

Mapping the Intersection of Stakeholder Engagement and Territorial Marketing in Tourism Mega-Projects: A Bibliometric Analysis (2000–2025)

Cartographie de l'intersection de l'engagement des parties prenantes et du marketing territorial dans les mégaprojets touristiques : Une analyse bibliométrique (2000-2025)

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Mapping the Intersection of Stakeholder Engagement and Territorial Marketing in Tourism Mega-Projects: A Bibliometric Analysis (2000–2025)

Abstract:

Tourism mega-projects have become crucial tools for territorial development and the construction of place identity. However, research connecting stakeholder engagement, territorial marketing, and the governance of such large-scale projects remains fragmented across disciplines. This study aims to explore this intersection by conducting a bibliometric analysis of 474 peer-reviewed documents indexed in Scopus between 2000 and 2025. Using Bibliometrix (R) and VOSviewer, we performed performance analysis, co-citation mapping, and keyword co-occurrence analysis. Results show steady growth in publications, especially after 2011, with journals such as *Sustainability* and the *Journal of Place Management and Development* emerging as key publication outlets. The primary research themes encompass sustainability, stakeholder engagement, urban governance, and territorial branding. Newer topics, such as participatory place branding and identity co-creation, are beginning to gain attention but remain underdeveloped. The study also highlights a geographical imbalance: most publications come from Western countries, while regions where these projects are often implemented, especially in the Global South, are underrepresented. This work helps clarify the current state of research and suggests future directions for more inclusive and interdisciplinary studies.

Keywords: bibliometric analysis; stakeholder engagement; territorial marketing; tourism mega-projects; sustainability; co-citation

JEL Classification : Z33, M31, R58, H54

Paper type: Theoretical Research

Résumé:

Les mégaprojets touristiques sont devenus des outils importants pour le développement territorial et la construction de l'identité des lieux. Cependant, la recherche reliant l'engagement des parties prenantes, le marketing territorial et la gouvernance de ces projets à grande échelle reste fragmentée entre les différentes disciplines. Cette étude vise à explorer cette intersection en effectuant une analyse bibliométrique de 474 documents évalués par des pairs et indexés dans Scopus entre 2000 et 2025. En utilisant Bibliometrix (R) et VOSviewer, nous avons effectué une analyse de performance, une cartographie des co-citations et une analyse de la cooccurrence des mots-clés. Les résultats montrent une croissance régulière des publications, en particulier après 2011, avec des revues comme *Sustainability* et le *Journal of Place Management and Development* émergeant comme des points de publication clés. Les principaux thèmes de recherche comprennent la durabilité, la participation des parties prenantes, la gouvernance urbaine et l'image de marque territoriale. Des sujets plus récents, tels que le marquage participatif des lieux et la cocréation d'identité, commencent à attirer l'attention, mais sont encore sous-développés. L'étude met également en évidence un déséquilibre géographique : la plupart des publications proviennent de pays occidentaux, alors que les régions où ces projets sont souvent mis en œuvre, en particulier dans le Sud, sont sous-représentées. Ce travail aide à clarifier l'état actuel de la recherche et suggère des orientations futures pour des études plus inclusives et interdisciplinaires.

Mots clés : analyse bibliométrique ; engagement des parties prenantes ; marketing territorial ; mégaprojets touristiques ; durabilité ; co-citation

Classification JEL : Z33, M31, R58, H54

Type de l'article : Article théorique.

1. Introduction

In an era of intensified global competition, tourism mega-projects have emerged as powerful territorial development tools. Deployed by regions seeking to enhance their international visibility and economic positioning, these large-scale initiatives—including cultural landmarks, international expos, and integrated resort zones—serve not only as engines of growth but also as instruments for constructing and projecting coherent territorial identities (Polyakova et al., 2021; Tartaraj & Trebicka, 2023). These projects operate at the intersection of infrastructure, symbolic branding, and spatial strategy, transforming place's material and narrative fabric. Yet, despite their ambitions, tourism mega-projects often provoke significant controversy. Their implementation is frequently shaped by top-down planning and elite-driven agendas, which can marginalize local communities, disrupt existing socio-spatial dynamics, and raise concerns around equity, access, and environmental sustainability (Carrus & Melis, 2019). In response, stakeholder engagement has gained traction as a normative and operational imperative, aimed at increasing transparency, inclusiveness, and legitimacy in project governance (Erkul et al., 2016). Parallel to this shift, territorial marketing has become an essential framework for understanding how places are promoted, narrated, and made competitive. Combining economic strategy with place identity construction, territorial marketing provides the symbolic and communicative infrastructure through which mega-projects gain visibility, attract investment, and mobilize support (Correia et al., 2022; Basile, 2016; Rovira et al., 2022). Together, stakeholder engagement and territorial marketing represent two interlinked dimensions of tourism-led territorial transformation—one participatory, the other strategic. However, these domains remain analytically fragmented despite their conceptual proximity and growing application. Research on stakeholder engagement is primarily situated within the fields of planning, governance, and environmental studies, whereas territorial marketing is developed in tourism management, economic geography, and public administration. Tourism mega-projects are often addressed in yet other literatures, such as destination development and critical tourism studies (Nemyrovska, 2023; Erkul et al., 2019). As a result, integrated frameworks that connect stakeholder dynamics with place-based branding in the context of mega-projects are rare. This lack of conceptual integration limits our understanding of how participation, power, and territorial narrative co-evolve in complex development processes. In light of this gap, a systematic bibliometric analysis is timely. Bibliometric methods allow for the mapping of scientific knowledge across disciplines, revealing intellectual structures, collaboration networks, and thematic trajectories. Applying this approach to the intersection of stakeholder engagement, territorial marketing, and tourism mega-projects offers an opportunity to clarify the contours of an emerging field, identify dominant and peripheral voices, and uncover geographic or thematic blind spots (Sguenfle & Sadki, 2018). The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents a review of the conceptual foundations related to stakeholders, territorial marketing, and mega-projects in tourism, as well as a brief overview of bibliometric methods. Section 3 describes the research methodology, including data collection from the Scopus database and the analytical tools used. Section 4 presents and interprets the results of the bibliometric analysis. Finally, Section 5 provides a discussion of the findings, outlines theoretical and practical implications, and suggests avenues for future research.

2. Literature review

In contemporary tourism development, the interconnection between stakeholder engagement, territorial marketing, and mega-projects has become increasingly central to destination strategy. This convergence has emerged in response to the intensification of global competition between destinations, the escalating scale and ambition of tourism infrastructure, and the growing

imperative for participatory governance in place-making processes (García-Hernández et al., 2023; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). Territorial marketing—understood as the strategic management of a place’s image and identity to attract visitors, investment, and recognition—has evolved beyond promotional campaigns to encompass complex, multi-actor branding processes tied to large-scale urban and regional transformations (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014; Kavaratzis, 2017). Within this context, tourism mega-projects, such as integrated resorts, heritage clusters, or smart tourism hubs, function not only as economic drivers but also as symbolic anchors of a destination's brand narrative (Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2020). Their success hinges on the coordination and cooperation of diverse stakeholders, including local governments, private developers, residents, destination management organizations (DMOs), and civil society actors (Nunkoo et al., 2022). These stakeholders contribute to shaping the project's vision, mediating conflicts, and aligning infrastructural investments with local cultural and environmental identities. Recent research highlights that stakeholder-driven branding processes yield more authentic, resilient, and competitive tourism destinations (Boisen et al., 2018; Styliadis, 2022).

