functional profiles (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011; Buhalis, Darcy & Ambrose, 2012).

Among the emerging technologies most frequently discussed in the literature are artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality, augmented reality, big data, and intelligent recommendation systems. These technologies are applied across the entire tourist experience cycle, from trip planning to the experience at the destination and the post-visit period (Gretzel et al., 2015; Tussyadiah, 2020). In the context of digital accessibility, their potential lies mainly in the personalisation of information, the adaptation of digital interfaces, and the creation of more inclusive and immersive experiences.

AI, in particular, has been widely explored as a tool for improving information accessibility through chatbots, virtual assistants, and personalised recommendation systems. These solutions allow content, formats, and levels of detail to be tailored to the specific needs of users, helping to reduce inequalities in access to tourist information (Buhalis, Darcy & Ambrose, 2012). Recent studies indicate that emerging technologies based on AI and language models can personalise and adapt digital content and recommendations, adjusting information to users' profiles and preferences and improving the efficiency of digital navigation and interaction (Karlović, 2025).

This personalisation has the potential to support the inclusion of diverse tourist profiles, including those with specific needs, provided that systems are designed with universal access principles in mind. However, the literature also warns that technological adoption does not always consider accessibility from the outset, which can generate new forms of exclusion in the digital context (Domínguez Vila, 2024).

In Europe, this dimension is particularly relevant in cross-border contexts, where the interoperability of digital systems, consistency of information and multilingual communication are essential to ensure seamless and inclusive tourist experiences. The literature suggests that territorial and digital disparities between neighbouring regions can accentuate inequalities in access to tourism, even in territories characterised by high levels of physical and institutional integration (Medeiros, 2020; Paiva et al., 2025; Gavioli et al., 2025). Thus, digital accessibility emerges as a fundamental pillar of territorial cohesion and the promotion of inclusive destinations in cross-border regions.

In summary, the literature converges in identifying digital accessibility and emerging technologies as structural dimensions of the transformation of accessible tourism. However, despite growing recognition of its importance, gaps remain in the systematisation of scientific knowledge that integrates digital accessibility, emerging technologies and cross-border tourism. This theoretical and empirical fragmentation hinders understanding of the maturity of the field and limits the formulation of strategies geared towards inclusive and digitally accessible destinations. It is in this context that bibliometric analysis proves particularly relevant, allowing trends to be mapped, relevant scientific actors to be identified, and structural gaps in academic production to be revealed. Although the research equation does not explicitly include terms associated with marketing or communication, these domains remain conceptually relevant in the context of accessible tourism and digital accessibility. The promotion of destinations, the mediation of the tourist experience and the dissemination of information occur predominantly through digital channels, making accessible digital communication a cross-cutting dimension of the phenomenon under analysis. This dimension is particularly important in cross-border contexts, where informational consistency, communicational interoperability, and linguistic adaptation significantly condition the visitor experience. It should be noted, however, that in this study, these dimensions are considered primarily as an interpretative framework and potential implication and are analysed in light of the themes effectively retrieved by the bibliometric strategy adopted.

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to identify, map and analyse the main trends in research on digital accessibility, emerging technologies and cross-border tourism, focusing on the Northern Portugal and Galicia Euroregion. To this end, research was conducted in November 2025 using the WoS database, with terms that can be used in articles in these areas of study. After this collection, a bibliometric analysis of the results was carried out using the Bibliometrix R package, with the Biblioshiny application.

The database selected for this study was WoS, due to its high degree of credibility, selectivity and scientific impact. This database includes the most influential international journals, evaluated using rigorous criteria of editorial quality and scientific relevance, making it one of the most widely used databases in bibliometric studies and quantitative literature reviews (Kraus et al., 2022; Ferreira et al., 2022). In addition, the quality and consistency of the metadata provided make WoS particularly suitable for quantitative analyses and for ensuring the reproducibility of results (Kraus et al., 2022; Pranckutė, 2021).

In order to conduct the research, it was necessary to identify the key concepts, based on the need to obtain a bibliometric review that explicitly linked digital accessibility and emerging technologies in the specific context of cross-border tourism. To this end, the following search equation was used:

WoS: TS=("digital accessibility" OR "accessible tourism" OR "e-tourism" AND "emerging technolog*" AND "cross-border tourism" OR "transboundary tourism")

This equation was constructed based on boolean combinations that articulate three main dimensions: (1) digital accessibility, accessible tourism, and e-tourism; (2) emerging technologies applied to tourism; and (3) the context of cross-border regions.

