

Bibliometric Exploration of Tourism Destination Competitiveness Studies: A Comprehensive Overview

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Abstract

Destination competitiveness is an important area of research in tourism and hospitality management. The literature suggests that destination competitiveness is a complex and multifaceted concept that involves a range of factors and stakeholders. Successful destination competitiveness requires the cooperation of all stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, local communities, and tourists. Furthermore, the literature highlights the need for sustainable tourism development and the use of innovative approaches and technologies to enhance destination competitiveness. This study aims to provide an overview of the existing research on destination competitiveness. The most relevant source, authors, affiliations, countries were identified to understand the current state of studies on the destination competitiveness concept using R programming tools. Results of the review provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of research on destination competitiveness and valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in the tourism and hospitality industry. This review considers various criteria, including annual scientific publications, related resources, authors' affiliations and countries, and citations. This contribution addresses the gaps resulting from the limited number of scientific studies by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the literature on destination competitiveness.

Keywords: Tourism, Destination Competitiveness, Literature Review, Bibliometric Study

Acknowledgments

This article was presented and the abstract was published in Abstract Proceedings of “V. ASC 2023 / Spring Congress: Everchanging World: Challenges and Opportunities”, May, 10-12, 2023.

For Citation: Dyikanov, K., Maksüdünov, A. (2024). Bibliometric Exploration of Tourism Destination Competitiveness Studies: A Comprehensive Overview. *Journal of Academic Value Studies*, 10(1), 58-71. <http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/jav.73403>

Received: 03.11.2023 Accepted: 10.03.2024

This article was checked by *intihal.net*



1. Introduction

The rapid and extensive changes occurring on a global scale in the 21st century have led to increased competition within the tourism industry, as well as in other sectors. Consequently, countries, regions, and tourist destinations operating within the tourism industry must place emphasis on the development of high-quality human resources, the implementation of suitable strategies, timely decision-making, and effective organizational structures. These efforts are the result of comprehensive research, both theoretical and practical, which aims to identify destinations, evaluate and measure various factors, and ultimately enhance competitiveness.

Before addressing the significance of destination competitiveness, it is crucial to examine the ongoing discourse surrounding the definition of a destination. Despite the numerous attempts by researchers, including Crouch & Ritchie (1999), Heath (2002), Dwyer & Kim (2003), Enright & Newton (2004), Bahar & Kozak (2007), Goffi (2013), Cu et al., (2018), and Happ (2021), to define destination competitiveness, a definitive response remains elusive in the literature. The intricate nature of its structure, the wide-ranging scope it covers, and its dynamic and multidimensional characteristics make it challenging to establish a universal agreement on the definition of competitiveness (Dwyer et al., 2004; Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). However, a comprehensive analysis of the literature on destination competitiveness indicates that this concept aims to improve the quality of life and actual income of the local residents foster and sustain economic growth and welfare, and boost tourism performance in terms of visitor numbers, revenue, market share, economic contribution, and employment opportunities (Buhalis, 2000; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Bahar & Kozak, 2007). On the contrary, scholars have undertaken extensive research on the competitiveness of tourist destinations, with a focus on sustainability (Hassan, 2000; Heath, 2003; Goffi, 2013; Mihalic, 2000, 2016; Cucculleli & Goffi, 2016). The authors agree that a destination can be deemed competitive if it successfully preserves its natural and cultural resources, promotes the sustainable well-being of its residents, and offers a more satisfying experience than other comparable destinations.

In order to sustain the competitiveness of tourist destinations, stakeholders must consistently enhance tourism offerings by creating novel services and products. This presents a significant challenge for tourism destinations to fortify and sustain their positions in the progressively competitive global marketplace (World Economic Forum, 2019). Moreover, evaluating the competitiveness of tourist destinations is closely linked to the regulations implemented, particularly in terms of resource management. For this reason, the matter of competitiveness of tourist destinations has gained importance for strategic planning and researchers in the field of tourism destinations (Mendola & Volo, 2017).

Given the variations in the literature and the abundance of research on this subject, a comprehensive analysis of the competitiveness of tourism destinations is necessary to offer deeper insights and greater advantages for forthcoming studies. Both the tourism industry and the government need to understand the evolving nature of competitiveness and the reasons behind its emergence in various destinations (Dwyer et al., 2002). However, Cronjé & Plessis (2020) pointed out that to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current research on tourism destination competitiveness and identify gaps in the literature, it is necessary to review the diverse perspectives and various definitions presented, as well as to consider universal factors and patterns. Therefore, this study aims to provide an overview of the existing research on destination competitiveness. We propose a research question (What is the primary relevant source, authors, affiliations, and countries on this topic?) to reach this objective.

2. Literature Review

The competitiveness of tourist destinations is a key concept in the tourism industry. The term "competitiveness" in the field of tourism was first used in the early 1980s from an interdisciplinary economics perspective (Mior Shariffuddin et al. 2022). For example, the first examination of competitiveness at the firm level was conducted by Porter (1980) and later expanded upon. According to Newall (1992), high productivity for a firm requires producing goods and services of higher quality than those offered by competitors. In order to achieve sustainable profitability, it is essential for firms to demonstrate growth and compete with one another (Reinert, 1995). Therefore, national competitiveness at the firm level is closely related to the concept of "productivity" (Porter, 1990; 76). In particular, the competitiveness of enterprises indicates national competitiveness. However, the efforts of stakeholders (supply and demand sides) in the field of tourism play an important role in the competitiveness of the country as well.

Leiper (1989) and Poon (1993) can be mentioned as the first tourism researchers who conducted research on tourism competitiveness. For example, Leiper published his work on the main destination ratio according to the flow of tourists, while Poon outlined four key principles for successful competition: prioritizing the environment, leading in

quality, fostering radical innovations, and strengthening strategic position. Since then, various authors such as Crouch and Ritchie (1999), Dwyer and Kim (2003), and Enright and Newton (2004) have also explored this topic. Additionally, some authors including Heath (2002, 2003), Ritchie & Crouch (2003), Goffi (2013), Goffi et al. (2018), Mendola & Volo (2017), and Luštický & Štumpf (2021) have analyzed tourism competitiveness by defining it, creating models, and identifying contributing factors and aspects.