In contrast, branding strategies that rely solely on traditional descriptors—such as location, facilities, or amenities—fail to meet the expectations of increasingly sophisticated and experience-seeking tourists. Today, the ability of a destination to co-create its brand through inclusive governance, responsive planning, and the symbolic value of mega-projects is a critical determinant of its visibility, credibility, and long-term sustainability in the global tourism market. In recent years, bibliometric analyses have been increasingly applied in tourism research, particularly in fields such as destination branding (Pike, 2009), place marketing (Lucarelli & Berg, 2011), and mega-event planning (Getz, 2008). However, a comprehensive bibliometric investigation connecting the stakeholder dynamics of mega-projects with their implications for territorial marketing and destination image remains underdeveloped. The fragmented treatment of these themes across various disciplines, including urban planning, tourism studies, and public management, has led to a lack of conceptual integration. This study addresses this gap by adopting a bibliometric approach to map and analyze the knowledge structure of research intersecting these four dimensions. The objective is to (1) identify the most influential works and intellectual foundations of this interdisciplinary field, (2) uncover emerging trends and research fronts, and (3) propose a synthesized conceptual framework linking stakeholder engagement, territorial governance of mega-projects, and tourism destination image formation. This mapping contributes to both academic theory and practical policymaking by offering insights that support more inclusive, strategic, and sustainable territorial branding initiatives.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data

This study employs a bibliometric methodology to examine the scientific literature related to the intersection of stakeholders, territorial marketing, and mega-projects in the context of tourism development. Bibliometric analysis is recognized as a robust and objective method for mapping research fields, evaluating scientific productivity, and identifying thematic trends through quantitative indicators (Rodríguez, Alcaide, & Cobo, 2018; Gao, Huang, & Wang, 2018). It combines performance analysis—focused on outputs such as the number of publications, citations, and journal productivity—with science mapping techniques that explore intellectual structures via co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-word analysis (Terán et al., 2019).

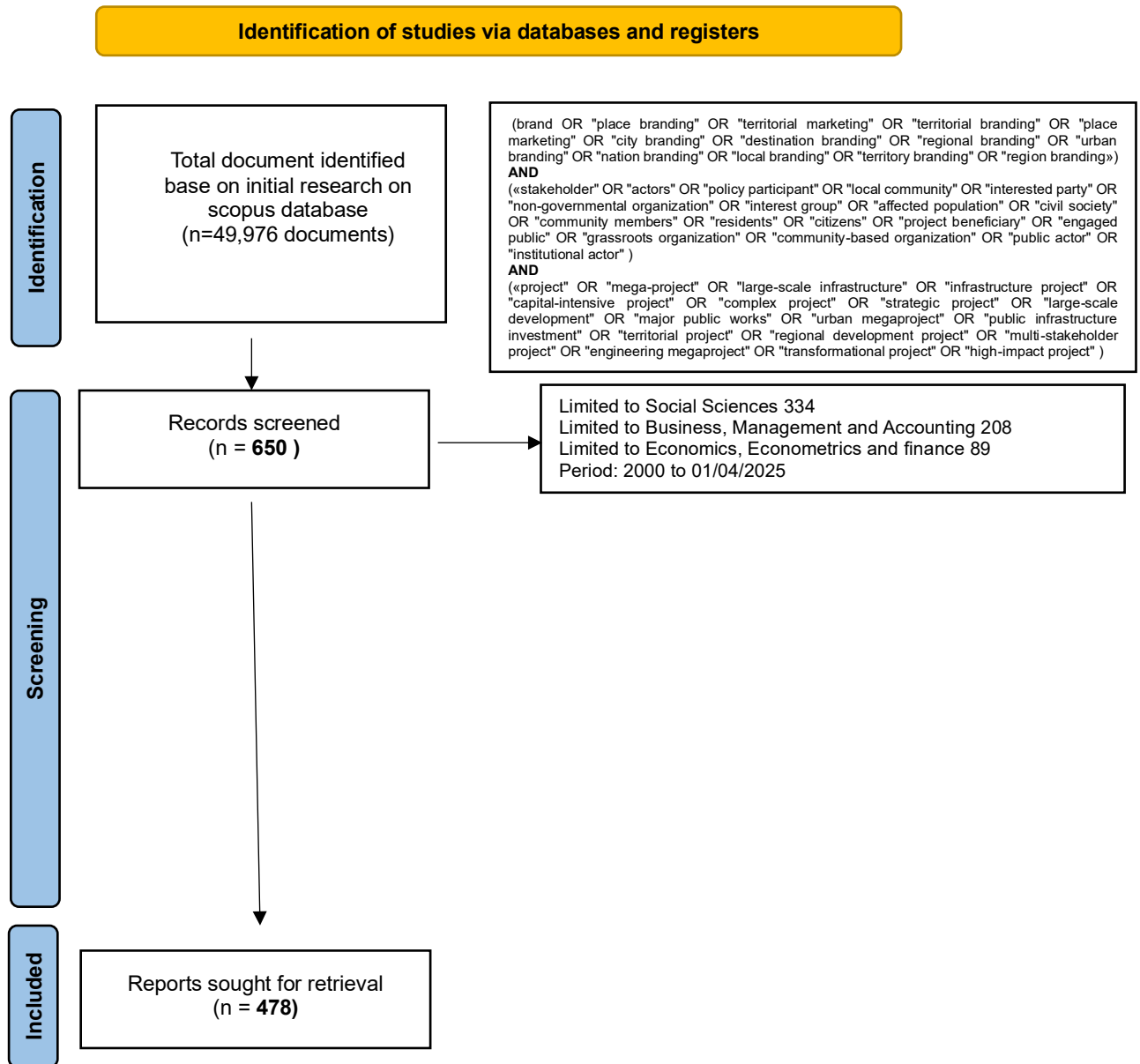
The metadata for this study were retrieved from the Scopus database, considered one of the most comprehensive and multidisciplinary platforms for peer-reviewed literature, covering over

25,000 active titles from thousands of international publishers. To ensure the thematic inclusiveness of the dataset, a search query was constructed using the following key terms across all fields: “Territorial Governance,” “Territorial Management,” “Territorial Planning,” and “Regional Planning.” As of January 2020, a total of 474 documents were identified, comprising journal articles, conference papers, and book chapters.

The dataset was exported in BibTeX format and processed using the open-source R package Bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Data pre-processing included author name disambiguation and keyword standardization. Bibliometric performance indicators were applied to identify the most prolific authors, institutions, and journals, as well as the most frequently cited documents. Co-citation analysis was used to reveal the intellectual foundation of the research field by identifying clusters of interrelated works. In contrast, co-word analysis helped to uncover dominant themes and conceptual linkages through the co-occurrence of keywords. The results were visualized using VOSviewer and Biblioshiny to generate maps, thematic networks, and co-occurrence diagrams, providing a comprehensive overview of the field's structure and development.

Research query on:

(TITLE-ABS-KEY (brand OR "place branding" OR "territorial marketing" OR "territorial branding" OR "place marketing" OR "city branding" OR "destination branding" OR "regional branding" OR "urban branding" OR "nation branding" OR "local branding" OR "territory branding" OR "region branding") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("stakeholder" OR "actors" OR "policy participant" OR "local community" OR "interested party" OR "non-governmental organization" OR "interest group" OR "affected population" OR "civil society" OR "community members" OR "residents" OR "citizens" OR "project beneficiary" OR "engaged public" OR "grassroots organization" OR "community-based organization" OR "public actor" OR "institutional actor") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("project" OR "mega-project" OR "large-scale infrastructure" OR "infrastructure project" OR "capital-intensive project" OR "complex project" OR "strategic project" OR "large-scale development" OR "major public works" OR "urban megaproject" OR "public infrastructure investment" OR "territorial project" OR "regional development project" OR "multi-stakeholder project" OR "engineering megaproject" OR "transformational project" OR "high-impact project")) AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ECON"))



3.2. Bibliometric analysis

Bibliometrics is a quantitative and analytical methodology that enables the systematic assessment of scholarly production, drawing on statistical methods to map the structure, development, and dynamics of a research field (Zupic & Čater, 2015; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Initially defined by Pritchard as the “application of mathematical and statistical methods to books and other media of communication” (Pritchard, 1969), bibliometrics has evolved into a robust tool for exploring the intellectual, social, and conceptual relationships between scientific publications. Compared to narrative or systematic reviews, bibliometric analysis offers objectivity and reproducibility, reducing researcher bias and allowing for a more comprehensive overview of complex research domains (Donthu et al., 2021).