To ensure the relevance and timeliness of the results, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined, including: considering only scientific articles, excluding other types of publications; selecting open access articles; and filtering articles published within a five-year time frame (2020-2025). The application of these criteria yielded consistent and relevant results in WoS, totalling 268 documents.

After cleaning the data and obtaining a significant sample, bibliometric processing was carried out using the Bibliometrix R package, with the Biblioshiny application. This open-source tool, specifically developed for bibliometric analysis and scientific mapping, allows for the systematic

examination of the structure, dynamics, and evolution of academic production (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

The analysis focused on answering the study's guiding questions, namely: (i) identifying the main trends and patterns in scientific production; (ii) determining the most influential authors, institutions and countries; and (iii) identifying gaps and research opportunities relevant to the Northern Portugal and Galicia Euro-region.

4. RESULTS

As mentioned above, the research yielded a total of 268 relevant documents, which form the empirical basis for the bibliometric analysis. To ensure clear and coherent reading, the results are presented in three dimensions: (i) general characterisation of scientific output; (ii) analysis of the most influential journals, authors, institutions and countries; and (iii) conceptual and thematic analysis, including the most recurrent terms, as well as the relationships and thematic clusters identified in the literature.

4.1 General characterisation of scientific output

The final sample comprises 268 documents published between 2020 and 2025, from 161 scientific sources. The time interval confirms that this is a field undergoing strong recent consolidation, with an average annual growth rate of 37.35% in scientific output. The average age of the documents is 1.7 years, which highlights the high topicality of the literature analysed. In terms of impact, the articles have an average of 7.3 citations per document, totalling 12,596 references cited in the sample as a whole.

The annual evolution of production reveals a clear upward trend (Figure 1). In 2020, 18 articles were published, a number that gradually increases to 30 (2021), 37 (2022) and 39 (2023). In 2024, there is a more significant jump, with 56 publications, culminating in 88 articles in 2025, confirming the emerging and dynamic nature of research into accessibility, emerging technologies and tourism in the most recent period.
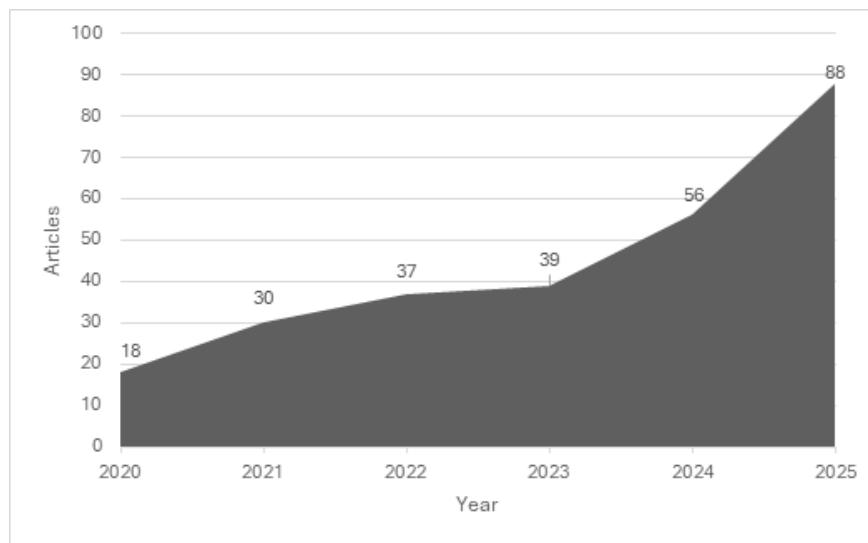
Figure 1. Annual scientific output (2020–2025)

Source. Prepared by the authors using WoS data.

In terms of document type, the sample is dominated by scientific articles, which represent almost all of the records (259 documents). There are also a few residual cases of "article; early access", "article; proceedings paper" and "article; retracted publication", which does not alter the markedly academic and indexed nature of the corpus.

The analysis of scientific collaboration shows that there are 820 authors involved, with 35 single-authored documents and an average of 3.27 co-authors per document, reflecting a pattern of moderate to high collaboration. The international co-authorship rate (23.88%) indicates a significant level of cooperation between researchers from different countries, although there is room to intensify transnational networks, particularly in European cross-border contexts.