The primary framework employed to characterize the competitiveness of tourism is derived from Crouch and Ritchie's (1999; 137) definition, despite the existence of various definitions within the tourism literature. According to their perspective, the competitiveness of a tourist destination is defined as the capacity to boost tourism spending, allure visitors, and offer them enjoyable and unforgettable experiences, while also ensuring profitability, improving the quality of life for local residents, and conserving the natural resources of the destination for future generations. Hence, in the context of literature, tourism competitiveness pertains to the overall destination (Croes & Semrad, 2018). This emphasizes the importance of having a precise definition for research purposes. Mangion et al. (2012) have proposed that there is a growing recognition of the need for improved policymaking in the tourism sector, which has led to the evaluation of public policies pertaining to tourism. Cvelbar et al. (2015) present an alternative perspective on the concept of tourist destination competitiveness, focusing on the total tourism contribution to GDP per tourism employee. The authors prioritize the economic aspects of tourism, highlighting its potential to enhance population prosperity and welfare. According to Mihalic (2013), the notion of tourist destination supply is complex and encompasses a range of components. These components extend beyond the traditional economic goods typically associated with tourism, such as accommodation and entertainment. They also encompass natural attractions, which serve as a fundamental basis for tourism development and frequently serve as the primary attraction for prospective tourists. In addition, Goffi (2013) emphasized the recognition of competition as a crucial factor in the achievement of tourist destinations. This viewpoint underscores the growing scholarly interest in establishing a correlation between competitiveness and the effectiveness of tourism endeavors within a particular region.

While there is a scarcity of research on the topic of tourist destination competitiveness, there has been a growing interest and subsequent increase in research conducted in this field. Studies on destination competitiveness continue to be conducted by different researchers and they certainly contribute to this field. According to Cronjé and Plessis's (2020) study findings, tourism destination competitiveness is a widely researched topic within the tourism industry, with a majority of the studies conducted in Europe. The research conducted in this field predominantly adopts a supply-side perspective. Specifically, out of the articles reviewed, 48 of them concentrated on identifying the factors, indicators, and aspects that contribute to destination competitiveness. Another study by Seguí-Amortegui et al. (2019) reveals that a total of 808 scholarly articles have been published on various aspects pertaining to tourism, sustainability, and competitiveness, while 409 articles have been published on tourism destinations. The findings indicate that there is a higher level of scientific productivity concerning sustainability-related factors compared to competitiveness-related factors. The significance of bibliometric research has also been demonstrated by other scholars. The study conducted by Estevão et al. (2019) aimed to map the intellectual structure of research on tourism and competitiveness as it is represented in the academic literature. The present study has identified the principal contributions of research in this particular field, ascertained the intellectual framework of the research lines, and pinpointed the scientific journals that exert the most significant influence.

Other authors (Teixeira & Ferreira, 2019) had investigated in the fields of regional competitiveness and tourism innovation. Their study employed a bibliometric approach, specifically a systematic literature review to analyze the scientific publications and intellectual knowledge. The authors obtained research data from the Web of Science database, which contains academic publications, authors, information, affiliations, and citations. The study mapped the interconnections between keywords and identified clusters with the highest density of citations in the areas of regional competitiveness and tourism innovation. It also ranked the top 20 most cited authors and identified the top scientific journals in the field. However, Soh et al. (2023) conducted bibliometric study on sustainable competitiveness in the tourism field and analyzed 1259 Scopus-indexed documents from 2010 to 2020, using various analytical methods and software tools. The findings reveal that the literature on sustainable competitiveness in tourism is in its growth stage, with the United States, China, and the United Kingdom being the most productive countries in this domain. The paper emphasizes the importance of sustainable competitiveness in the evolution of the tourism field and suggests that it can provide a reference for future research. One more study which conducted by Garrigos-Simon et al. (2019) aims to address bibliometric and visualization analysis of the literature on tourism and quality, examining 4625 documents published until 2018. The analysis includes various techniques such as co-occurrence of keywords, co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-authorship analyses, as well as the use of the VOS viewer program for mapping clusters and relationships among the literature.

Bibliometric studies have been widely recognized in the field of literature reviews for their valuable contribution in uncovering and elevating the standing of specific scientific disciplines. In more recent times, the discourse surrounding the influence of location on competitiveness has adopted a simplistic perspective on the dynamics of competition among companies and regions. This perspective perceives competition as static and primarily driven by cost reduction within self-contained economies. Within this framework, the possession of comparative advantages in production factors becomes essential for attaining economies of scale, which in turn serves as a significant catalyst for economic growth (Porter, 2003). Furthermore, bibliometric analyses within the realm of tourism competitiveness assume a pivotal role in monitoring the advancement and impact of this particular field of research. Such studies provide valuable perspectives on the patterns of publication, influential contributors and institutions, research themes, and areas of deficiency within the existing literature. Consequently, these insights contribute to shaping the trajectory of future research endeavors and informing decision-making processes within the tourism industry.

3. Methodology

Bibliometric analysis is a research methodology utilized to investigate and scrutinize vast quantities of scientific data. It is advantageous to have a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of a specific field of study and to identify emerging areas within that field (Donthu et al., 2021; Mirhashemi et al., 2022). This paper is based on data retrieved from the Web of Science. As a keyword, "destination competitiveness" was used and the topic section was chosen. As seen in Table 1 as of April 14th, 2023, 1934 related documents were found for the period of 1991-2023. The field exhibits an annual growth rate of scientific publications of approximately 12%, and the average age of documents is approximately 6 years. The production of this literature involved 4221 authors and 828 distinct sources. The majority of the documents, accounting for 67%, were articles, while the remaining 33% comprised other types of academic papers.