This methodological approach is particularly well-suited for investigating interdisciplinary phenomena, such as the intersection of stakeholder engagement, mega-projects, and territorial marketing strategies, especially in the context of shaping or reshaping the brand image of tourism destinations. In such contexts, bibliometric mapping techniques—such as co-citation analysis and co-keyword analysis—facilitate the identification of influential contributions, emerging trends, and thematic clusters within the literature (van Eck & Waltman, 2010; Cobo

et al., 2011). Co-citation analysis allows researchers to explore the intellectual foundation of a research domain by examining how frequently two documents are cited together, thus revealing underlying theoretical or methodological affinities (Boyack & Klavans, 2010). Co-keyword analysis, on the other hand, helps to identify semantic proximities and emerging research themes based on the co-occurrence of keywords in titles and abstracts, visualized through strategic diagrams or co-word networks (Callon et al., 1983; Cobo et al., 2011).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive analysis



This bibliometric snapshot offers a clear picture of how research in the field has evolved between 2001 and 2025. Over the past 25 years, 474 documents have been published across 361 different sources, involving 1,033 authors—a sign of growing interest and engagement from the academic community. The annual growth rate of 9.05% is quite encouraging, suggesting that the topic is not only relevant but increasingly attracting attention over time. Interestingly, while a single author wrote 152 publications, the average number of co-authors per document is 2.26, pointing to a healthy trend toward collaboration. This is reinforced by the fact that about 16.46% of the work involves international co-authorship, which, although modest, shows a degree of global scientific exchange. In terms of content, the presence of 1520 distinct keywords indicates a rich and diverse thematic landscape, which is promising for anyone looking to explore the topic from various angles. The citation data also tells us that more than 21,000 references were cited across the corpus, and on average, each document received approximately 15 citations—a respectable number that indicates the relevance and impact of the work being done. With a document average age of 7.13 years, the literature seems well-balanced between foundational studies and newer contributions.

Scientific production trends

Figure 1 Annual Scientific Output on Stakeholder Engagement, Territorial Marketing, and Tourism Mega-Projects (2001–2025)



The graph illustrates the number of articles published per year, based on Scopus-indexed literature. A 4th-degree polynomial regression curve ($R^2 = 0.8916$) shows the growth trend over time, highlighting a sharp rise in publications from 2011 onward and a peak in 2023–2024. The evolution of scientific production over the 2001–2025 period reveals a compelling trajectory of growth, particularly from 2010 onward. In the early 2000s, publication activity was sporadic and modest, rarely exceeding six articles per year. This low output suggests either a nascent stage in the field's development or limited academic attention during that period. A noticeable turning point occurs around 2011, with a marked increase from previous years: 21 articles were published that year, nearly tripling the previous record. This likely reflects the beginning of a more structured or consolidated interest in the domain. From 2015 to 2021, the number of publications consistently exceeded 30 per year, peaking in 2024 with 44 articles, indicating a phase of maturity and sustained scientific interest. The polynomial trend line (with an $R^2 = 0.8916$) captures this upward trajectory quite accurately, although the sharp drop observed in 2025 (only eight publications) is likely due to incomplete data collection for the current year, rather than an actual decline in interest or output.

Top ten journals

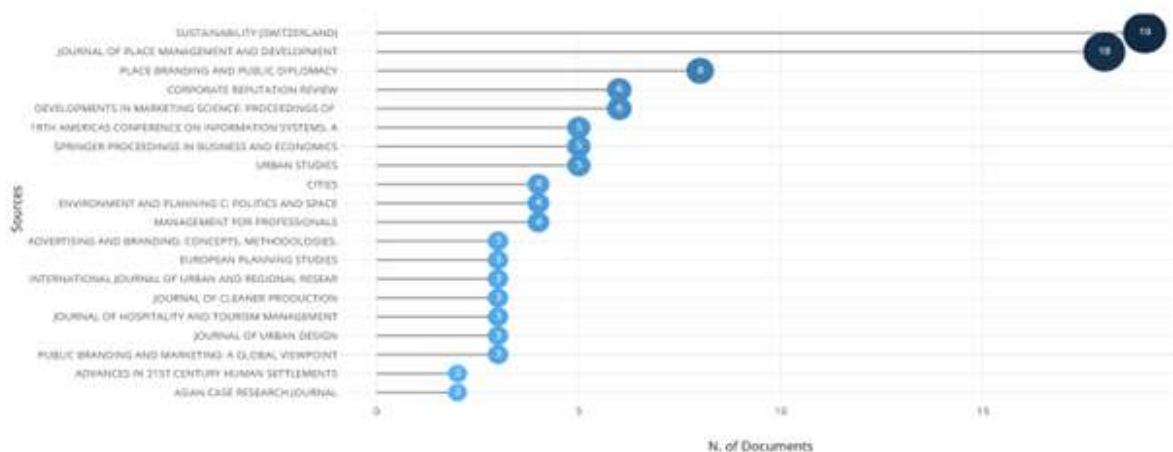
The analysis of source distribution highlights a significant concentration of publications in a small number of highly active journals. At the forefront, Sustainability (Switzerland) stands out with 19 documents, closely followed by the Journal of Place Management and Development with 18 documents. These two journals appear to be key platforms for disseminating research in this field, likely due to their interdisciplinary orientation and openness to topics such as sustainability, place branding, and urban governance.

Other important contributors include Place Branding and Public Diplomacy (8 documents) and the Corporate Reputation Review (6 documents), pointing to a strong intersection between territorial marketing, strategic communication, and institutional image in the literature.

Beyond these leading sources, journals such as Urban Studies, Cities, and Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space—each with around 4 to 5 publications—indicate that the topic also draws substantial attention from scholars in urban studies and planning. The variety of these secondary sources reflects the multidisciplinary nature of the field, which spans social sciences, business studies, urbanism, and development.

It is also worth noting the presence of more specialized journals, such as the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management and the Asian Case Research Journal, even if they account for only 2 or 3 documents. Their inclusion suggests a growing interest in sector-specific or regional approaches, particularly within tourism studies and Asian development contexts.

Figure 2 Leading Journals Publishing on Stakeholder Engagement, Territorial Marketing, and Tourism Mega-Projects.



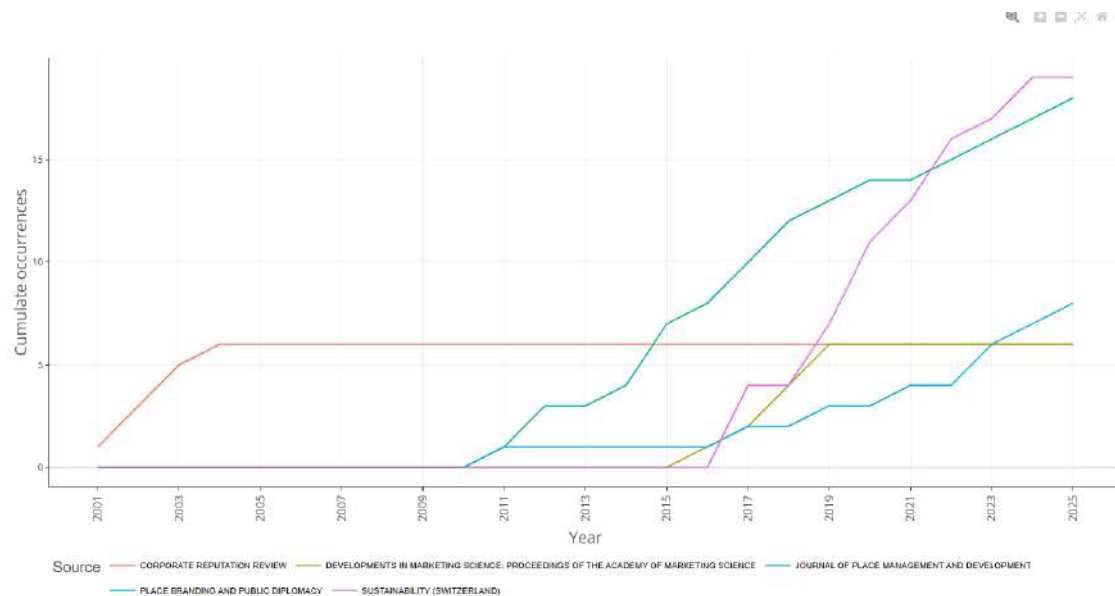
This horizontal bar chart displays the top academic sources ranked by the number of published documents addressing the intersection of stakeholder engagement, territorial branding, and tourism mega-projects. “Sustainability (Switzerland)” and the “Journal of Place Management and Development” are the most prolific outlets, with 19 and 18 documents respectively, followed by “Place Branding and Public Diplomacy” (8 documents).

