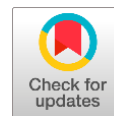


Evolution and trends in tourism conflict studies (2004-2024): A bibliometrics review



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Abstract As the global tourism industry has rapidly grown, tourist destinations are facing increasing environmental pressures, social conflicts, and cultural clashes. Tourism conflict has become one of the key issues hindering sustainable tourism development. This study aims to explore the research hotspots in tourism conflict studies, providing insights into current trends and future research directions. A comprehensive review of 804 research articles on tourism conflict is carried out based on bibliometric records from the Web of Science Core Collection database ranging from 2004 and 2024. Techniques such as coauthorship analysis, cocitation analysis, and keyword co-occurrence analysis using the CiteSpace software was employed for this review. The results reveal that China, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia are the major countries contributing to tourism conflict research. The research topics have evolved from perceptions to root causes, from case studies to patterns, and from phenomena to essence, gradually forming five main research topics: 1) the conceptual connotations and theoretical interpretations of conflict; 2) different conflict situations and typical cases; 3) causes of conflicts; 4) conflict governance; 5) reflections on tourism conflicts from a sustainable perspective. This study provides insights into the current state, research hotspots, knowledge gaps, and future research directions in the field of tourism conflict, benefiting scholars, industry practitioners, and government agencies.

Keywords: stakeholders, causes, governance, sustainability

1. Introduction

As the global tourism industry has rapidly grown, tourist destinations are facing increasing environmental pressures, social conflicts, and cultural clashes (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Yang et al., 2013). During the tourism development process, conflicting interests among stakeholders such as tourists, residents, businesses, and governments often lead to opposition and contradiction (Almeida et al., 2018), making tourism conflict one of the key issues hindering sustainable tourism development. As early as the 1980s, scholars began to pay attention to the environmental and social problems caused by tourism activities (Butler, 1980; Mathieson & Wall, 1982). With increasing awareness of sustainable development, tourism conflict has gradually become an important research topic in tourism studies.

Tourism conflict refers to a social phenomenon in tourism activities where owing to the competing interests of multiple stakeholders, divergent opinions, emotional opposition, or even behavioral confrontation ultimately arise among the parties involved (Yan et al., 2020). Tourism conflicts present characteristics such as diversity, complexity, and dynamism. The types of stakeholders can be categorized as follows: tourist-resident conflicts (Farmaki, 2024), intracommunity conflicts (Hien & Thanh, 2022), and stakeholder conflicts (Zhong et al., 2020). In terms of manifestations, they range from minor value disagreements to intense behavioral confrontations (Guan et al., 2021). The developmental stages typically undergo processes of emergence, escalation, and mitigation (Wang & Yotsumoto, 2019). Overall, at tourist destinations, differences in values and conflicting interests among stakeholders are the root causes of tourism conflicts (Zhong et al., 2020).

Research on tourism conflicts can be traced back to the 1980s. Butler (1980) proposed the tourist area life cycle theory, pointing out that environmental degradation and resident dissatisfaction are likely to occur in the later stages of tourism development. Ap (1992) introduced social exchange theory into tourism research and analyzed residents' perceptions and attitudes toward the impacts of tourism. In the 21st century, as the scope and intensity of tourism activities expanded, tourism conflicts became increasingly prominent, research topics became more diverse, research methods became more varied, and research content continued to expand and deepen.

With respect to causal mechanisms, scholars have analyzed the formation mechanisms of conflicts arising from the imbalance of interests among multiple stakeholders in tourist destinations on the basis of theories such as resource dependence theory, social exchange theory, tragedy of the commons theory, and stakeholder theory. In terms of characterizing features, the basic landscape of tourism conflicts has been preliminarily sketched in terms of stakeholder types, manifestations, and developmental stages. Empirical studies have examined the negative effects of tourism conflicts on residents' perceptions (Moyle et al., 2013), community participation (Mensah & Adofo, 2013), and destination image (Zhong et al., 2020). With respect



to governance strategies, pathways for mitigating tourism conflicts have been proposed from various perspectives, such as participatory governance (Erdmenger, 2023), interest coordination (Snyman & Bricker, 2021), and emotional bonds (Joo & Woosnam, 2020).

As research continues to expand, a few scholars have attempted to review certain aspects of tourism conflict studies. As shown in Table 1, Yang et al. (2013) summarized the theoretical foundations and analytical frameworks of tourism community conflict research; Kim et al. (2021) reviewed the factors influencing residents' perceptions of community-involved tourism; and Thyne & Lawson (2001) outlined the research status of tourist–resident interaction relationships. These valuable attempts have laid the foundation for a systematic understanding of tourism conflict research, but they have not provided a comprehensive portrayal of the developmental trajectory, knowledge structure, and cutting-edge trends within this research domain.

This study uses a scientometric perspective to systematically review the tourism conflict research literature published between 2004 and 2024. Specifically, coauthorship analysis is used to map the research landscape, cocitation analysis is employed to trace the evolution of research topics, and keyword co-occurrence analysis is utilized to capture the changing research hotspots. On the basis of these analyses, this study summarizes the deficiencies in tourism conflict research and proposes future research directions.

Table 1 Comparison of review articles related to tourism conflict.

Authors	Perspective /research areas	Methodology	Highlights of results
Silva et al. (2023)	Protected areas and nature-based tourism	Bibliometric review	Reviewing the past 30 years of research on protected areas and nature tourism, the main conflict centers on environmental protection and tourism development.
Mkonyi (2022)	Human-carnivore conflict management in Tanzania	Systematic review	The current situation and research trends of human-carnivore conflict management were evaluated, and preventive interventions were recommended.
Wang et al. (2022)	Tourism destination resilience	Bibliometric analysis and literature review	This paper evaluates the resilience of tourism destinations through bibliometric analysis, and finds that conflicts among stakeholders mainly focus on resource utilization, risk management and benefit distribution.
Yang et al. (2021)	Community conflicts in national parks	Systematic review and bibliometric analysis	The conflicts between communities and national parks are mainly caused by land use, ecological protection policies, development and utilization, and unfair profit distribution, which puts forward the importance of stakeholder cooperation and ecological compensation mechanism.
León-Gómez et al. (2021)	Sustainable tourism development and economic growth	Bibliometric review and analysis	This paper evaluates the impact of sustainable tourism development on economic growth through bibliometric analysis and finds that conflicts among stakeholders mainly focus on resource utilization and economic benefit distribution.
Zmyślony et al. (2020)	Social conflicts in tourism	Literature review	The study explores social conflicts in tourism development, including cultural, economic and environmental conflicts, emphasizing cooperation among stakeholders.
Costa et al. (2020)	Social conflicts in tourism development	Literature review	This paper analyzes the common social conflicts in tourism development, especially in resource utilization and cultural identity, and puts forward the necessity of stakeholder cooperation.