4.2 Most influential journals, authors, affiliations, and countries

Analysis of publication sources reveals the existence of a concentrated core of journals that have assumed particular relevance in scientific dissemination on accessibility, inclusion, digital technologies and tourism (Figure 2). First and foremost is the journal *Sustainability*, with 39 articles, reflecting the centrality of sustainability in debates on tourism, technology and inclusion. Next comes *Universal Access in the Information Society* (15 articles), focused on issues of universal access and digital inclusion, and the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (6 articles), which highlights the link between accessibility, well-being and social and environmental determinants. Other journals with relevant contributions include

Healthcare, *European Journal of Tourism Research*, *IEEE Access*, *Land*, *PASOS. Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural*, *Rosa dos Ventos – Turismo e Hospitalidade* and *Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Research*, each with between 3 and 5 articles. This set of sources demonstrates that the topic lies at an interdisciplinary intersection between tourism, hospitality, information technologies, accessibility studies and applied social sciences.
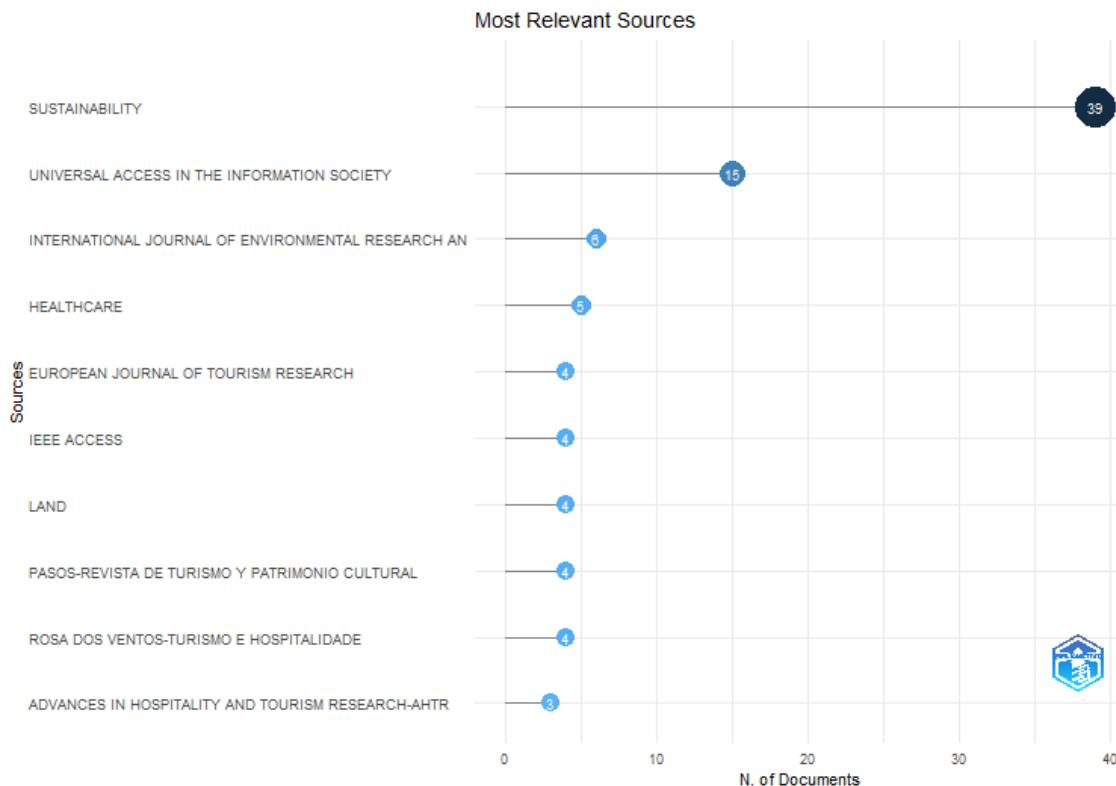
Figure 2. Most relevant journals

Source. Bibliometrix with data from WoS.