Table 1. Main Information about Data

Description	Results
Timespan	1991:2023
Documents	1934
Annual Growth Rate %	12.22
Document Average Age	5.91
Average citations per doc	17.39
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	828
Authors	4221
Co-Authors per Doc	2.76
Article	1301
Other types	633

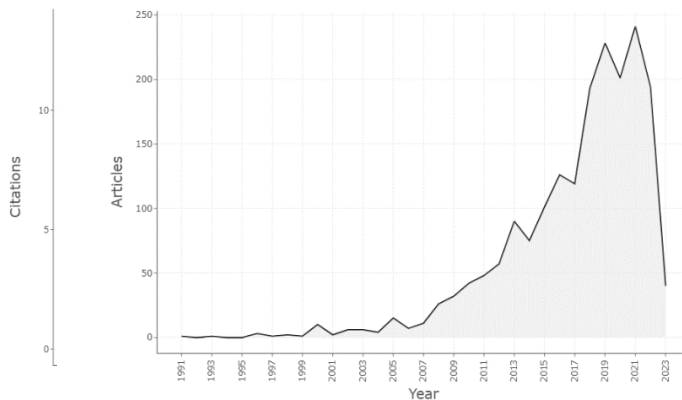
Source: Web of Science, 14.04.2023

The visualizations presented in this study were generated using Biblioshiny, a tool available in the R programming language (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). In the final stage of the analysis, the results are interpreted and discussed in detail.

4. Findings

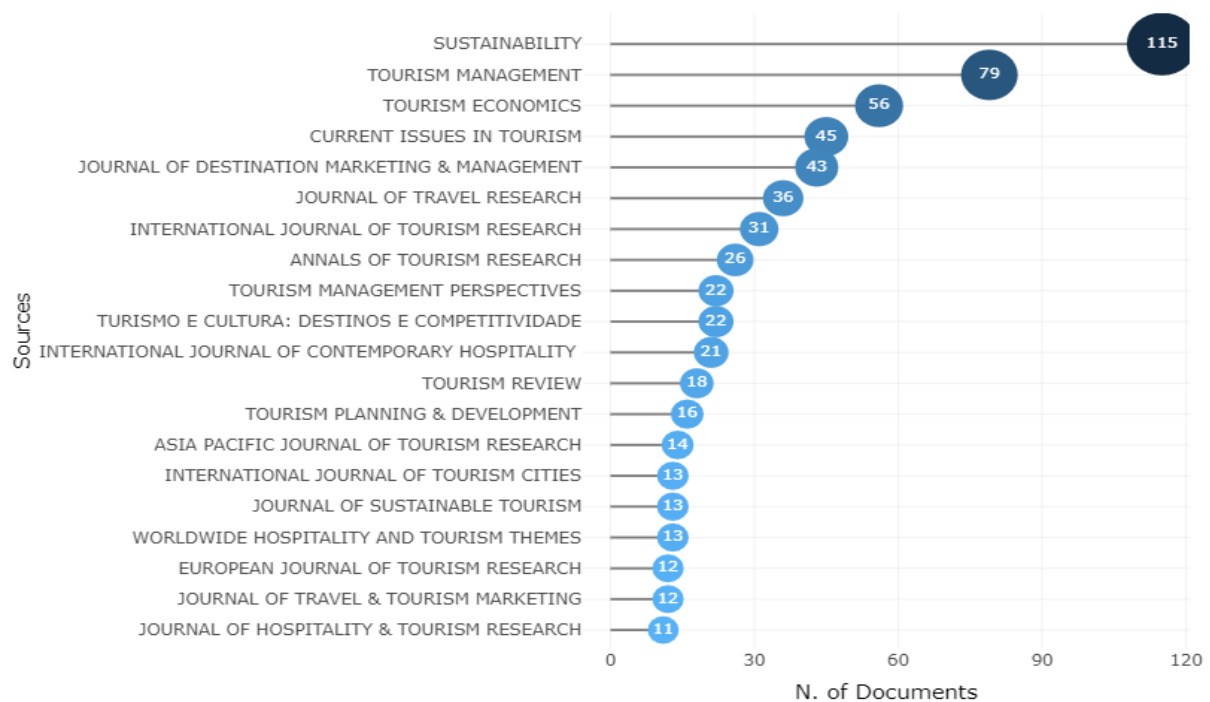
The graphical representation in Figure 1 illustrates the annual worldwide scientific production on destination competitiveness and average citation per year, demonstrating a steady growth in the quantity of scholarly publications and citations throughout the years. The first paper was published in 1991 and the year 2021 saw the highest number of publications with 241 papers. The analysis of citation data indicates that the mean total citation per article reached its peak during the period of 2000-2001. Specifically, in the year 2000, the highest citation rate of 13 citations per year was observed.

Figure1. Annual Scientific Production and Average Citation per Year



The following figure (Figure 2) displays the top 20 most relevant sources, which published 32% of total publications. All journals in the field, except for Sustainability, are directly related as shown in the figure. Tourism Management (79 papers), Tourism Economics (56 papers), and Current Issues in Tourism (45 papers) are top academic journals in the field.

Figure 2. Most Relevant Sources



In Figure 3, the top three most cited journals in the field are identified as Tourism Management (8174 citations), Annals of Tourism Research (3832 citations), and Journal of Travel Research (1992 citations).