Most productive countries

This cumulative trend analysis provides a dynamic view of how research contributions have evolved across key journals in the field. The Corporate Reputation Review shows early activity, with a notable rise from 2001 to 2004, but then stabilizes, indicating limited sustained engagement with the topic over time. In contrast, Place Branding and Public Diplomacy had an initial surge between 2001 and 2004, after which their cumulative growth plateaued, suggesting early interest but less recent contribution.

The Journal of Place Management and Development emerges as a consistent contributor, particularly from 2011 onward. Its steady growth through the 2010s and early 2020s reflects its central role in the consolidation of research on place branding and territorial strategies. Similarly, Developments in Marketing Science began contributing around 2016, though its growth remains relatively moderate. The most striking trend is observed with Sustainability (Switzerland), which shows a late but rapid rise beginning in 2017. From that point forward, it surpasses the other sources, reaching the highest cumulative occurrences by 2025. This rapid increase underscores the growing integration of sustainability concerns within the broader discourse on place branding, urban development, and public policy.

Figure 3 Cumulative Occurrence of Publications by Source (2001–2025)



This line graph displays the cumulative number of publications over time for key journals contributing to the literature on stakeholder engagement, territorial marketing, and tourism mega-projects. Notably, Sustainability (Switzerland) and the Journal of Place Management and Development have shown steep upward trends since 2017, reflecting growing scholarly interest. In contrast, Corporate Reputation Review and Place Branding and Public Diplomacy show earlier engagement with the topic but slower growth in recent years.

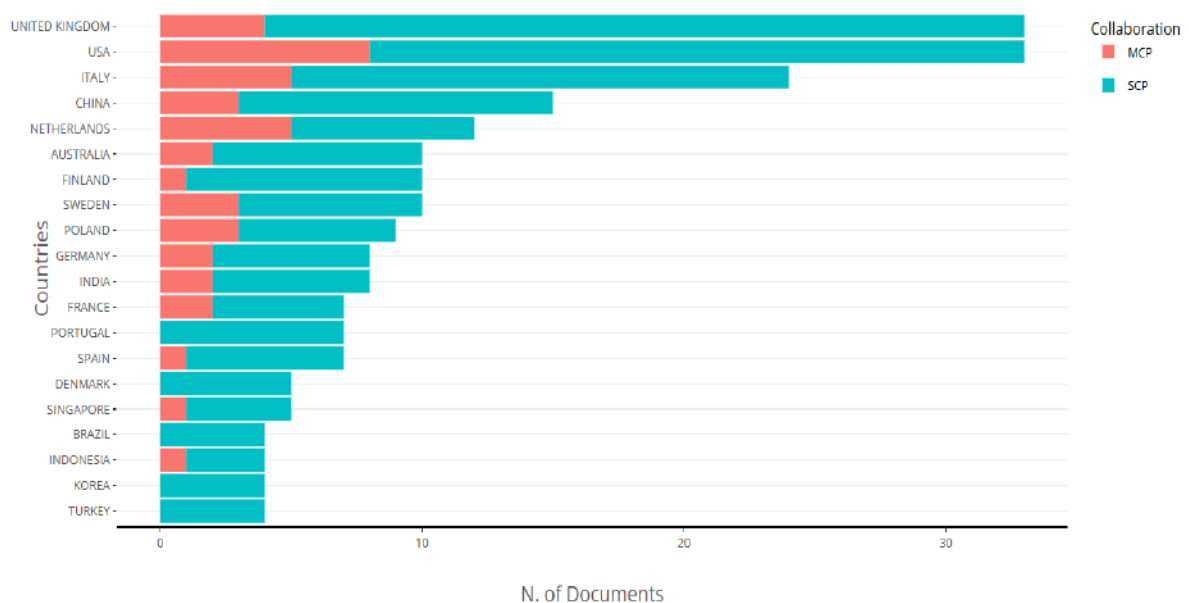
	Author	Year	Title	Total Citation	Total citation per Year
1	BILGRAM V	2017	The moderating effect of personal features on the consequences of an enjoyable co-creation experience	38	4.222
2	CHEN Y	2020	Emerging participative approaches for urban regeneration in Chinese megacities	35	5.833
3	BROMBER K	2014	Under construction: logics of urbanism in the gulf region	31	2.583
4	SEVIN E	2011	Turkayfe.org: share your türkspexperience	11	0.733
5	BROMBER K	2016	Under construction: logics of urbanism in the gulf region	8	0.8
6	HALME J	2020	Constructing consensus and conflicts: dynamics in regional place marketing collaboration	6	1
7	BEJOU D	2012	Internal relationship management: linking human resources to marketing performance	6	0.429
8	CHEN Y	2024	Megaproject branding on social media from the lens of information content and information diffusion	5	2.5
9	SEVIN E	2020	Analyzing country images through networks: case of south korea	5	0.833
10	HALME J	2021	The role of social capital in the institutionalization of regional place marketing activity	4	0.8
11	HALME J	2020	Representation and power – discursive constructions of stakeholder positions in regional place marketing collaboration	4	0.667
12	BILGRAM V	2017	Empowering members of a brand community to gain consumer insights and create new products: the case of the vorwerk thermomix research community	2	0.222
13	BEJOU D	2012	Internal relationship management: linking human resources to marketing performance	2	0.143
14	SEVIN E	2016	Globetrotters and brands: cities in an emerging communicative space	1	0.1
15	CHEN Y	2024	The role of classical music public services in building urban cultural soft power: a triple model in China	0	0

Source: Authors

Local and international collaboration

The bar chart distinguishes between Single Country Publications (SCP) and Multiple Country Publications (MCP)—a critical distinction in bibliometric analyses, as it reflects the degree of international scientific collaboration, which is often positively correlated with visibility and citation impact (Glänzel & Schubert, 2005; Wagner et al., 2017). The United Kingdom leads in total output, with a particularly high proportion of MCPs, indicating a strong integration into transnational research networks. This aligns with prior findings that UK-based research frequently benefits from EU and Commonwealth-based collaboration schemes (Leydesdorff & Wagner, 2008). Similarly, the United States exhibits high absolute productivity, although its proportion of SCPs remains substantial, reflecting the self-sufficiency of its domestic research system but also indicating slightly less collaborative intensity relative to the UK. Italy and the Netherlands also demonstrate a balanced engagement, with Italy showing a healthy proportion of MCPs. In contrast, China stands out for its significant volume of SCPs and relatively limited MCP activity. This trend is commonly observed in large emerging economies, where national funding structures and linguistic or policy barriers may restrict international co-authorship (Zhou et al., 2016). Countries such as Poland, Sweden, and Finland, despite lower publication volumes, demonstrate a high proportion of MCPs, suggesting that their scientific impact may be enhanced through strategic collaborations with more research-intensive nations. This finding is consistent with the concept of collaborative leverage, wherein smaller systems increase their global visibility by integrating into international partnerships (Adams, 2012). The presence of countries such as India, Brazil, Singapore, and Indonesia—albeit with modest output—indicates the global diffusion of the research theme under study. It also highlights the gradual diversification of scholarly participation, a trend that is increasingly encouraged by open science frameworks and capacity-building programs in the Global South. In conclusion, the figure reveals not only the dominance of traditional scientific powers (UK, USA, Western Europe) but also the emergence of collaborative clusters in peripheral or semi-peripheral regions. The relative weight of MCPs is a key indicator of international engagement, and in future bibliometric analyses, it would be valuable to compute metrics such as the MCP Ratio (MCP/Total Publications) or to map co-authorship networks to further quantify patterns of global scientific collaboration.