At the author level (as already mentioned, a total of 820 authors), the results indicate a core group of researchers with higher scientific productivity in the period analysed. Eusebio C. emerges as the most prolific author, with 7 articles, followed by Teixeira L. and Teixeira P., both with 5 articles, and Othman A. with 4 publications (Figure 3). These authors work mainly in areas related to accessible tourism, disability studies, hospitality and digital technologies applied to tourism, contributing significantly to the consolidation of the field.
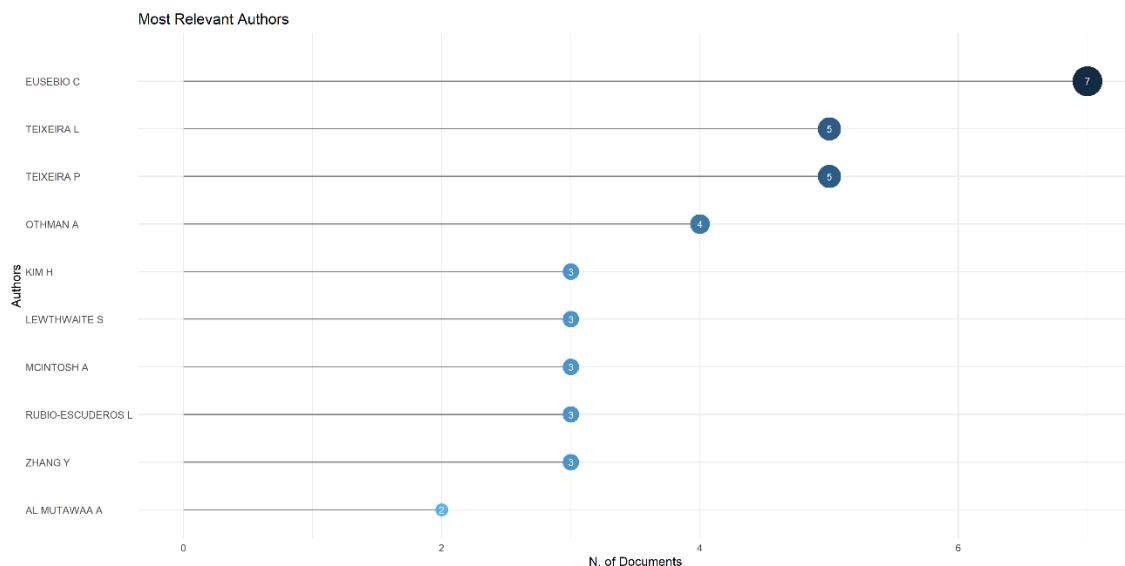
Figure 3. Top 10 most relevant authors

Source. Bibliometrix with data from WoS.

However, citation analysis shows that productivity does not necessarily translate into greater scientific impact. Figure 4 shows that the author with the highest number of publications is an author with only two citations (2020 and 2025). The 2020 publication by author Pai Chen-Kuo, entitled 'The role of perceived smart tourism technology experience for tourist satisfaction, happiness and revisit intention,' had 134 citations and addresses the perception of the experience with smart tourism technology (information, accessibility, interactivity, personalisation and security). Interestingly, the second most cited publication (89 citations) belongs to authors Gillovic Brielle and Mcintosh Alison, the latter being in the Top 10 most relevant authors. The study addresses accessibility and the development of inclusive tourism.

Also on the list of the 10 most relevant authors is Zhang Y. (with 3 publications), who totals 56 citations with his article dedicated to exploring the influence of the dimensions/attributes of smart technologies on the tourism experience in the context of tourist attractions and their results (satisfaction and post-consumption behavioural intentions). These results show that scientific impact is strongly associated with thematic relevance and innovative methodological contributions, rather than the volume of individual production.
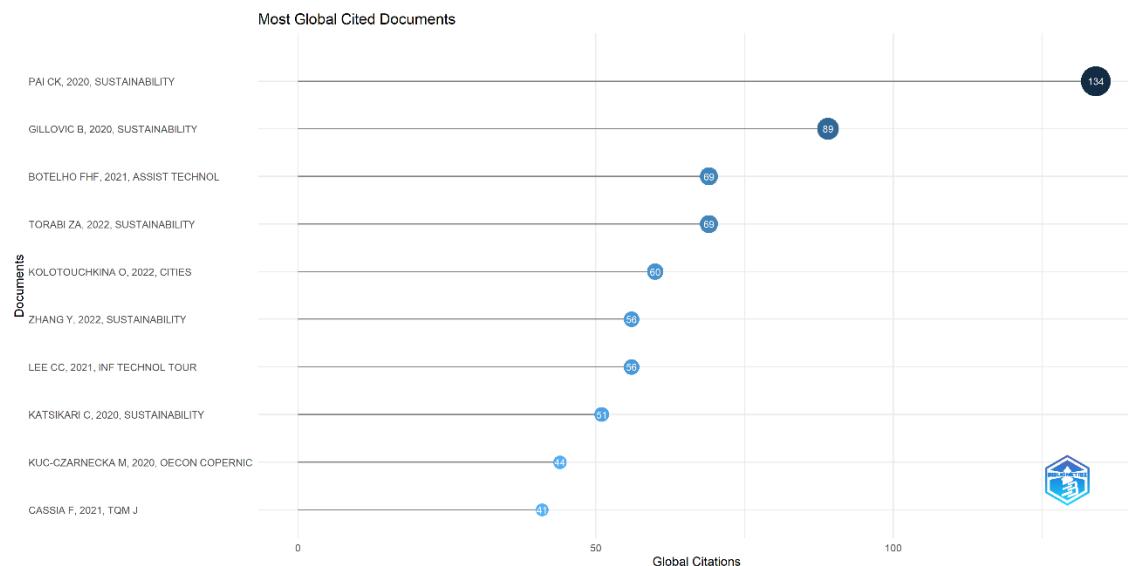
Figure 4. Most cited documents globally

Source. Bibliometrix with data from WoS.