2. Methods

CiteSpace is a widely used scientometric analysis tool internationally and has significant advantages in knowledge map construction and burst detection (Chen, 2014). The extensive indexing and citation data of the Web of Science Core Collection make it particularly suitable for bibliometric analysis (Birkle et al., 2020), justifying the selection of the WOS database as the main source for the literature data. Keywords such as "tourism conflict," "community," "conflict," etc., were used in the topic search, covering titles, abstracts, author keywords, and supplementary keywords. The time span is set to "2004–2024." The search query is set as follows: (TS=("tourism conflict" OR "conflict")) AND Language: (English) AND Document Types: (Article OR Review) AND Publication Years: (2004–2024). The search was conducted on May 30, 2024, with the database updated on May 30, 2024. The initial search yielded 2,898 results. In the first round of screening, conference papers, book chapters, and other types were excluded, retaining only 2,599 English journal articles and reviews, as these are generally considered more influential and reputable (Weißer et al., 2020). After systematic screening and manual verification, 804 publications were

obtained for the analysis sample, spanning the period from 2004--2024. This sample size can comprehensively reflect the overall state of tourism conflict research, and the strict selection process ensures the reliability of the analysis results.

3. Results

3.1. Overall overview

This study systematically reviews 804 SSCI/SCI papers on tourism conflict published between 2004 and 2024. The analysis reveals a steady increase in research output over the past two decades, with a notable surge in publications after 2016. This indicates that tourism conflict has become a popular issue of common concern for both academia and industry. As shown in Figure 1, the publication trend from 2004 to 2024 demonstrates different developmental stages.

2004--2010 was the initial development stage. The number of publications on tourism conflict was relatively small, with a relatively flat growth rate and an average of fewer than 15 papers published per year, indicating a late start and limited attention to the research topic during this period.

The period from 2011--2015 was a steady growth stage. After 2011, tourism conflict research entered a period of rapid development, with a significant increase in the number of published articles. The average annual publication output increased noticeably, indicating an initial rise in research interest. In 2014 and 2015, the number of published papers exceeded 28 each year, suggesting that the research topic was gradually gaining widespread attention in academia.

The period of 2016--2019 was a rapid development stage. The annual publication output increased from 29 papers in 2016 to 80 papers in 2019, with the total literature volume increasing nearly 2.75 times within three years.

The period of 2020--2022 was the peak period. After 2020, although affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of research publications slightly fluctuated, with a slight decline to 73 papers; however, overall, the number of publications remained relatively high. Research interest has resurged, reaching 96 papers in 2021 and a peak of 102 papers in 2022. The combined publication output in these two years was 198 papers, indicating that the tourism conflict issue has attracted widespread attention and discussion in academia.

In 2023 and 2024, the number of research publications was 92 and 36 papers, respectively. The apparent decrease in publication numbers for 2023 and 2024 is not indicative of a decline in research interest but rather reflects the ongoing nature of the publication process. Many papers from this period are still in the submission, review, or publication pipeline. As shown in Figure 1, the publication trend from 2004 to 2024 demonstrates different developmental stages.

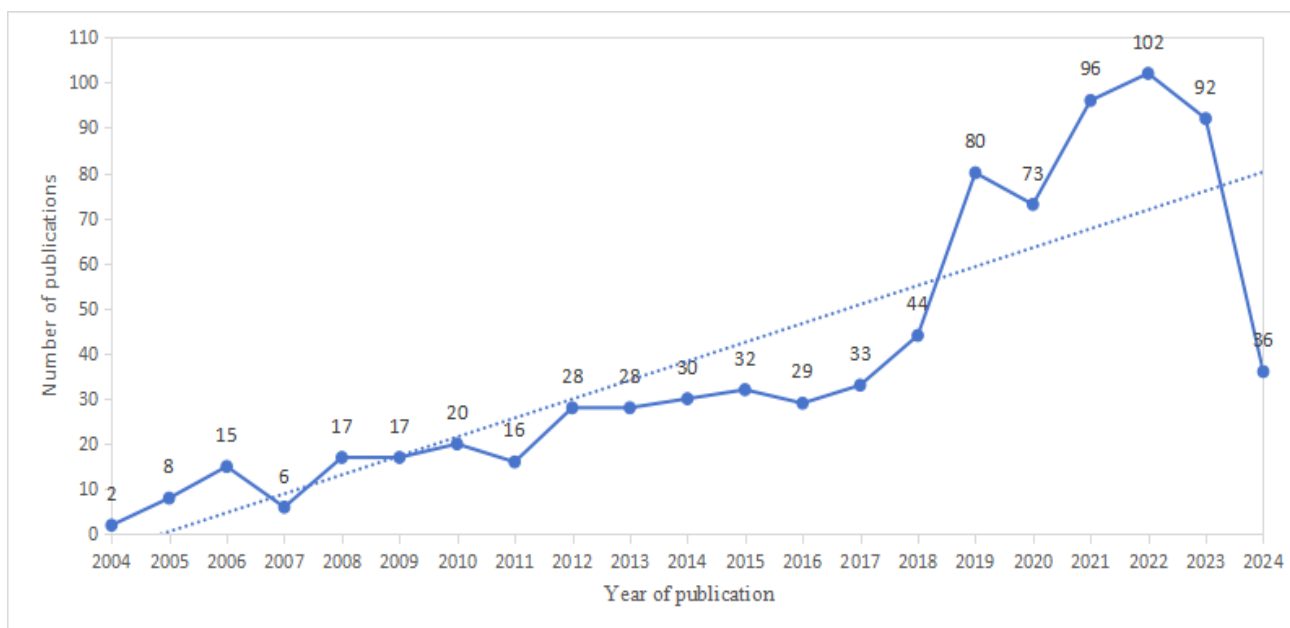


Figure 1 Trend of publications from 2004 - 2024.