Figure 4 Country Contributions and Collaboration Types in Tourism Mega-Project Research



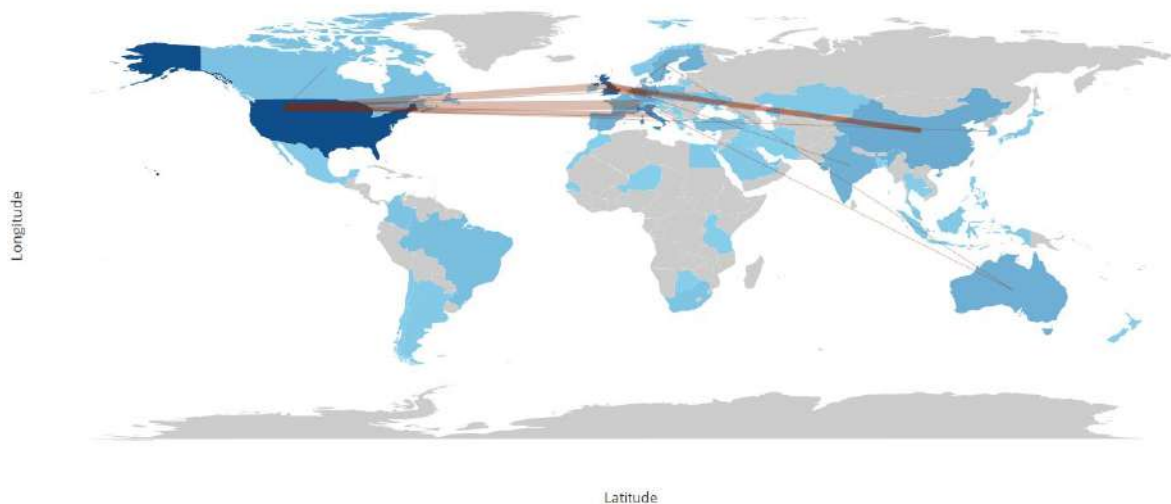
The chart shows publication counts by country, distinguishing between single-country (SCP) and multi-country (MCP) collaborations. The UK and USA lead in output, with the UK showing notably higher international collaboration.

Collaboration between countries

This collaboration world map provides a powerful visual representation of the global research connectivity underpinning the analyzed corpus. It highlights bilateral co-authorship networks between countries, where the intensity of the connections—illustrated by line thickness—reflects the volume of collaborative publications. Darker shades of blue represent higher publication output, while the connecting arcs signify multiple country publications (MCPs), an established proxy for international research integration (Glänzel & Schubert, 2005). The United States emerges as the principal hub of collaboration, maintaining active co-authorship links with multiple European countries (notably the United Kingdom, Italy, France, Germany, and the Netherlands), as well as with China, India, and Australia. This dominant position aligns with the concept of “centrality” in global science networks (Wagner & Leydesdorff, 2005), where core nations function as bridges for global knowledge exchange. Western Europe forms a dense cluster of interlinked countries, especially visible in the strong ties between the UK, Italy, and France, suggesting the existence of a regional collaborative ecosystem, likely facilitated by EU funding frameworks such as Horizon Europe. The network density in this region suggests high collaborative intensity, an indicator positively correlated with research impact and citation performance (Adams, 2013). The involvement of countries such as India, China, and Brazil reflects the growing presence of emerging scientific powers. While their domestic publication output is substantial, the visualization confirms that they are increasingly engaging in international partnerships—critical for global visibility and access to shared research infrastructure.

Importantly, the map also highlights gaps in collaboration. Significant regions, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and parts of Latin America, appear underrepresented or entirely disconnected. This underscores persistent structural asymmetries in global knowledge production and signals the need for targeted policy interventions to foster inclusivity and reduce epistemic marginalization (Beaudry & Mouton, 2018). From a network science perspective, this map could be further analyzed using centrality measures (degree, betweenness, closeness) or cluster detection algorithms (e.g., modularity-based community detection) to reveal collaborative sub-networks, regional hubs, or isolated nodes.

Figure 5 Global Collaboration Network in Tourism Mega-Project Research

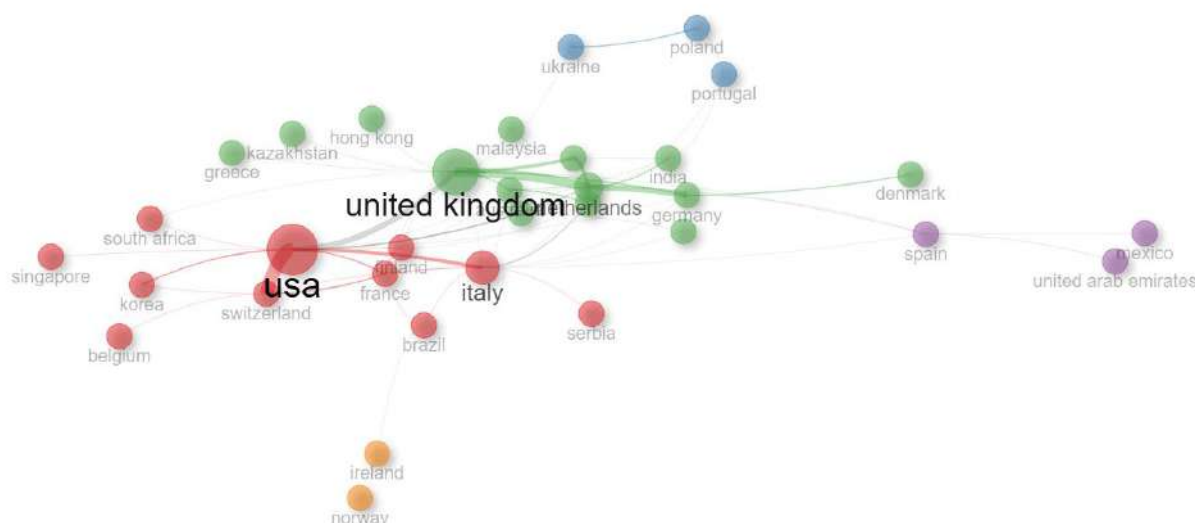


This world map illustrates international research collaborations, with lines connecting co-authoring countries. Darker shades indicate higher publication volumes. Strong connections are visible between the USA, UK, and European countries, while collaboration remains limited in much of the Global South.

Collaboration network between countries

This figure represents a collaboration map between countries. Each node corresponds to a country, and the size of the node indicates the volume of publications or collaborations associated with that country. The United States (USA) and the United Kingdom occupy central positions with the largest nodes, illustrating their dominant role in international collaboration networks. Their strong connectivity also reflects active involvement in global research projects. The proximity of countries such as Switzerland, France, Italy, and the Netherlands to these central nodes indicates close cooperation, particularly among Western European and Anglo-Saxon countries. Several regional clusters can also be observed. For example, a green cluster primarily includes Asian and European countries such as Malaysia, India, the Netherlands, and Germany, indicating a growing dynamic of collaboration in these regions. Another cluster, shown in red, includes countries such as South Korea, Switzerland, France, and Singapore, highlighting another important collaborative axis. Countries located on the periphery of the network, such as Mexico or the United Arab Emirates, appear to be less integrated into the central network, reflecting still limited participation in major international collaborations in this field.