The analysis of the authors' countries of origin shows a significant concentration of scientific output around a few specific geographical centres (Figure 5). Spain plays a particularly prominent role, emerging as the most represented country with a total of 38 publications, mostly developed in a national context (SCP). It is followed by China (21 publications), Portugal and the United Kingdom (both with 15 publications). These countries have different profiles: while Portugal and Spain show a predominance of internal publication (SCP), China and the United Kingdom show more collaborative patterns (MCP). Other countries, such as Italy, South Korea and the United States of America, also make significant contributions, while a wider group of countries appear only through occasional international collaborations, reflecting their dependence on external scientific networks.
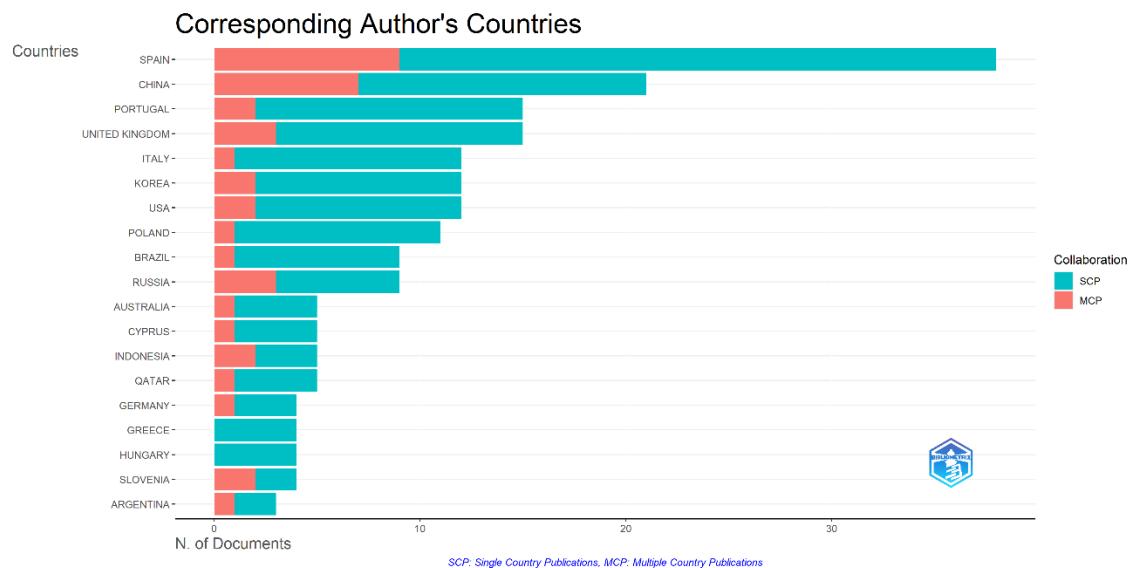
Figure 5. Country of the corresponding author

Source. Bibliometrix with data from WoS.