3.2. Coauthorship analysis

This analysis progressively examines cooperation at three levels that's is macro level of intercountry/regional collaboration, the meso level of interinstitutional collaboration, and the micro level of author collaboration. Although cooperation networks can be viewed at different levels, but this study uses the country collaboration network as an example. In scientific collaboration networks, nodes represent research topics, with links between nodes represent collaborative relationships between research entities.

3.2.1. Collaboration network between countries and regions

The scientific collaboration network among countries/regions consists of 37 nodes and 107 links (Figure 2). In relation to continental distribution, countries that are focused on tourism conflict research are concentrated mainly in Asia, North America, Europe, and Oceania. Among them, Asia and North America possess the most robust research forces, whereas European and Oceanian countries also have considerable outputs. In contrast, the participation of South American and African countries is relatively low.

In terms of publication quantity, China ranks first with 163 papers, accounting for 16.72% of the total sample. The United States (146 papers), the United Kingdom (116 papers), Australia (102 papers), and Spain (59 papers) follow. The combined paper count of these five countries is 586, constituting 60.10% of the total, making them the most active regions in tourism conflict research. Notably, although developed countries in Europe and the United States generally dominate, China, as a major tourism country, has experienced rapid growth in research output in recent years and has emerged as the world leader.

In terms of collaboration intensity, nodes surrounding countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and China display prominent purple rings, indicating that they are core nodes in the international collaboration network with closer connections to other countries (Zhang et al., 2022). Figure 2 illustrates the scientific collaboration network among countries and regions, where the node size represents a country's publication output, and line thickness indicates the strength of collaboration.

As shown in Figure 2, the United States occupies a central position in this field, with close collaborations (thicker lines) with the United Kingdom, China, Australia, Canada, Spain, and others. China's research strength has significantly improved in recent years, surpassing the United States to become the largest node, and China has established strong collaborative relationships with traditional tourism research powerhouses such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Some developed European countries, such as the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy; Oceanian countries, such as Australia and New Zealand; and Asian countries, such as Israel and India, are also important participants in this field, reflecting that tourism conflict has become a global research topic.

In terms of regional distribution, North America, Europe, Asia, and Oceania are the main research forces, with collaboration networks concentrated on these four continents. In contrast, only Brazil represents South America, and only South Africa represents Africa in this landscape, indicating that these two continents have relatively little attention to tourism conflict research. However, notably, the rise of emerging economies such as China, India, and Brazil has injected new vitality into tourism conflict research. Some small countries highly dependent on the tourism industry, such as Switzerland, Portugal, Denmark, and Cyprus, although having a relatively small overall research scale, have paid considerable attention to tourism conflict, which may be related to the prominent contradictions they face in the tourism development process. Resolving tourism conflicts requires localized approaches, and the experiences of small countries may provide valuable insights.

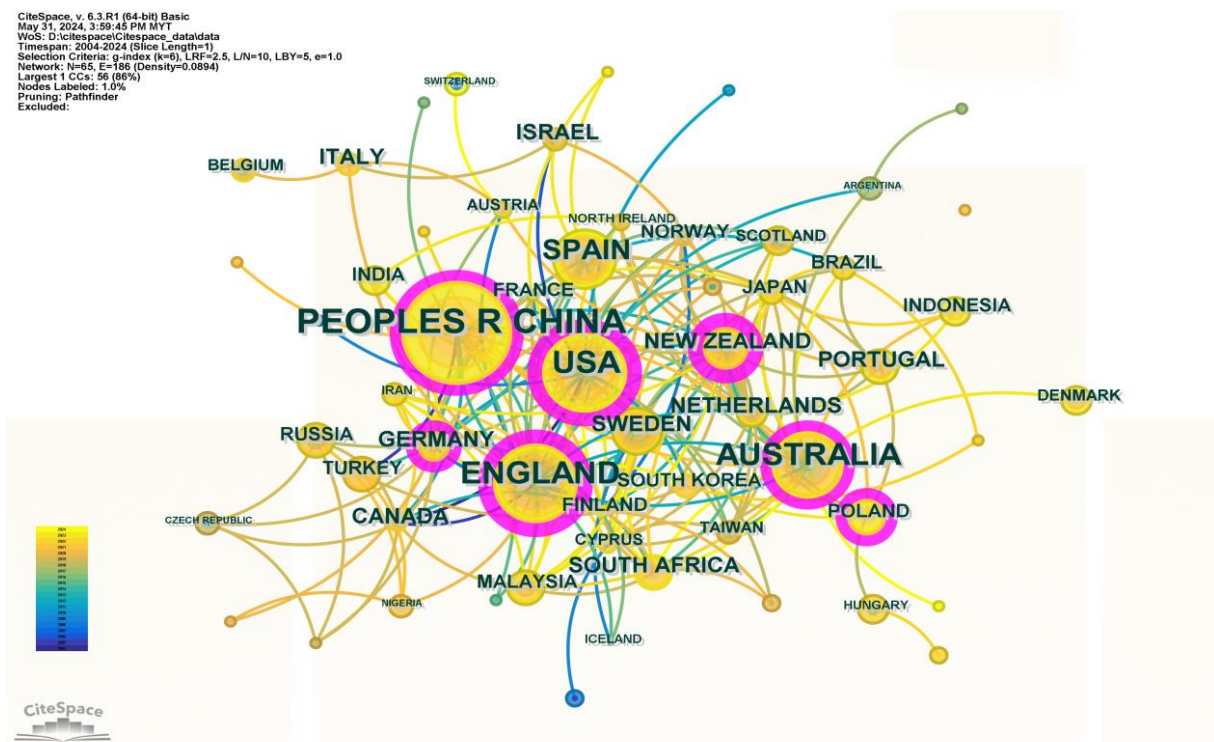


Figure 2 Country/region collaboration network.

3.2.2. Research institutions and authors

In terms of research institutions, the collaboration network shows a scarce trend, with a network density of 0.0081, indicating a severe lack of communication and collaboration between different institutions. Figure 3 illustrates the institutional collaboration network in tourism conflict research, where node size represents publication output and line thickness indicates the strength of collaboration. Institutions such as Griffith University in Australia, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and Sun Yat-sen University have relatively high research outputs, with most being comprehensive research universities.