Figure 6 Country Co-Authorship Network in Tourism Mega-Project Research



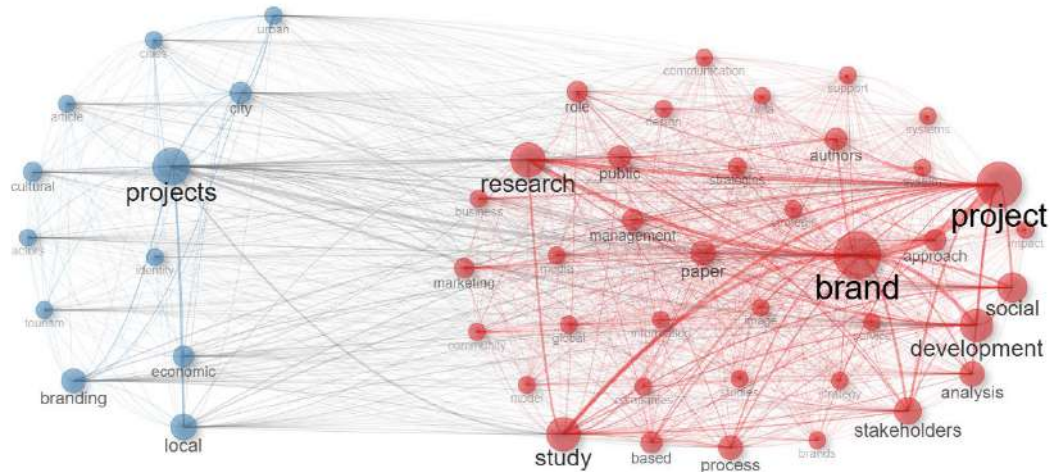
This network graph maps international research collaborations based on co-authorship. Node size reflects publication volume, and edge thickness indicates the strength of collaboration. The United Kingdom and USA are the most central and interconnected countries, forming dense clusters with European and Asian partners.

Co-citation between Keywords

This figure represents a keyword co-occurrence map derived from a bibliometric analysis, likely generated using VOSviewer. Each node corresponds to a keyword, with its size indicating the frequency of occurrence in the literature. Two main clusters clearly emerge. The red cluster, dense and central, is structured around the keywords “brand,” “project,” “research,” and “study.” It reflects a theme focused on academic work related to branding, project approaches, stakeholder roles, and social or organizational development. This dense network indicates

strong interdependence among concepts tied to brand management, strategic analysis, and case-based research. The blue cluster, more distinct and positioned to the left, centers on terms such as “projects,” “local,” “tourism,” “economic,” and “cultural.” This group appears more focused on applied projects situated in territorial or urban contexts, dealing with local, cultural, or tourism development issues.

Figure 7 *Co-Word Network of Key Themes in Tourism Mega-Project Literature*



This co-occurrence network shows two main thematic clusters: one centered on “projects” and urban/economic development (blue), and another on “brand,” “research,” and stakeholder engagement (red). Node size indicates keyword frequency, and links represent co-mentions in the literature, highlighting conceptual bridges between territorial branding and project-based governance.

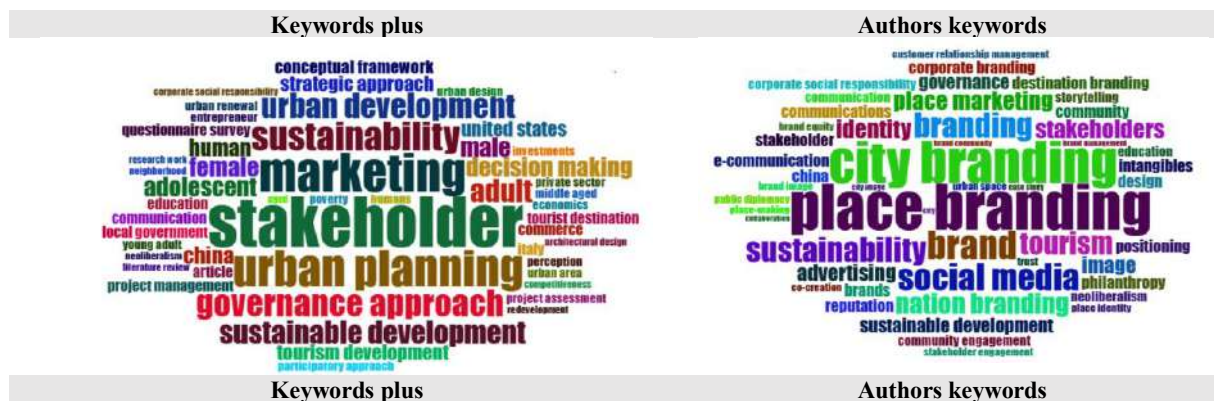
Co-citation between Keywords

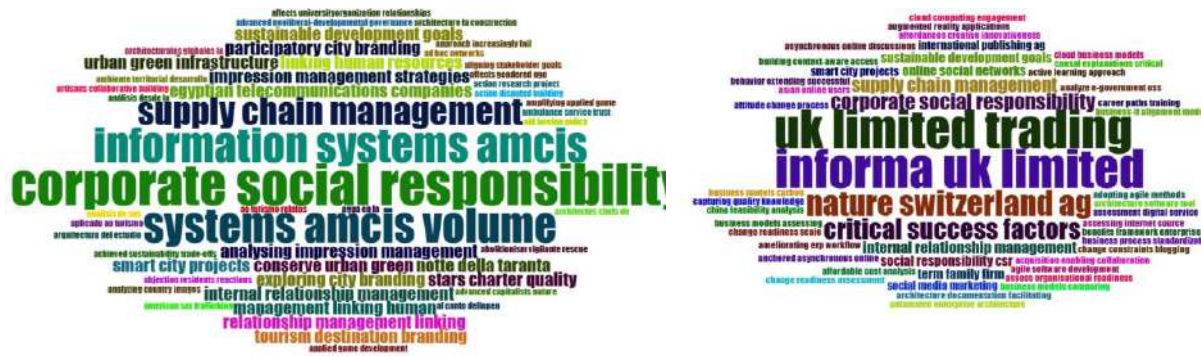
This figure presents a co-occurrence network map of keywords from a bibliometric analysis, illustrating the conceptual structure of a research domain. Each node represents a keyword, and its size indicates how frequently the term appears in the analyzed literature. Connections between nodes show co-occurrences, meaning the keywords appear together in the same articles.

The keyword “stakeholder” appears prominently and centrally, suggesting it plays a pivotal role across multiple themes. It acts as a conceptual bridge linking diverse research topics. A major red cluster centers on urban planning, development, and marketing, indicating a thematic focus on participatory planning, urban renewal, and the socio-economic impacts of urban transformation. Another significant cluster in green focuses on sustainability, governance, and tourism development, showing a strong relationship between environmental and institutional dimensions of research. The purple cluster groups keywords related to human characteristics, such as age groups and demographic descriptors, which implies a thematic interest in the human and social factors within the broader context. Smaller clusters, such as those in orange and blue, touch on more specialized themes like urban design and commerce, highlighting their more focused but still relevant roles in the field.

Word Cloud

Figure 9 "Keyword Mapping of Thematic Trends in Tourism Mega-Project Research"





This image presents four-word cloud visualizations comparing “Keywords Plus” and “Author Keywords” from bibliometric data. These visualizations offer a thematic overview of research topics and terminologies used across two distinct domains or datasets, possibly drawn from different journals or periods. In the top-left quadrant, the Keywords Plus emphasize themes like *stakeholder*, *urban planning*, *marketing*, *sustainability*, *urban development*, and *governance approach*. These keywords suggest a strong focus on urban studies, participatory governance, and sustainability practices, highlighting how urban transformation and stakeholder engagement are interconnected research priorities. The top-right quadrant shows Author Keywords from the same or a related dataset. Here, the prominent terms such as *place branding*, *city branding*, *social media*, *nation branding*, and *identity* reveal a focus on strategic communication, branding in urban and national contexts, and stakeholder perception. This indicates that while Keywords Plus are more reflective of broader structural themes, Author Keywords are more strategic and market-oriented. In the lower-left quadrant, another Keywords Plus cluster features terms like *corporate social responsibility*, *information systems*, *supply chain management*, and *systems amcis volume*. These keywords point to a technological and organizational research focus, especially in information management, CSR, and supply chain analytics. The lower-right quadrant presents Author Keywords related to this dataset. Dominant terms include *UK Limited Trading*, *Informa UK Limited*, *Nature Switzerland AG*, and *Corporate Social Responsibility*. These suggest a dataset heavily referencing specific institutions or publishers, with overlapping interests in CSR, digital systems, and critical success factors in information systems and management contexts.