These results are consistent with the analysis of the most productive institutional affiliations, which confirms the predominance of European institutions in driving research. The *Universidade de Aveiro* stands out as the academic institution with the highest number of publications (29 publications), followed by the *Universidad de Alicante* (16). Other leading institutions (including *Akdeniz Üniversitesi*, *Seoul National University*, *Università di Foggia*, *Universidad de Málaga*, *Eastern Mediterranean University*, *Eduardo Mondlane University*, *Charles University/ Univerzita Karlova* and *East China Normal University*)) also play an active role, albeit to a lesser extent in numerical terms. Taken together, these data reveal a diverse international distribution, but with a particular concentration in Europe and Asia, confirming the centrality of these regions in scientific advances related to the topics under study.
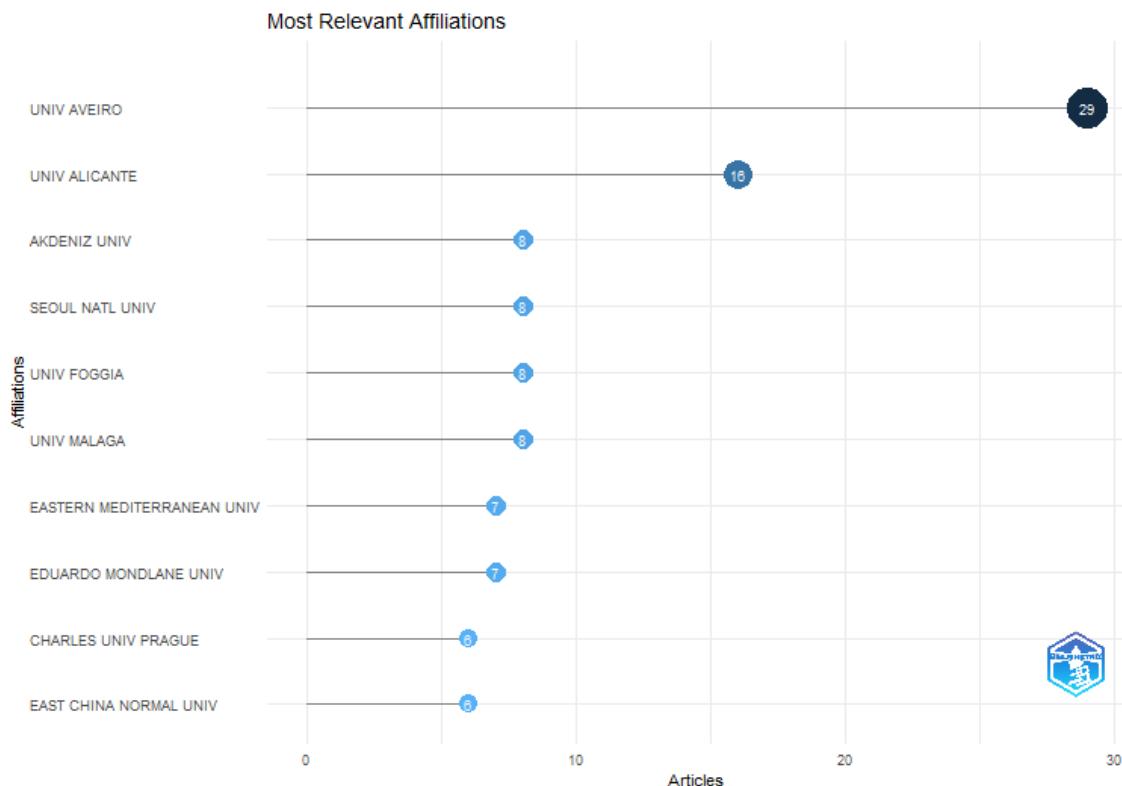
Figure 6. Most relevant affiliations

Source. Bibliometrix with data from WoS.

Once the analysis of the distribution of scientific output and its main agents (journals, authors, institutions, and countries) has been completed, we move on to the evaluation of the terminology used and the conceptual structure of the literature, an essential step in understanding the thematic patterns that underpin the development of the field. This analysis allows us to identify key concepts, the relationships between them, and how they contribute to the consolidation of knowledge in the area.

4.3 Keywords, themes, and conceptual structures

The analysis of keywords (*Author's Keywords* and *Keywords Plus*) allowed us to identify the concepts that structure the field of research. The word cloud obtained (Figure 7) shows the predominance of terms such as *disability*, *travel*, *people*, *accessible tourism*, *experiences*, *tourism*, *barriers*, *model*, *technology*, *constraints* and *leisure,*, which constitute the main thematic axes present in the analysed literature. In general, these terms suggest that scientific production has focused on the tourist experience of people with disabilities and other groups with specific needs,

the identification of barriers and constraints (physical, social, informational) that limit full participation in tourism, the role of technologies and management models in mitigating these barriers, and the relationship between leisure, satisfaction and inclusion as central elements of accessible and inclusive tourism.

Figure 7. Most frequent words (tag cloud)
Source. Bibliometrix with data from WoS.

The analysis of word co-occurrence networks (*co-word analysis*) reveals the existence of four thematic clusters that organise the field of research (Figure 8).