Figure 3. Most Local Cited Sources

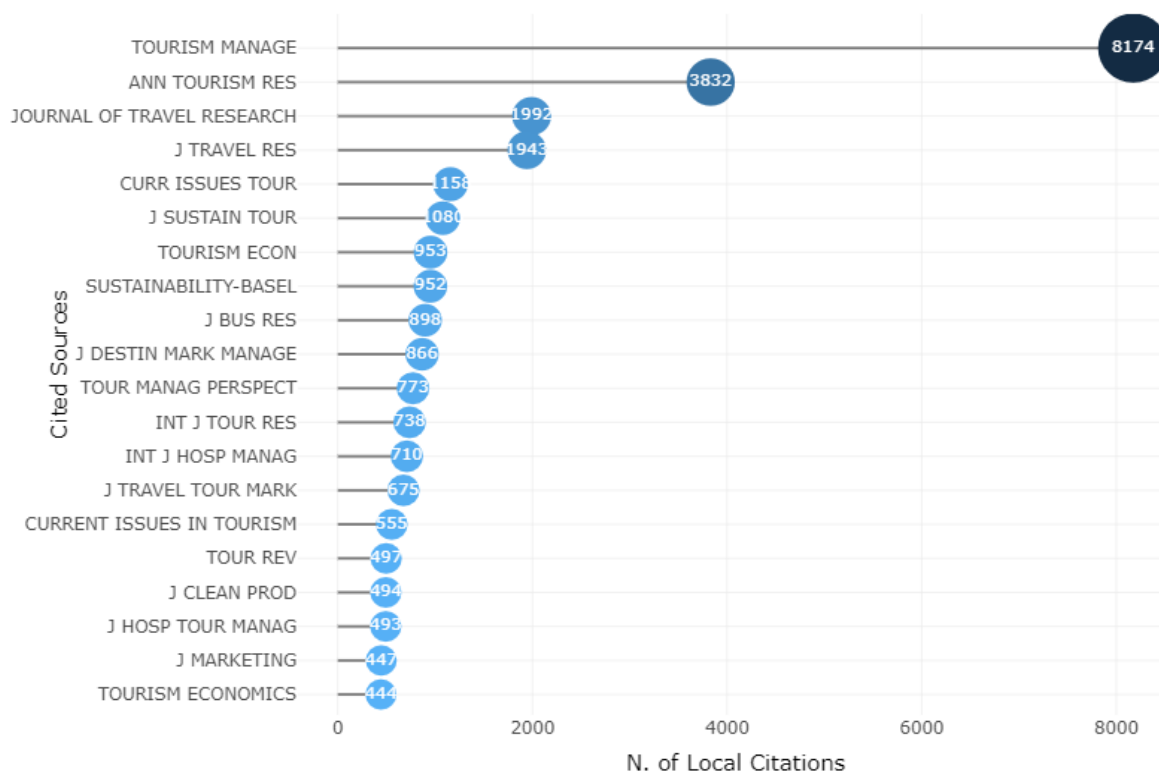
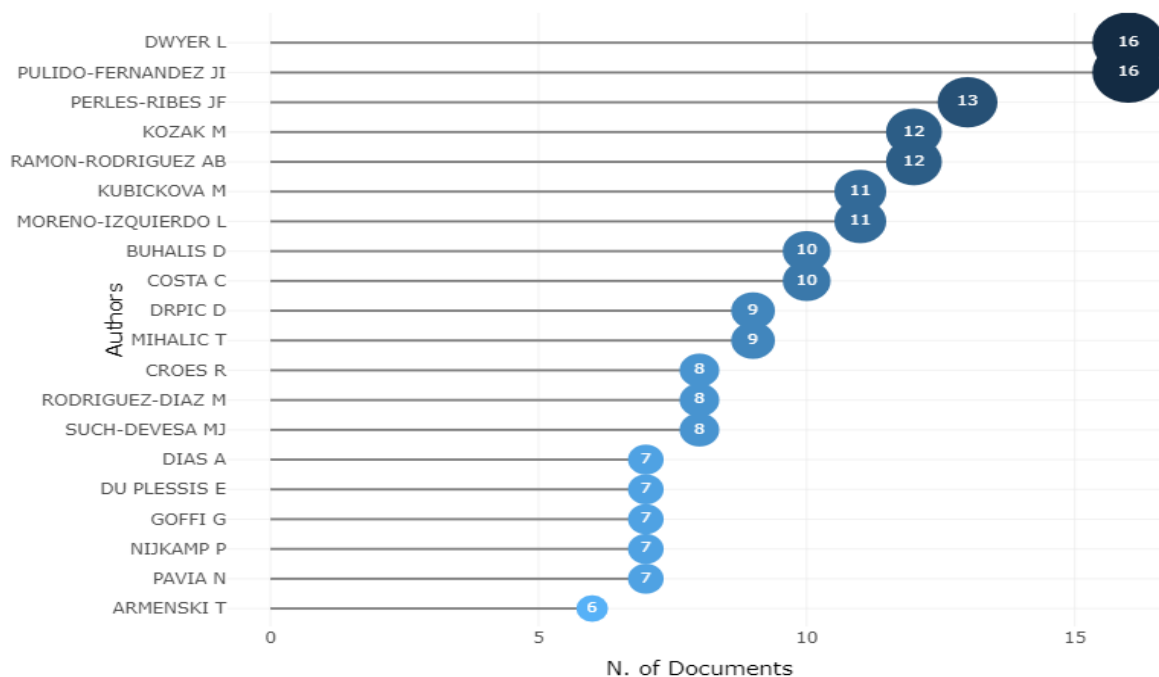