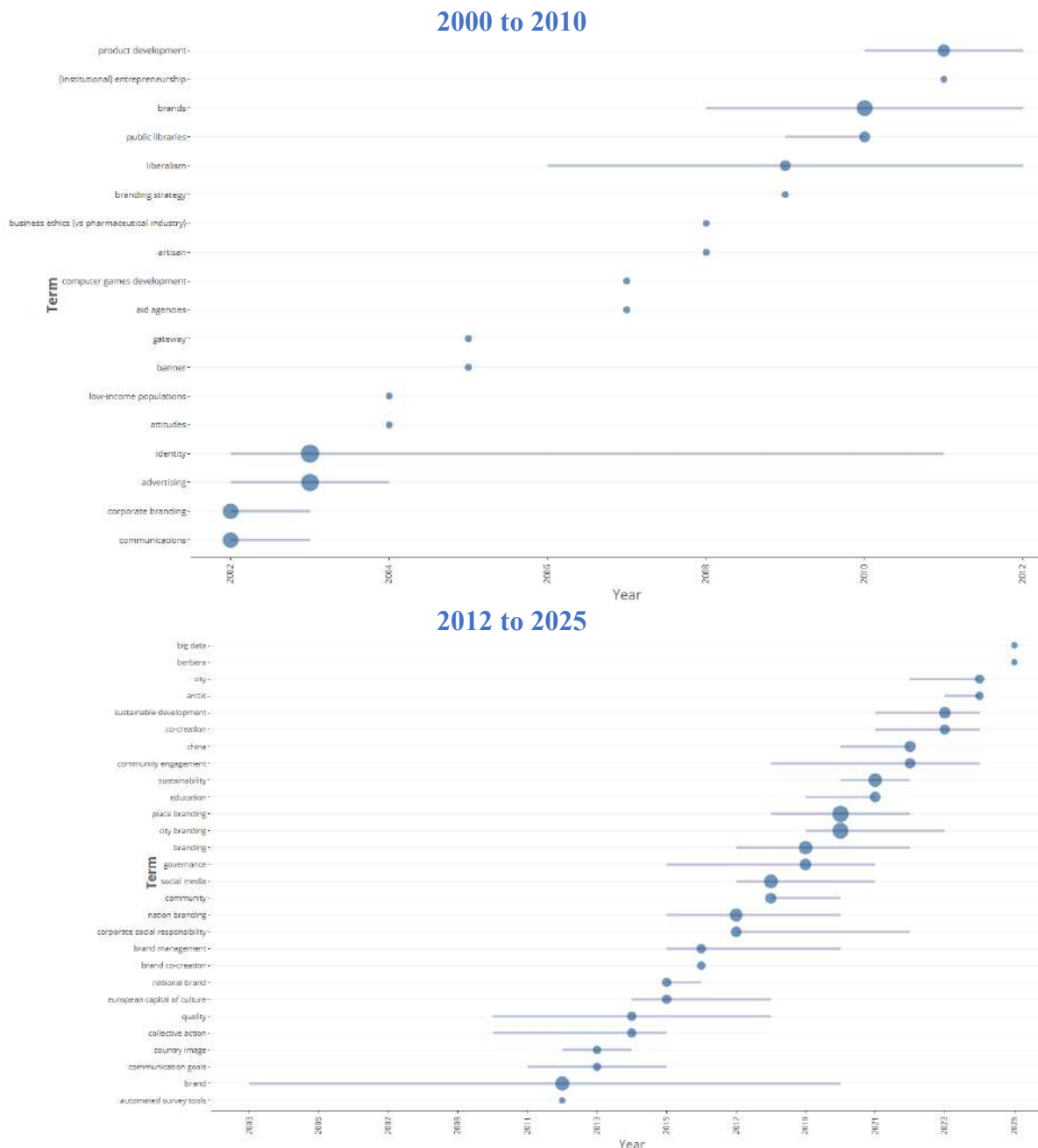
2000–2011: During this early period, the field was clearly laying its conceptual groundwork. Dominant terms such as “communications,” “advertising,” “identity,” and “corporate branding” signal a focus on classical themes of brand construction, promotional strategy, and public image. These were the core around which early discussions were structured. The size and duration of these terms reflect their centrality and long-standing impact.

As the decade progressed, new concepts emerged—“branding strategy,” “liberalism,” “public libraries,” “entrepreneurship,” and even “business ethics.” Their appearance marks a shift from purely commercial or communicative concerns toward broader socio-economic and institutional perspectives. This diversification suggests that researchers were beginning to connect branding with governance, public value, and ethical considerations—a critical turning point that paved the way for later interdisciplinary expansion.

The post-2012 period is marked by intensification, diversification, and digital transformation. Key concepts like “place branding,” “city branding,” “nation branding,” “social media,” and “governance” rise rapidly to prominence. These aren’t isolated shifts—they represent a systemic redefinition of the field toward branding as a tool for territorial identity, civic engagement, and global competitiveness.

Figure 10 "Emerging and Evolving Research Topics in Territorial Branding and Stakeholder Governance (2012–2025)"

Trending topics



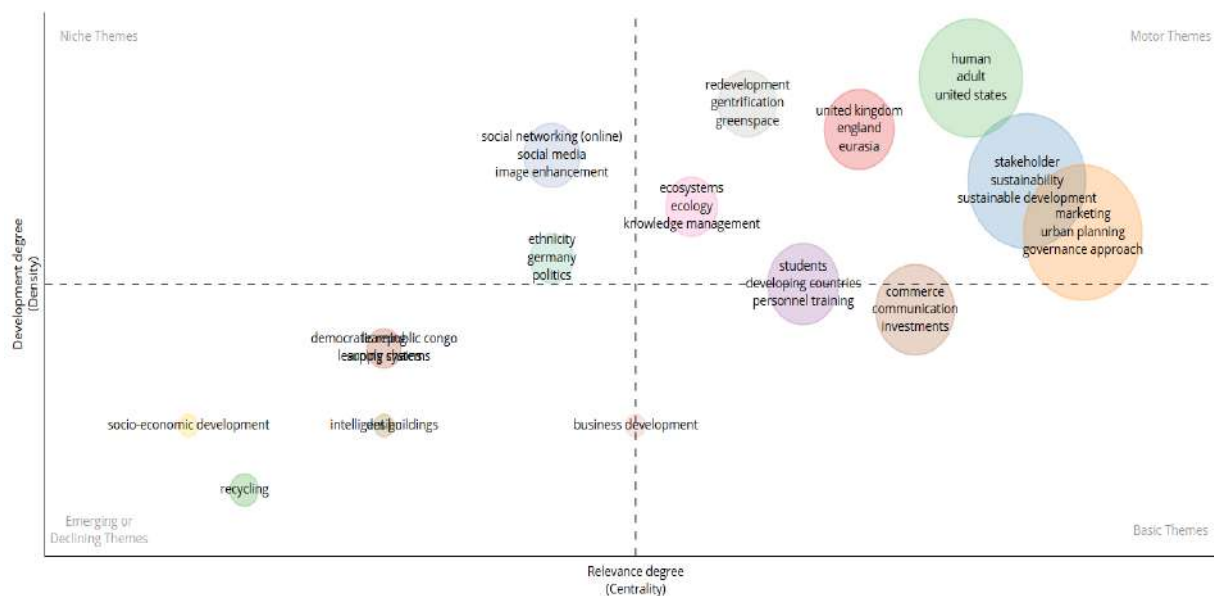
The emergence of terms such as “co-creation,” “community engagement,” “sustainability,” and “corporate social responsibility” underscores a decisive turn toward participatory, ethical, and sustainable frameworks. This is no longer branding for visibility—it's branding for legitimacy, for trust, for long-term value creation. The visualisation captures the field's embrace of technology and data-driven methods, as seen in late-emerging terms like “big data,” “automated survey tools,” and “smart cities.” These show the discipline not only reacting to digital transformation but actively integrating it into methodological and strategic practice.