The main cluster (blue) aggregates terms such as *disability*, *travel*, *people*, *accessible tourism*, *experiences*, *barriers*, *leisure*, *constraints*, *social tourism*, *inclusive tourism*, among others, reflecting the dominant focus of the literature on the participation of people with disabilities and the physical, social and informational barriers that condition access to tourism activities. The red cluster integrates concepts associated with emerging technologies and digital accessibility, including *technology*, *design*, *web accessibility*, *quality*, *satisfaction* and *behavior*, highlighting the growing attention given to the role of technological solutions in improving the tourism experience and reducing barriers. Less prominent, the green cluster brings together terms related to destinations, hospitality and (*destination*, *hospitality*, *impact*, *word-of-mounth* and *access*),

highlighting the relevance of approaches geared towards the management and competitiveness of inclusive tourist destinations. Finally, the fourth cluster (purple), which appears at the top of the isolated map with the term social media and connects to the network through the term *word-of-mouth*, shows that, despite the growing importance of social networks in tourism, their relationship with digital accessibility and emerging technologies remains largely unexplored. This unique connection indicates that existing research addresses digital media primarily as channels for communication and sharing experiences, not yet exploring their strategic potential to promote digital accessibility and inclusion in cross-border tourism. This configuration reveals an explicit gap and a relevant opportunity for future research.
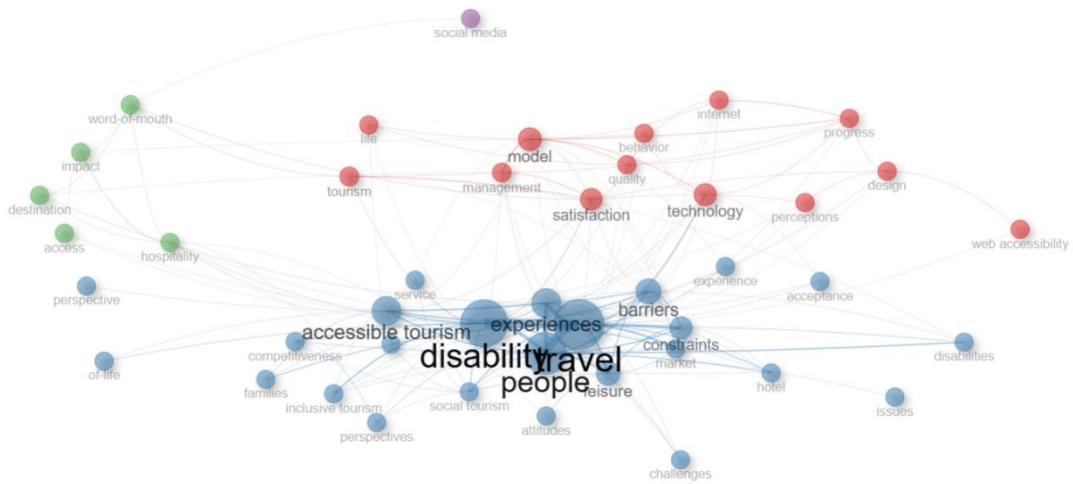
Figure 8. Most frequent words (tag cloud)

Source. Bibliometrix with data from WoS.

Reading the strategic diagram, which organises topics according to their centrality (importance in the field) and density (degree of internal development), allows us to assess the conceptual maturity of the literature analysed (Figure 9). The concentration of terms such as *social media*, *technology*, *inclusion* and *travel* in the area of driving themes confirms that recent research converges on an agenda focused on digital transformation, inclusion, and the tourist experience of people with disabilities. Terms associated with *smart destinations* and *government interventions* emerge as niche themes, revealing the existence of relevant production focused on public policies and specific practices of smart destinations, although still poorly integrated into the main line of