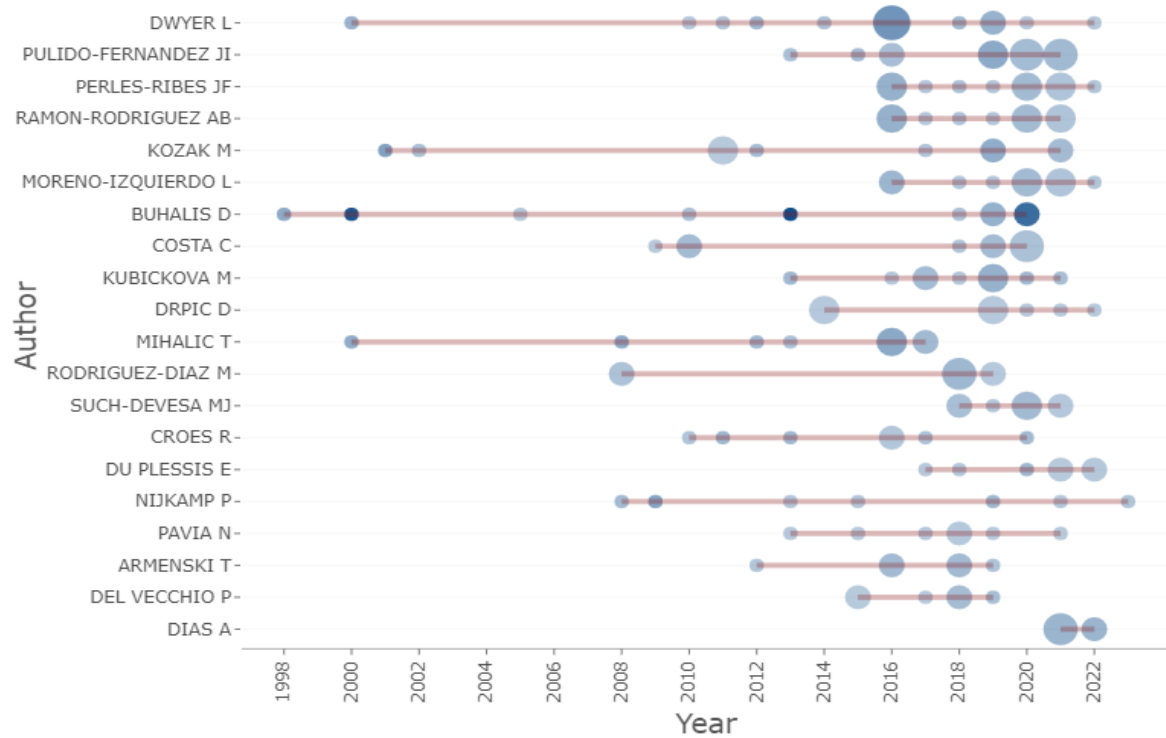
Figure 4 displays the top 20 authors who contributed to academic papers on destination competitiveness.

Figure 4. Most Relevant Authors



The figure shows that Larry Dwyer and Juan Ignacio Pulido-Fernández are the top authors among 4221 authors, with 16 published papers each. Figure 5 shows that Dwyer has been publishing papers consistently from 2000 to 2022. Dimitrios Buhalis and Tanja Mihalič have also been consistent publishers for a long time. All other documents were published by the authors after 2008.

Figure 5. Authors' Production over Time



Dimitrios Buhalis has the highest local impact among authors, with a total of 2874 citations (Figure 6). Muzafer Uysal (1830 citations) and Yoosik Yoon (1662 citations) are the most cited authors.

Figure 6. Author Local Impact

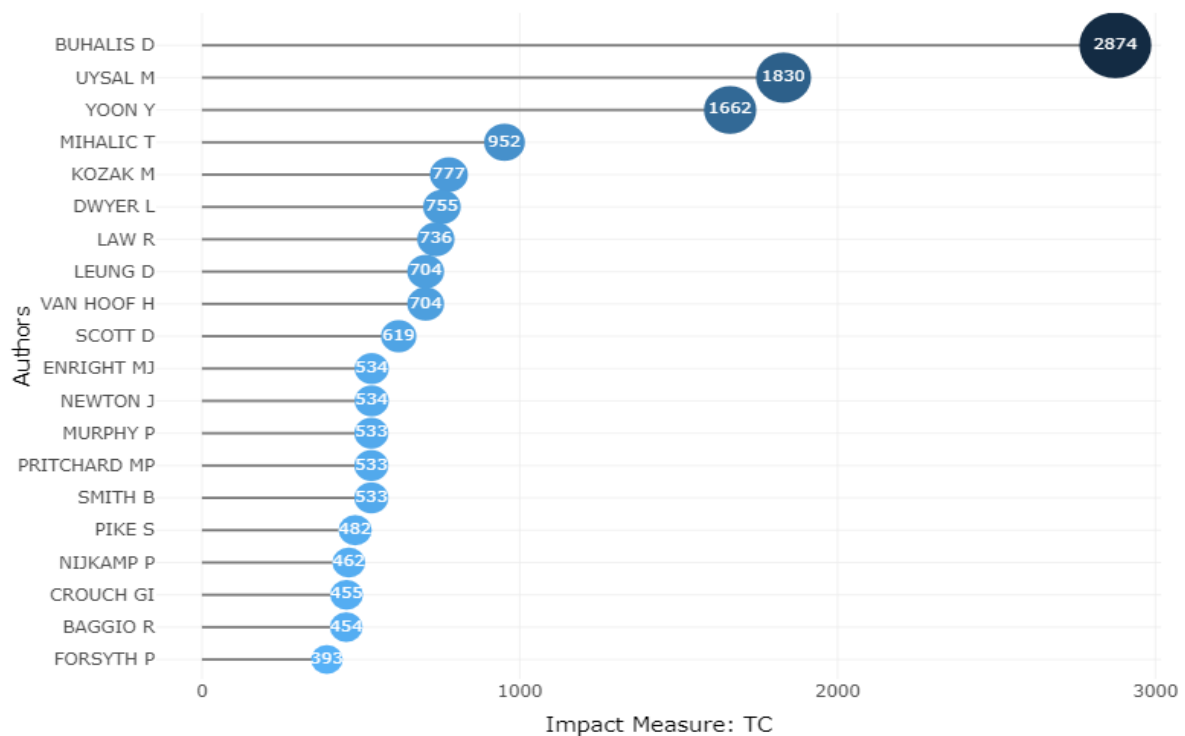


Figure 7 displays the affiliations of the authors, which include 20 institutions. According to the figure, the University of Alicante produced 46 scholarly papers, making it the most academically productive institution. The University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria followed closely with 45 papers.