As shown in Table 2, among the top three institutions with the highest publication counts, China holds two positions: Hong Kong Polytechnic University, with 22 papers, and Sun Yat-sen University, with 16 papers, reflecting China's important role in tourism conflict research. As a representative institution in China, Sun Yat-sen University has established relatively close collaborations with renowned universities such as Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Griffith University in Australia and occupies a central position in the network. This indicates that Sun Yat-sen University has a significant influence on the field of tourism conflict research, both in China and globally. Notably, Griffith University, known for its strength in science and engineering, and Hong Kong Polytechnic University, with a focus on tourism management research, have also demonstrated outstanding performance in the tourism conflict domain. Griffith University holds an important position in the network, as it initiated research on tourism sustainability at an early stage, with tourism conflict being one of its significant research directions. Additionally, the University of Johannesburg represents Africa in this network. As the largest tourist destination country in Africa, the booming tourism industry in South Africa has inevitably led to various conflicts. The University of Johannesburg's collaboration with the University of Southern Cross in Australia is conducive to learning from the experiences of developed countries and enhancing South Africa's tourism management capabilities. This highlights the need for institutions from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to participate in tourism conflict research, enabling multiperspective and multilevel discussions.

However, currently, the institutions involved in tourism conflict research are primarily academic, with limited representation from government agencies, industry organizations, and communities. There is a lack of communication and connections among research teams from different institutions and countries, resulting in a failure to form a close cross-regional collaboration network. This may, to some extent, hinder academic innovation and enhance international influence in tourism conflict research. Overall, institutional tourism conflict research has the characteristics of "high concentration, homogeneity, and insufficient collaboration." On the one hand, a few prestigious comprehensive universities monopolize most of their research resources, whereas local institutions and industry organizations have low participation rates. On the other hand, teams from different institutions and disciplinary backgrounds lack communication and integration, making it difficult to achieve complementary advantages and collaborative innovation.

Table 2 List of TOP10 high-frequency institutions

Frequency	Year of first appearance	Institution name
30	2013	Griffith University
22	2005	Hong Kong Polytechnic University
16	2014	Sun Yat Sen University
14	2016	University of Johannesburg
18	2008	Arizona State University
7	2018	State University System of Florida
7	2014	Ben Gurion University
7	2012	KU Leuven
6	2016	University of Surrey
6	2008	California State University

The network density is 0.0091, indicating that collaboration among authors is not intensive and that collaborative relationships are relatively sparse. As illustrated in Figure 3, the co-authors reference network shows 45 nodes and 9 links, suggesting a low frequency of collaboration among different authors in the field of tourism conflict research. Through further analysis of the figure, the node size represents an author's publication output, with larger nodes indicating higher publication counts. Links between nodes represent collaborative relationships among authors, with more and thicker lines indicating higher collaboration frequencies. In the sample data, 44 authors have conducted tourism conflict research, but their collaboration networks are relatively limited in scope. Larger nodes such as Saarinen, Jarkko, Fan, Daisy X F, Becken, and Susanne indicate that these authors have higher publication outputs in the field of tourism conflict research. The colors and layers next to the nodes represent research activity levels in different periods. Some authors have multiple and thicker lines, such as Saarinen and Jarkko with other authors, indicating more frequent collaborations, whereas some authors, such as Avraham and Eli, appear as isolated nodes, suggesting relatively few or no collaborations.

In terms of collaborative groups, the figure displays some close-knit collaborative groups, such as Becken and Susanne, with other authors forming a relatively close collaborative group. However, some nodes are scattered across different parts of

the figure, indicating that these authors have relatively independent collaboration networks with fewer collaborative relationships. In the author collaboration network, highly productive authors such as Campo, Sara, Gelbman, Alon, Kruczek, Zygmunt, Stepchenkova, Svetlana, Szromek, and Adam R demonstrate their activity and influence in this field. These high-output authors are mostly affiliated with renowned research institutions and possess strong research capabilities and extensive academic influence. Researchers' scientific collaborations are primarily concentrated within supervisor–student and colleague relationships, with a relatively low proportion of cross-institutional and cross-national collaborations. Some institutions have formed research groups internally, with dense member relationship networks, but there is a lack of communication and connections among research teams from different institutions and countries, resulting in a failure to form a close cross-regional collaboration network. This may, to some extent, hinder academic innovation and enhance international influence in tourism conflict research. See Figure 3.