Research Area topic

The thematic map presents a bibliometric analysis of research themes based on co-word analysis. The horizontal axis (centrality) represents the importance of a theme within the overall

research field, while the vertical axis (density) indicates the level of development of a theme internally. In the upper-right quadrant are the motor themes. These are both highly relevant and well-developed. Themes such as stakeholder, sustainability, urban planning, and governance approach appear frequently and are strongly connected to other topics. Their position shows that they are central to the field and supported by a strong body of research. The lower-right quadrant contains the basic themes. These are important in the research network but not yet fully developed. Examples include commerce, communication, and investments. These themes offer opportunities for further development. In the upper-left quadrant are niche themes like social media, social networking, and image enhancement. These are well-developed in themselves but not widely connected to other areas. This suggests they are specialized topics with a focused audience, and may become more influential if linked to broader themes. The lower-left quadrant shows emerging or declining themes. These include recycling, socio-economic development, and learning systems. They are currently underdeveloped and have limited influence in the field. Some may represent early-stage research areas, while others could be losing relevance.

Figure 11 Strategic Thematic Map of Tourism Mega-Project Research



Themes are plotted by relevance (centrality) and development (density). Core themes include “stakeholder,” “sustainability,” and “urban planning,” while “recycling” and “socio-economic development” appear as emerging or declining areas.

5. Discussion

This bibliometric study offers a structured overview of the scholarly landscape at the intersection of stakeholder engagement, territorial marketing, and tourism mega-projects. While the field demonstrates steady growth and thematic diversification, several findings highlight persistent limitations in conceptual integration, geographic representation, and collaboration dynamics.

A key insight concerns the ongoing fragmentation between stakeholder governance and territorial marketing frameworks. Although both concepts frequently appear in the literature, they are often treated in parallel rather than through an integrated analytical lens. For example, while themes like “co-creation” and “place identity” are increasingly invoked, few studies thoroughly examine how participatory processes shape—and are shaped by—branding strategies within tourism development contexts (Carrus & Melis, 2019).

The study also underscores geographic asymmetries in knowledge production. Research is predominantly driven by institutions in Western Europe, North America, and East Asia, with minimal representation from the Global South. This imbalance is particularly salient given that many tourism mega-projects are implemented in developing regions. The underrepresentation of Southern perspectives may result in models that overlook culturally embedded planning logics or alternative governance mechanisms (Mirari et al., 2019).

In addition, the analysis of co-authorship networks reveals limited international collaboration among leading publishing countries. While the United Kingdom and the United States exhibit broad collaborative reach, other prolific contributors, such as China and Italy, tend to operate within more insular academic networks (Erkul et al., 2016). This pattern may constrain cross-cultural learning and hinder the development of globally adaptable governance frameworks.

Encouragingly, the co-word analysis reveals emerging thematic frontiers, including participatory place-branding, identity co-creation, and stakeholder-led territorial narratives. These themes signal a shift from top-down marketing approaches toward more dialogical and locally grounded practices (Correia et al., 2022). However, these topics remain under-theorized and merit further conceptual development, particularly through interdisciplinary engagement with political geography, planning theory, and communication studies.

Despite the increasing popularity of the issues, the literature remains limited by a range of structural flaws. First and foremost, many studies use descriptive, context-dependent methods without developing mid-range theories that could be applied across different contexts (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014). Second, although notions of co-creation and participatory branding are common, they are rarely rooted in substantial theoretical underpinnings or longitudinal studies (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013). Third, stakeholder engagement and territorial branding's relationship is infrequently comprehensive, with limited research thoroughly investigating aspects like power dynamics, conflict, or legitimacy concerns in branding initiatives. These lacunae imply that future scholarship ought not to examine just emerging practices but also to probe more extensively the normative, political, and institutional assumptions underlying territorial branding discourse.

Finally, the results suggest a broader paradigmatic evolution: branding is increasingly viewed not as a static promotional tool, but as a participatory process embedded in stakeholder negotiation, territorial identity, and governance legitimacy (Rovira et al., 2022). This evolution reflects a maturing research agenda, yet also underscores the need for deeper integration of normative, strategic, and relational dimensions.

5.1. Contribution of the study

This study advances the integration of stakeholder engagement, territorial marketing, and tourism mega-projects—three interrelated yet often siloed domains—by offering the first bibliometric synthesis of their combined scholarly landscape. Through a data-driven mapping of thematic clusters, citation patterns, and collaboration networks, the study clarifies the intellectual structure of this fragmented field and promotes cross-disciplinary coherence. It also provides a critical lens on global research dynamics, revealing pronounced imbalances in authorship and geographic representation. The underrepresentation of the Global South highlights the need for more inclusive and context-sensitive approaches to territorial development. Lastly, the study identifies emerging yet under-theorized themes—such as participatory place-branding and co-creative governance—helping to define a future research agenda grounded in both scholarly insight and practical relevance.

5.2. Limitations

While this bibliometric analysis provides an overview of the intellectual structure and thematic development within the intersection of stakeholder engagement, territorial marketing, and

tourism mega-projects, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the study relies exclusively on indexed publications retrieved from selected academic databases. As a result, relevant grey literature, local case reports, and policy-oriented documents—particularly from the Global South—may be underrepresented. This could skew the geographic and institutional distribution of influential contributions, reinforcing the dominance of well-resourced Western research systems. Second, bibliometric methods are inherently quantitative and do not assess the substantive quality or depth of argumentation within the cited works. While citation counts and co-occurrence patterns reveal influence and connectivity, they cannot substitute for critical engagement with the conceptual frameworks or empirical robustness of individual studies. Third, the reliance on author-supplied keywords and indexed metadata for co-word analysis introduces a risk of thematic oversimplification or inconsistency in keyword assignment. This limitation may obscure more conceptual overlaps between disciplines or mask emerging terminologies that are not yet standardized. In addition to the methodological constraints of this study, it is necessary to determine the intrinsic limitations of the available literature. Much of this field's work remains conceptually dispersed and lacks substantial theoretical consolidation across stakeholder engagement and territorial branding (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Zenker & Erfgen, 2014). Empirical research often relies on context-specific case study data without comparative or longitudinal research designs, thus limiting generalizability (Braun, Kavaratzis, & Zenker, 2013). Moreover, there is a trend to take managerial or promotional standpoints, which tend to disregard power imbalances, legitimacy issues, and the sociopolitical character of stakeholder engagement in branding processes. Such shortcomings highlight the need for future research to be more theoretically informed, critically reflective, and interdisciplinary in focus.

Finally, this analysis focuses on peer-reviewed academic literature, which may lag behind ongoing policy, practice, and innovation developments within tourism governance. Stakeholder engagement and territorial branding are dynamic fields shaped by real-time experimentation, and the academic record may not fully capture current or grassroots-led initiatives.

6. Conclusion

This bibliometric study offers a comprehensive overview of the scientific production related to stakeholder engagement within the framework of territorial marketing and tourism mega-projects. The results reveal that while scholarly interest in this intersection has grown—particularly in recent years—the field remains fragmented and dominated by disciplinary silos such as urban planning, environmental studies, and tourism development. Despite the emergence of core themes like “sustainability,” “governance,” and “public participation,” the limited integration between these domains suggests an ongoing need for conceptual convergence. Moreover, the geographic concentration of influential authors and institutions in Western and high-income countries highlights a critical gap in global representation and collaboration. Regions that are often the sites of tourism mega-projects—particularly in the Global South—are underrepresented in the academic discourse, which may limit the contextual relevance and applicability of proposed frameworks.

By identifying key intellectual contributions, collaboration patterns, and thematic clusters, this study contributes to a clearer understanding of how stakeholder engagement is conceptualized and operationalized in the context of territorial branding and large-scale tourism initiatives. These insights provide a valuable foundation for future research that seeks to bridge disciplinary divides, incorporate perspectives from underrepresented regions, and promote more inclusive and responsive forms of stakeholder governance in tourism-led territorial transformations.

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