Figure 7. Most Relevant Affiliations

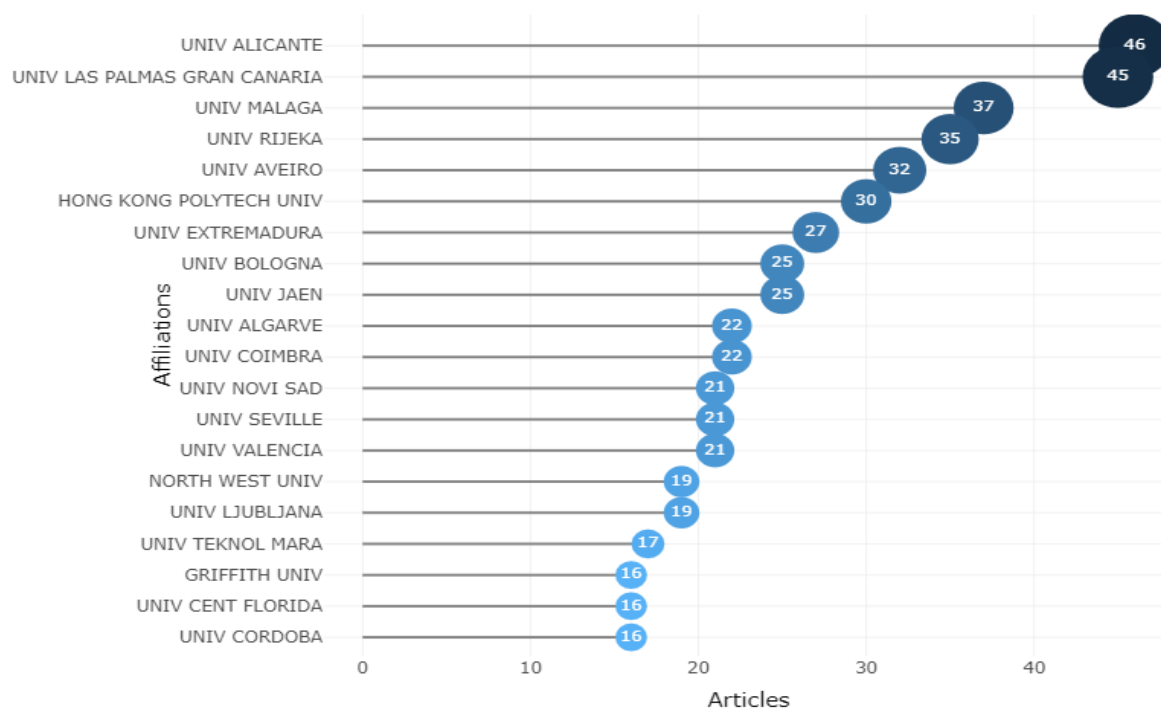
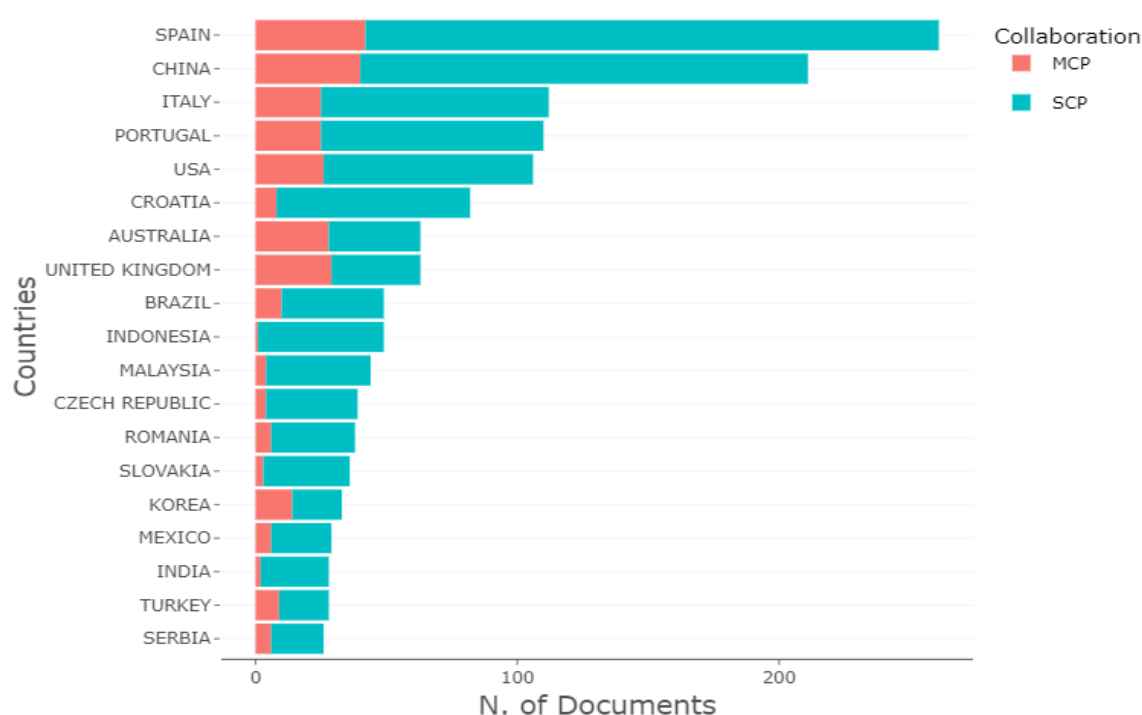


Figure 8 shows the top countries of corresponding authors who participated in scientific production. Spain and China are among the top countries in terms of research output, with single-authored papers (SCP) comprising the majority of publications for most countries, followed by multi-authored papers.

Figure 8. Corresponding Author's Country



The impact of top 20 countries is shown in Figures 9. Spain has the highest number of citations (4946), followed by the UK (3426), China (3353), and Australia (3292).