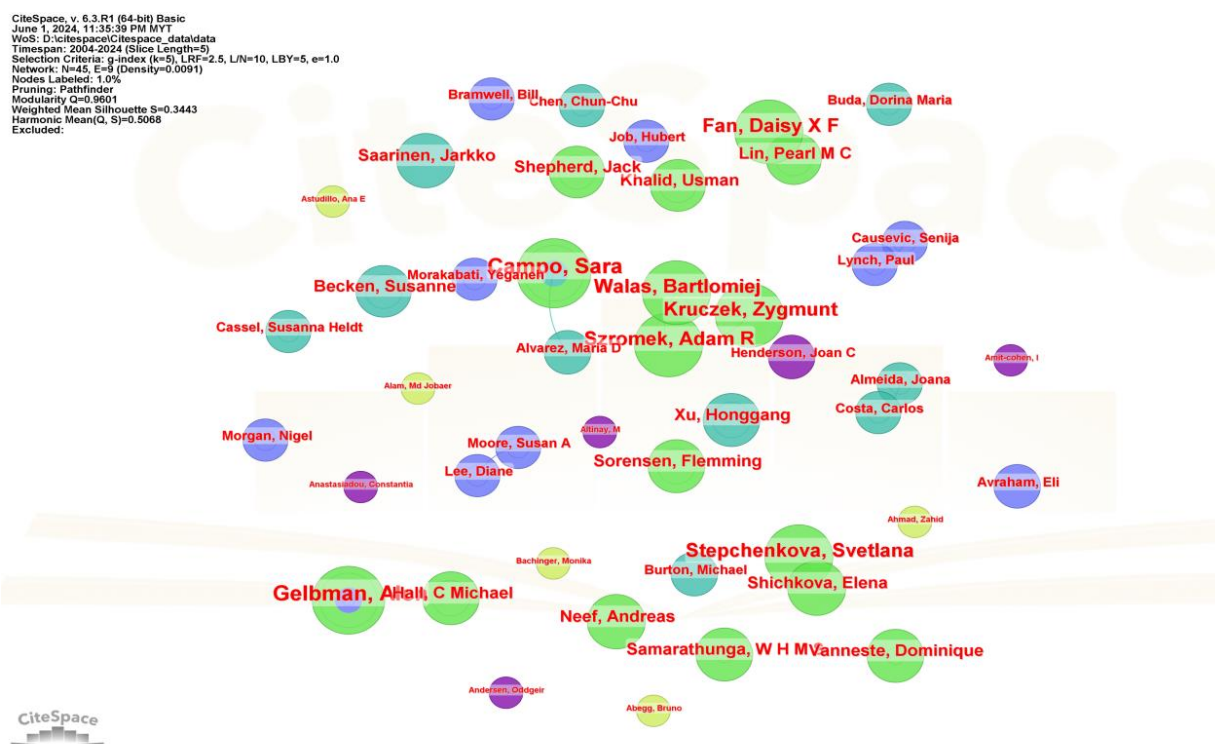


Figure 3 Coauthors coreference network.

3.3. Cocitation analysis

This section employs the LLR algorithm to cluster the cocitation network of literature by extracting noun phrases from the titles, keywords, and abstracts of the cited publications to form cluster labels. This method has been effectively validated by studies across different domains (Yin et al., 2019).

By analyzing the cocitation network shown in Figure 4, the evolution of the knowledge structure in tourism conflict research can be depicted in a more three-dimensional and dynamic manner. From a temporal perspective, this landscape covers representative publications from 2004–2024, with research nodes from different periods presented in different colors. Earlier studies from 2004–2007 and 2008–2011 are represented by deep blue and blue–green colors, respectively, with relatively few publications, whereas many publications have emerged since 2016, particularly those from 2018–2020, depicted as yellow and orange nodes, gradually becoming the core of the network. This trend visually illustrates the developmental trajectory of tourism conflict research, which has undergone a process from inception to growth and then to prosperity.

In terms of the evolution of research topics, earlier studies, such as Dredge (2010), focused on analyzing case studies of cultural conflicts, environmental conflicts, and other phenomena, forming the peripheral area of the network. In contrast, later studies, such as Wang et al. (2019), emphasized uncovering the deeper conflicts among different entities, such as scenic areas, communities, and stakeholders, and explored institutional and mechanism innovations such as multicentered governance and collaborative planning. This reflects a deepening of tourism conflict research from descriptive phenomena to mechanistic interpretations. As time progresses, some key nodes, such as those in Wang et al. (2019) and Guo & Jordan (2022), have continuously increased in centrality, playing an important role in connecting different research topics and integrating multidisciplinary theories. Overall, although research topics have become increasingly diverse, theoretical dialogs and empirical explorations across domains and contexts have continued to deepen around core issues such as sustainable development,

multistakeholder cogovernance, and collaborative synergies, exhibiting a strong "centripetal force." This suggests that tourism conflict research is transitioning from dispersed studies toward a more systematic approach.

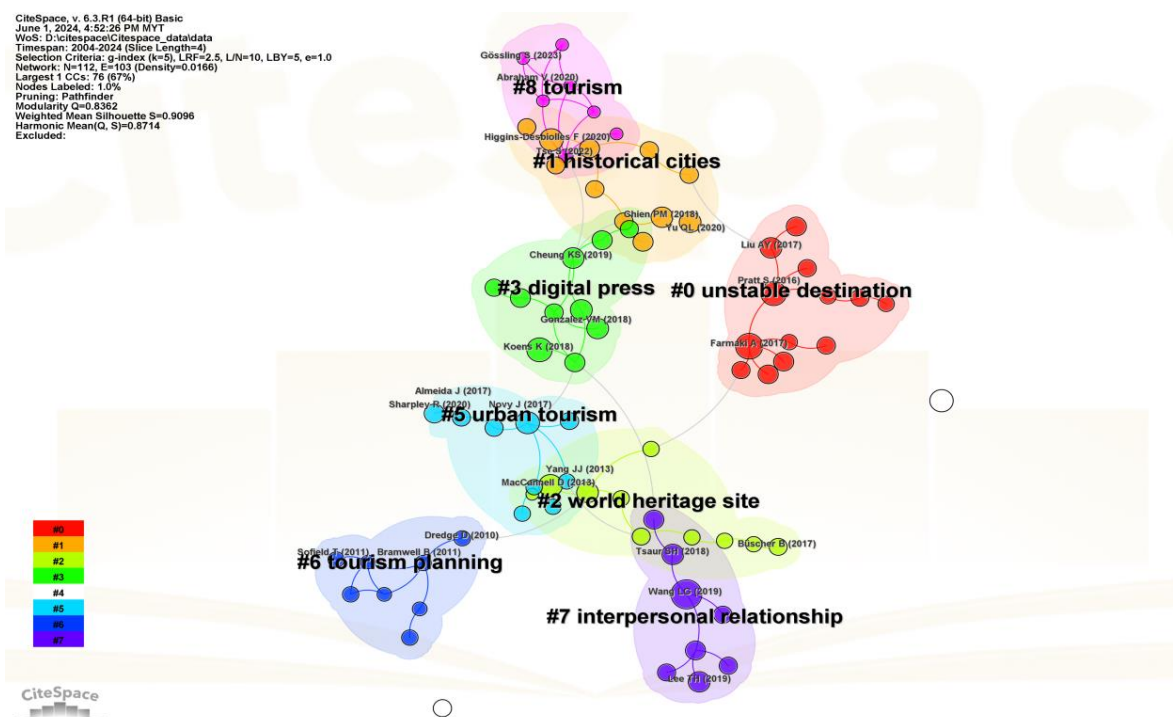


Figure 4 Document cocitation network.