research on digital accessibility and cross-border tourism. In contrast, the location of terms such as *usability*, *innovation*, *education* and *health* in the basic themes quadrant indicates that these dimensions are recognised as relevant but remain conceptually underdeveloped and poorly articulated with studies in the field. Finally, the residual presence of terms positioned in areas of low centrality and density highlights emerging topics that are still in their infancy. Taken together, the thematic map reveals a scientific field undergoing progressive consolidation, in which inclusion and digital transformation take centre stage, while complementary areas remain in conceptual and methodological expansion.
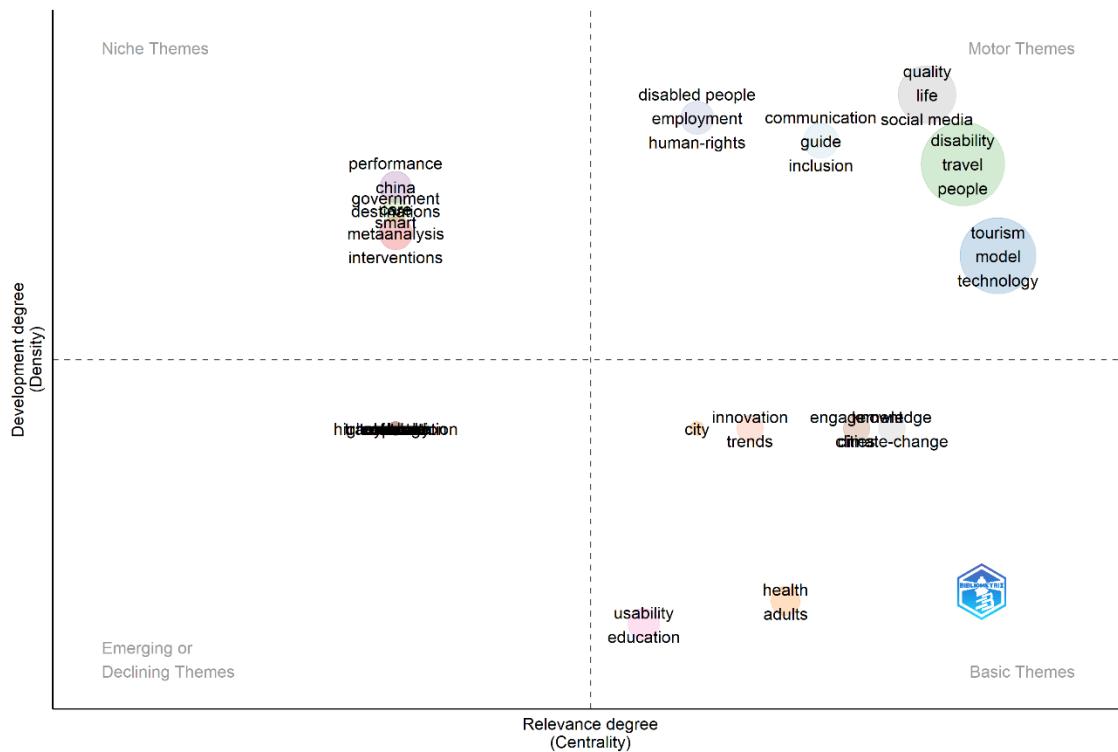
Figure 9. Concept diagram. Thematic evolution.

Source. Bibliometrix with data from WoS.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that scientific research related to digital accessibility, emerging technologies and cross-border tourism has been consolidating significantly between 2020 and 2025, revealing a field in clear conceptual and methodological expansion. The strong annual growth rate of scientific output, associated with the recent concentration of publications, confirms

that this field has gained centrality in the international academic agenda, particularly in the European context.

From the point of view of scientific output, there is a predominance of research linked to sustainability, inclusion and digitisation in the tourism sector, as demonstrated by the weight of the journals Sustainability and Universal Access in the Information Society. An analysis of authors, institutions and countries reveals the existence of highly active production centres, notably in Spain, China, Portugal and the United Kingdom, as well as the strong participation of European academic institutions. These dynamics reinforce the idea of a highly internationalised field, but one that is still marked by geographical asymmetries, given that certain countries depend almost exclusively on external collaborations to produce relevant research.

The conceptual analysis clarified the thematic structures that organise the literature. The results show that the core of the research continues to focus on the tourist experience of people with disabilities, barriers to access, and the importance of inclusion. This centrality is complemented by an emerging axis related to digital technologies (particularly design, web accessibility, smart technology, and user behaviour) that is establishing itself as a strategic domain for the future of inclusive tourism.

The thematic clusters also reveal less developed areas of research, such as the role of social networks and their relationship with digital accessibility, as well as emerging topics in the very early stages of theoretical construction. Similarly, the peripheral position of topics such as usability, innovation, education, and health suggests that, despite their practical relevance, they remain insufficiently integrated into the main theoretical body, constituting clear opportunities for future research.

Overall, the results of this bibliometric study highlight an evolving scientific field, characterised by the convergence of inclusion, digital transformation and tourism experience. However, they also show that significant gaps remain, particularly with regard to the specificities of cross-border tourism, the full integration of digital accessibility in smart destinations, and the articulation between public policies, technology and territorial cohesion. Considering the potential of the Northern Portugal and Galicia Euroregion as a living laboratory for accessible and digital tourism, these identified gaps constitute relevant opportunities for future empirical research and for the formulation of cross-border policies based on scientific evidence.

Thus, this study contributes to the advancement of knowledge by mapping trends, identifying the main centres of scientific production, and highlighting gaps that can guide new lines of research, especially in the context of the Northern Portugal and Galicia Euroregion. Future research could deepen the analysis of emerging technologies in the field, explore mixed methodologies that combine bibliometric analyses with empirical studies, and develop applied models that support digital accessibility and inclusion strategies in cross-border tourism.

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