Figure 9. Most Cited Countries

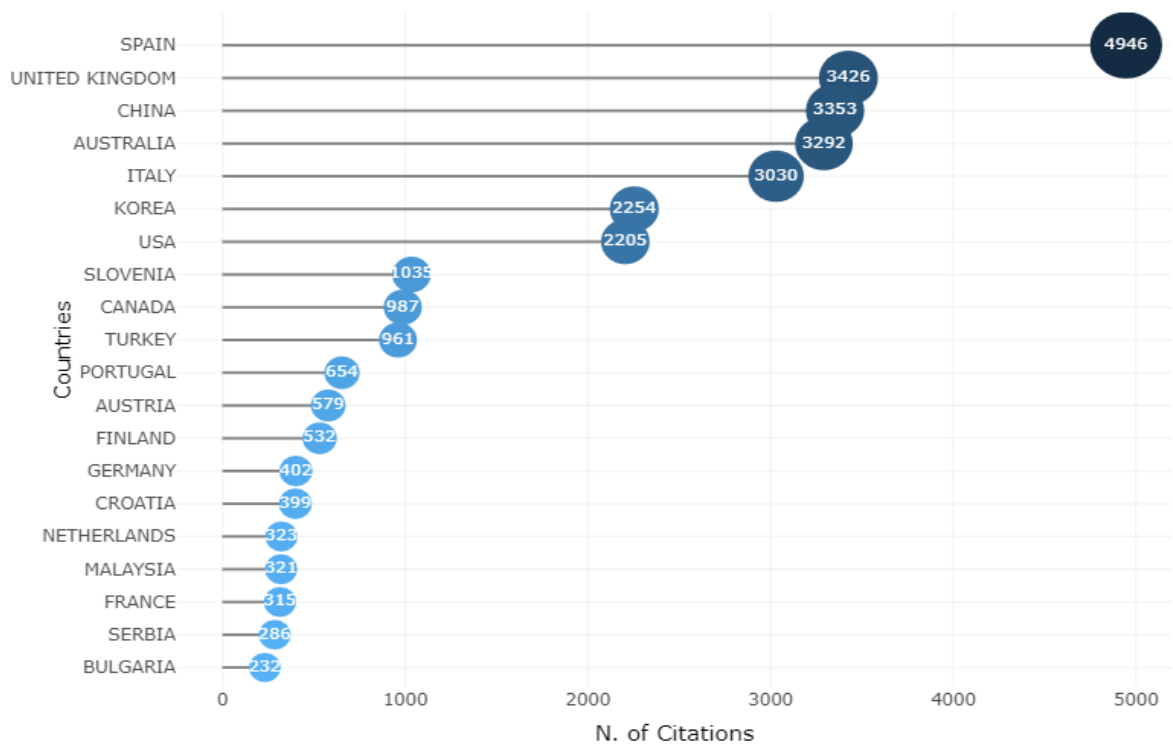
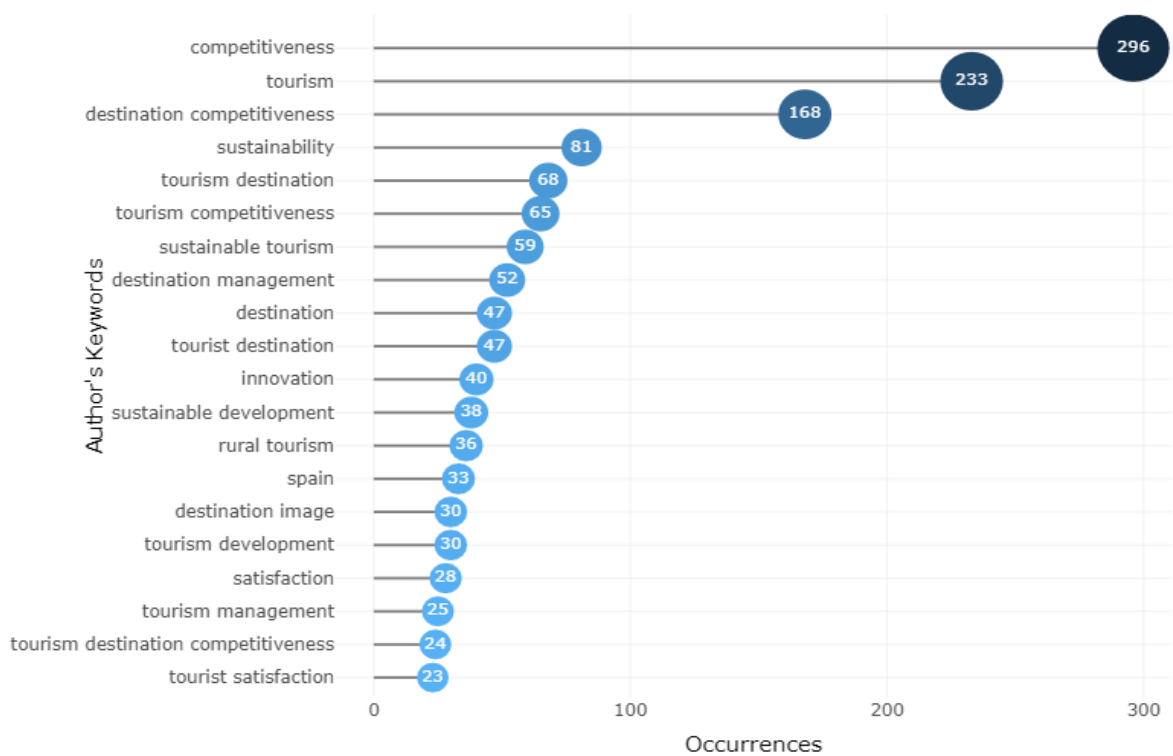
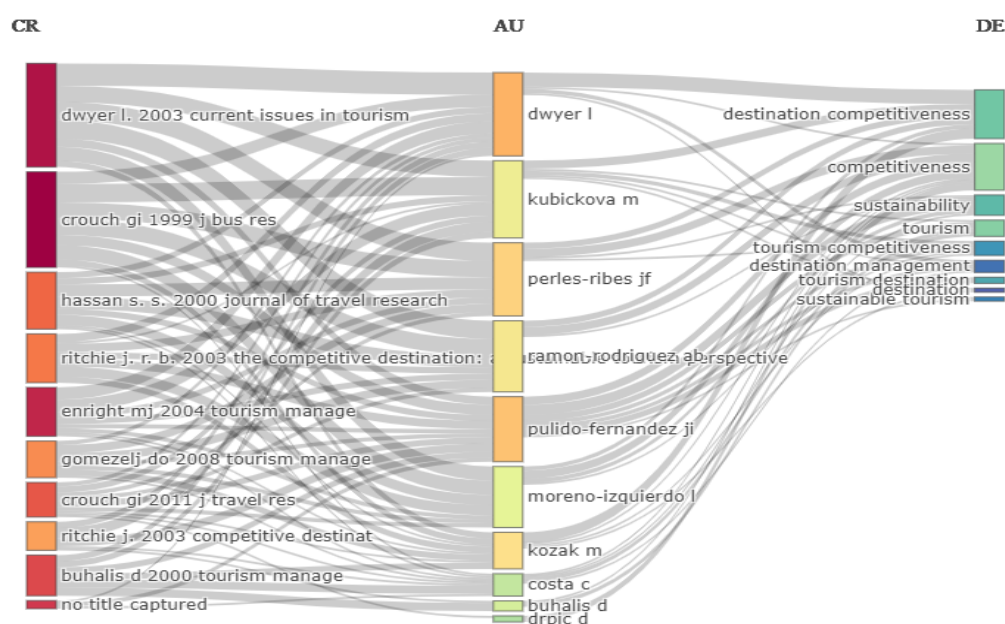