Figure 4 consists of 112 nodes (cited publications) and 103 links (cocitation relationships). Tourism conflict research has formed eight clusters, reflecting the main research directions in this field. The modularity Q value of 0.7709 exceeds the 0.3 threshold, indicating a reasonable cluster structure. The average silhouette value of the eight clusters is 0.9271, reflecting highly reliable overall cluster quality. The silhouette values for each cluster are #0 0.914, #1 0.998, #2 0.963, #3 1.0, #5 0.945, #6 0.918, #7 0.81, and #8 0.955, which are all far above the 0.7 credibility standard. Among these, clusters such as "unstable destinations," "historical cities," "world heritage sites," and "urban tourism" focus on conflicts in different types of tourist destinations, revealing the close associations between tourism conflicts and destination types and development stages. Clusters such as "tourism planning" and "interpersonal relationships" approach the topic from the perspectives of tourism planning and interpersonal relationships, emphasizing the roles of institutional and emotional factors in conflict generation and resolution. The "digital press" cluster highlights the important influence of digital media in modern tourism conflicts. These clusters construct the knowledge spectrum of tourism conflict research from different dimensions, but further exploration of the relationships among clusters and the inherent logic of each topic is needed.

Cluster #0, "unstable destination," focuses on the negative impacts of overdevelopment and overutilization of tourism destinations, such as environmental pressures and declining tourist experiences. The concept of sustainable tourism emphasizes that tourism development should be constrained by the carrying capacity of resources and the environment. However, driven by economic interests, many destinations blindly pursue economic benefits while neglecting ecological balance (Candia et al., 2020). Over time, environmental degradation can, in turn, constrain the sustainable development of the tourism industry, forming a vicious cycle (Insch, 2020).

Clusters #1 "historical cities," #2 "world heritage site," and #5 "urban tourism" reflect the tensions between heritage preservation and tourism development. Historical and cultural heritage sites are important resources for the tourism industry but are also hotspots for conflicts. Large numbers of tourists exert tremendous pressure on ancient ruins and sites, and violations occur, triggering dissatisfaction from various parties (Yang et al., 2013). Excessive commercialization driven by the pursuit of economic benefits can also damage the authenticity and integrity of heritage sites (Dredge, 2010).

Cluster #3, "digital press," reveals the transformations brought about by new technologies in the information age for tourism conflict research. On the one hand, online reviews, social network data, and other sources provide new data and analytical tools for conflict monitoring (Gonzalez et al., 2018). On the other hand, in the era of self-media, the public has more diverse channels to express demands, and public opinion risks cannot be ignored. Tourism management authorities should enhance their digital governance capabilities, utilizing big data analysis to identify potential issues and resolve conflicts at an early stage.

Cluster #6, "tourism planning," reflects the important role of tourism planning in mitigating and preventing conflicts, highlighting the need to address and resolve tourism conflicts from the source. Scientific planning is crucial for achieving multiplan integration and multistakeholder win-win situations. Governments should strengthen overall coordination, grant communities and residents more participatory rights, and formulate development blueprints that align with reality on the basis of broad consensus (Reindrawati, 2023). A systems thinking approach should be adopted to provide spatial guarantees for tourists and residents in areas such as land use, industrial layout, and public services, coordinating the demands of various stakeholders, optimizing the allocation of tourism resources, and controlling the intensity of tourism development (Scolozzi et al., 2015).

Cluster #7, "interpersonal relationship," analyzes the impact of interactions among entities on conflicts. Tourists, residents, and practitioners are the main actors in tourism activities, and increased tourism contacts have expanded the breadth and frequency of group interactions. However, cultural differences and conflicting interests have also fostered contradictions. Positive interactions rely on perspective-taking and seeking common ground while respecting differences (Joo et al., 2018). By undertaking community building, improving benefit compensation and sharing mechanisms and enhancing residents' sense of gain, understanding and harmony among different parties can be promoted.

Cluster #8, "ecotourism," highlights the importance of the sustainable development concept. Ecotourism emerged as an industry in response to the increasing tensions between tourism and the environment. Initiatives such as nature education and ecological experiences can deepen tourists' environmental awareness, while reasonably controlling visitor numbers and promoting civilized tourism are necessary requirements on the basis of environmental carrying capacity (Reimer & Walter, 2013). The development of community-based ecotourism, with residents' participation and benefits, can stimulate their sense of ownership in environmental protection.

3.3. Keyword co-occurrence analysis

Figure 5 displays the keyword co-occurrence network used in tourism conflict research. It can be observed that "conflict" has consistently been the core keyword in this domain, but the surrounding hot terms have evolved across different stages, reflecting the dynamic adjustments in research topic selection. As shown in Figure 6, the analysis of the top 25 keywords with the strongest citation bursts reveals lists the high-frequency keywords that emerged during different periods, with "conflict" ranking 6th in frequency and centrality, highlighting the core status of the conflict topic in tourism research as supplementary evidence.

The close links between "conflict" and keywords such as "governance," "collaboration," and "political ecology" indicate that conflict governance, multistakeholder collaboration, and political ecology research have become important issues in this field (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Reed, 1997; Bramwell & Lane, 2000). Keywords such as "authenticity," "conservation," and "sustainability" reflect widespread attention to multidimensional conflicts, including cultural conflicts (Cole, 2007), environmental conflicts (Kousis, 2000), and sustainable development (Tosun, 2001).

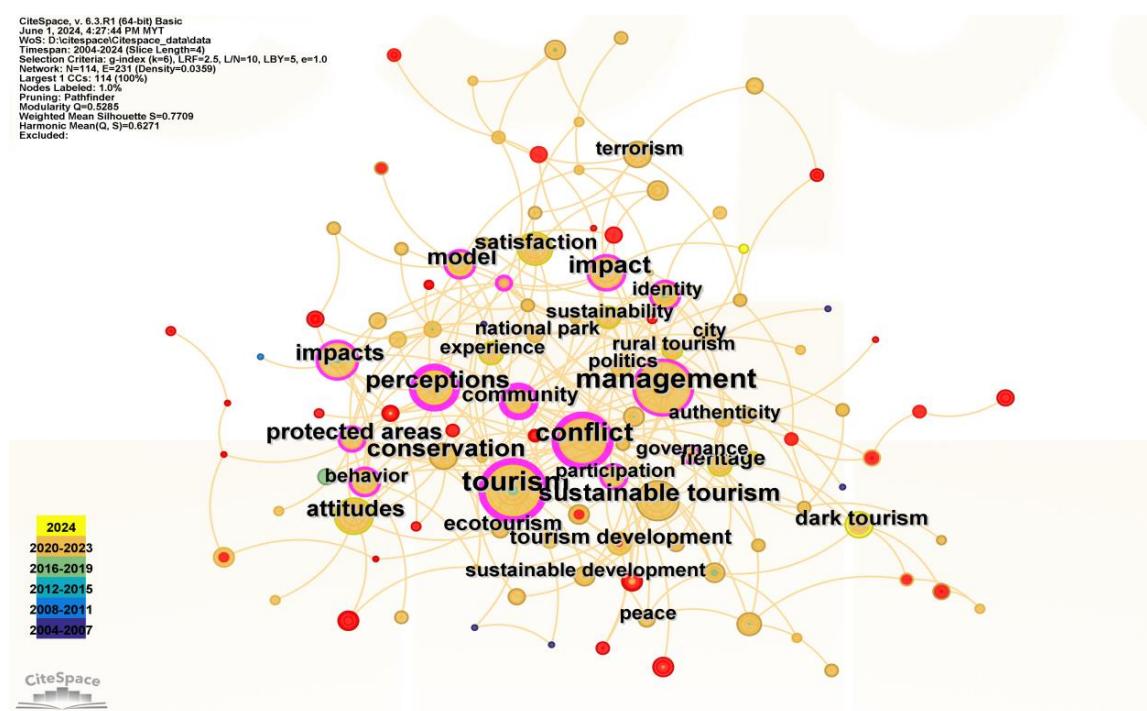


Figure 5 Keyword co-occurrence network.

From a temporal perspective, tourism conflict research has undergone a progressive development from phenomena to essence, from singular to comprehensive, and from the present to the future. In 1987, Perdue et al. proposed the tourism impact perception model, initiating the systematic study of tourism conflicts. In the following two decades, traditional topics such as "tourism," "place," "conservation," and "authenticity" frequently emerged, with a focus on exploring surface-level conflicts related to the environment, culture, power, and other aspects in scenic areas and communities (Pearce, 1996; Ap & Crompton, 1993; Greenwood, 1989).

In the early 21st century, with the rise of new topics such as "identity" (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012), "governance" (Hall, 2011), and "political ecology" (Douglas, 2014), researchers began to explain the root causes of conflicts from deeper factors such as identity crises, governance deficiencies, and political-ecological imbalances. The emergence of representative keywords such as "collaboration," "ecotourism," and "governance" from 2004--2015 reflects that tourism conflict governance models started to transition from being dominated by single stakeholders to multistakeholder collaborative participation (Poetry et al., 2021), from coarse control to refined governance (Hall, 2011), and from quantity control to optimizing visitor behavior (Cole, 2006) and improving community participation (Liu et al., 2014).

After 2016, the high-intensity coupling of "conflict" with "sustainability," "world heritage," "economic growth," and "residents" indicated that sustainable development has become the guiding value for resolving conflicts (Tao & Wall, 2009), and the trade-off between heritage preservation and economic growth has received increasing attention (Chen et al., 2014). Academia has placed greater emphasis on deconstructing conflicts from stakeholder perspectives, viewing enhancing community participation and residents' sense of gain as a breakthrough for conflict management (Tosun, 2006; Bello et al., 2016). In recent years, as heritage preservation, economic growth, and other grand narratives have accelerated their integration with tourism conflict research, coordinating tourism development and conflict governance at a larger scale and from a higher standpoint has reached a consensus (Su & Wall, 2014). In the future, keywords such as "country" and "disaster" foreshadow the further expansion of tourism conflict research into macro domains such as national governance (Hall, 2021) and disaster response (Ritchie, 2004). Several researchers have explored the complexities of tourism conflicts from various perspectives. Yang et al. (2013) examined the role of cultural identity in conflict generation, whereas Bello et al. (2016) focused on the importance of community participation in conflict resolution. Tosun (2006) and Liu et al. (2014) further emphasized the need for stakeholder engagement and benefit-sharing mechanisms to mitigate conflicts in tourism destinations.

Specifically, conflict research has undergone a progressive development from phenomena to mechanisms, from specific to general, and from the present to the future. In the 1980s, scholars such as Mathieson (1982) and Butler (1980) were among the earliest to pay attention to real-world issues such as the cultural impacts and environmental effects of tourism activities. In the 21st century, the emergence of some key nodes marked new expansions in research topics: for example, Uriely (2005) and Cole (2007) introduced the identity perspective, whereas Dredge (2010) and Hall (2013) explored institutional innovations such as multicentered governance, reflecting a deepening of conflict research from descriptive phenomena to mechanistic interpretations. In recent years, sustainable development has become the dominant paradigm in tourism conflict research, with scholars such as Winter (2020) and Bianchi (2018) emphasizing the need to reflect on deeper-level questions such as "whose interests" and "whose tourism," aiming to achieve civilizational exchange and mutual learning through "multistakeholder participation and coconstruction and sharing." Table 3 presents the top 25 keywords identified in tourism conflict research.

Table 3 Keywords of tourism conflict research (top 25).

NO.	Keyword	Year of first appearance	frequency	centrality	NO.	Keyword	Year of first appearance	frequency	centrality
1	tourism	2004	156	0.53	14	dark tourism	2011	32	0.04
2	management	2009	131	0.18	15	heritage	2012	32	0.04
3	conflict	2005	110	0.14	16	protected areas	2011	31	0.02
4	sustainable	2008	77	0.13	17	terrorism	2016	30	0.05
5	tourism								
5	perceptions	2009	76	0.07	18	behavior	2010	25	0.05
6	impact	2009	65	0.09	19	experience	2012	24	0.01
7	conservation	2008	63	0.13	20	ecotourism	2009	24	0.02
8	attitudes	2015	58	0.07	21	participation	2012	23	0.02
9	impacts	2008	57	0.08	22	rural tourism	2015	22	0.02
10	model	2008	47	0.06	23	sustainable	2019	20	0
						development			
11	community	2014	43	0.11	24	peace	2016	20	0.02
12	tourism	2013	38	0.1	25	city	2007	19	0.01
	development								
13	satisfaction	2013	33	0.04					

As shown in Figure 6, the analysis of the top 25 keywords with the strongest citation bursts reveals lists the high-frequency keywords that emerged during different periods, with "conflict" ranking 6th in frequency and centrality, highlighting the core status of the conflict topic in tourism research as supplementary evidence.