Figure 10. Most Frequent Words



The most commonly used author's keywords are shown in Figures 10 and 11. According to the figures, "competitiveness," "tourism," and "destination competitiveness" are the most frequently used keywords in literature on destination competitiveness, appearing 296, 233, and 168 times, respectively.



According to the findings, the top 10 authors are Dwyer, Kubickova, Perles-Ribes, Ramon-Rodriguez, Pulido-Fernandez, Moreno-Izquierdo, Kozak, Costa, Buhalis, and Drpic. The most cited documents include Dwyer (2003), Crouch (1999), Hassan (2000), Ritchie (2003), among others. Destination competitiveness, competitiveness, sustainability, tourism, tourism competitiveness, destination management, tourism destination, destination, and sustainable tourism are the most relevant keywords in the studies on this domain.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

An extensive analysis of bibliometric studies in the field of tourism destination competitiveness would provide a thorough overview of the existing research in this specific domain. However, a review of the literature in this study highlights several important keys regarding bibliometric studies in destination competitiveness. Based on previous sources (Niñerola et al., 2019; Estevão et al., 2019; Garrigos-Simon et al., 2019; Teixeira & Ferreira 2019; Soh et al 2023), bibliometric studies are conducted to determine the methodological significance, trends in publication, sources of publication, influential authors and institutions, patterns of citation, keywords and research themes, geographical distribution, interdisciplinary connections, emerging areas of research, gaps in knowledge, and networks of collaboration and co-authorship. Based on these sources, the results of this study indicate that the most three influential sources in the field of destination competitiveness are the journals Sustainability, Tourism Management, and Tourism Economics. Thus, the intersection of sustainability, tourism management and tourism economics has been extensively explored in the scientific literature in these fields. The results of our study, as well as those of other studies (Niñerola et.al. 2019; Nobanee et al. 2021), suggest that sustainability is increasingly recognized as a critical issue in the tourism industry, with consequences for both environmental protection and socio-economic development. However, in our study the top three authors who have made significant contributions to academic papers on this topic are Dwyer L, Pulido-Fernandez JI, and Perles-Ribes JF. Authors often approach the topic of destination competitiveness from various perspectives, incorporating different theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and empirical evidence. For example, some authors such as Porter, M.E., Ritchie, J.R., Crouch, G.R., and Enright, M.J., Kozak, M., Buhalis, D., Yoon, Y., Mihalic, T., Uysal, M., Pike, S. and others have conducted important studies on destination competitiveness. In terms of academic institutions, the University of Alicante has produced the highest number of scholarly papers, with a total of 46, making it the most productive institution in this area. The University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria closely follows with 45 papers. Spain and China are leading countries in terms of research output, with a majority of publications being single-authored papers (SCP), followed by multi-authored papers. Additionally, Spain has the highest number of citations, with a total of 4946, followed by the UK (3426), China (3353), and Australia (3292). Academic institutions, scholarly papers, and citations play crucial roles in advancing knowledge, fostering innovation, and driving societal progress (Vogel 2012; Baas et al. 2020). In this respect, if the results of bibliometric studies are used and analyzed in both theoretical and practical environments, it can pave the way for numerous advancements (Avila-Robinson & Wakabayashi 2018).

In conclusion, this study on destination competitiveness literature has shed light on the current state of research in this field. By analyzing a comprehensive dataset of scholarly articles, this study has identified key trends and patterns in the existing literature. Leong et al. (2021) emphasized that the results of such studies significantly contribute to the literature and activities, playing a crucial role in enhancing destination competitiveness. Based on this, our study also provides valuable information on bibliometric research on destination competitiveness, making an additional contribution to these scientific and practical fields.

The findings of this study reveal that destination competitiveness is an emerging and dynamic field that has gained increasing attention from researchers in recent years. The study has identified a growing interest in the topic by various authors, institutions and countries worldwide. Furthermore, this study has identified the most commonly used keywords, journals, and authors in this field, providing insights into the intellectual structure of the literature. The field exhibits an annual growth rate of scientific publications of approximately 12%, and the average age of documents is approximately 6 years. The production of this literature involved 4221 authors and 828 distinct sources. The majority of the documents, accounting for 67%, were articles, while the remaining 33% comprised other types of academic papers.

This study emphasizes the potential for policymakers and researchers to make informed decisions and formulate effective strategies by utilizing the insights obtained from bibliometric analyses on destination competitiveness. Additionally, researchers can contribute to the existing literature in this field by addressing the limitations identified in previous studies. Importantly, these findings highlight the importance for policymakers to prioritize initiatives that promote collaboration, provide support to researchers, leverage the expertise of influential authors and institutions, and emphasize the importance of tourism service quality.

Limitations

However, this study also reveals some limitations and gaps in the existing literature. For instance, the contribution of scientific communities from emerging tourism destinations is still very low within the evaluated database. And this is one of the main limitations of this study, which was limited to the Web of Science. Future studies should evaluate the literature based on other international and national databases. However, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the destination competitiveness literature, highlighting its state of the art. The findings of this study may contribute to the existing knowledge in this field and provide directions for future research to advance the understanding of destination competitiveness and its implications for destination management and policy.

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