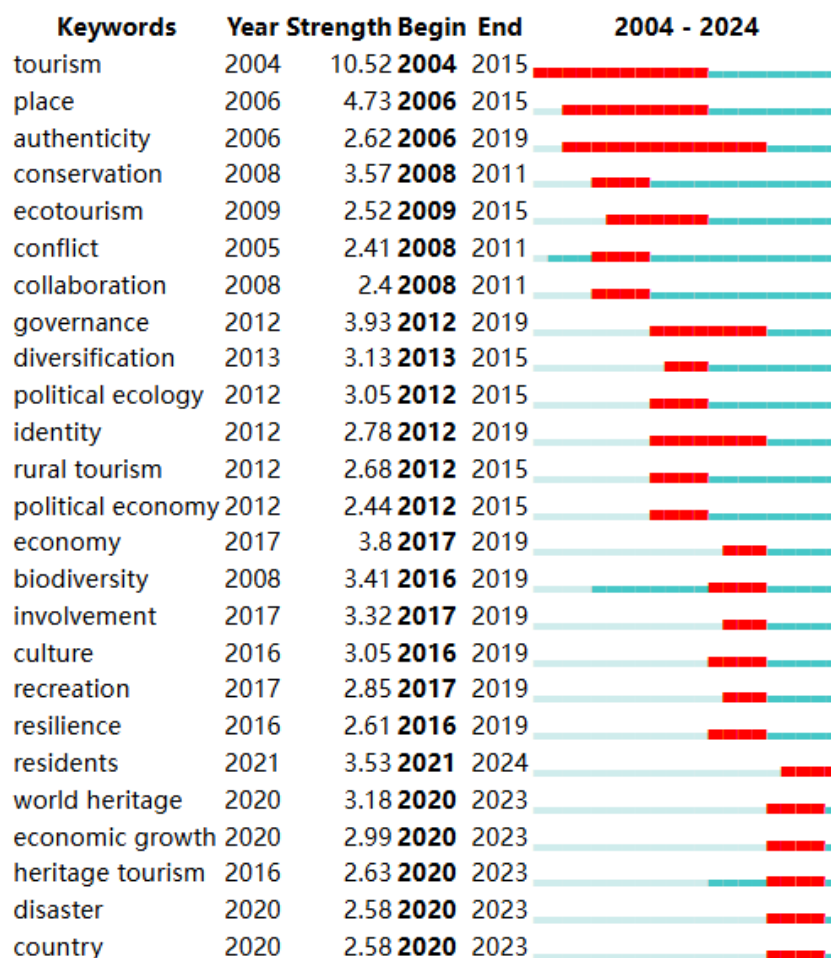


Figure 6 Top 25 keywords with the strongest citation bursts.

4. Discussion

4.1. Research hotspots and evolution

Based on the findings on cocitation clusters, it can be observed that the research hotspots in tourism conflict studies have been continuously evolving, with increasingly rich content and diverse perspectives. The research focus has gradually shifted from superficial descriptions of conflict phenomena in the early stages to systematic exploration of the inherent causes, evolution mechanisms, and governance approaches of various types of conflicts. Different themes are intertwined but have unique emphases. After the literature is reviewed, this paper reveals the characteristics, connections, and differences of each theme from the perspectives of the conflict connotation definition, real-world scenario analysis, cause and impact analysis, governance strategy discussion, and sustainable development examination and further categorizes tourism conflict research into five major themes.

4.1.1. Conceptual connotation and theoretical interpretation of conflict

The logical starting point of tourism conflict research is to clarify the conceptual connotation of "conflict." By reviewing studies from different disciplinary perspectives, it is widely recognized in the academic community that tourism conflict is the result of multistakeholder interactions and a dynamic process from cognitive divergence to behavioral confrontation (Yang et al., 2013). The conceptual definition lays the foundation for case analysis and mechanism exploration. With the deepening of sustainable development concepts, conflict issues have increasingly risen to a strategic level concerning the survival and development of the tourism industry (Gössling, 2020). This has prompted scholars to reflect on the theoretical connotations of tourism conflicts from macro perspectives such as philosophy and sociology (Cole, 2007; Jamal & Getz, 1995), but systematic theoretical interpretations are still insufficient and require further theoretical exploration.

4.1.2. *Different conflict scenarios and typical cases*

To clarify the conceptual connotations, scholars have focused on real-world contexts and analyzed the typical characteristics and governance approaches of tourism conflicts in different scenarios, forming a series of valuable case studies. In ecotourism destinations, conflicts between visitor behavior management and resource protection are particularly prominent because of limited environmental carrying capacity (Llausàs, 2019). The tension between commercial development and ancient relic preservation at cultural heritage sites reflects the erosion of cultural authenticity by tourism commodification (Zhang et al., 2021). Urban communities often experience conflicts due to the imbalance between tourism growth and residents' quality of life (Biagi et al., 2020). Moreover, improper crisis management and public opinion response to emergencies can also intensify conflicts (Öberg, 2021). These studies focus on specific contexts where conflicts occur and discuss the comprehensive influence of multiple factors, such as environmental carrying capacity, cultural evolution, interest relations, and public governance, but systematic comparisons between different cases and the extraction of general patterns need to be strengthened.

4.1.3. *Causes and impacts of conflicts*

As research has progressed, scholars have begun to investigate the root causes and impacts of tourism conflicts. Many studies note that institutional deficiencies and interest imbalances are deep-seated reasons for brewing conflicts. The lack of scientific planning and overall management, coupled with poor departmental coordination and local regulatory absence, has made violations and chaos difficult to curb (Tao & Wall, 2009). Economic benefits are skewed toward a small group, community participation is insufficient, and public discourse power is lacking, resulting in a sense of unfairness (Bello et al., 2016). Divergent cultural values and the loss of identity have also intensified the antagonistic emotions between tourists and residents (Yang et al., 2013). The negative environmental and social impacts further exacerbate the conflict situation and constrain the sustainable development of the tourism industry (Chen et al., 2014). Studies on causes and impacts have enhanced the understanding of conflict formation mechanisms and potential risks, but they still lack systematic comparative analysis across scenarios and cases, making it difficult to form universally applicable theoretical explanations.

4.1.4. *Practice in conflict governance*

Conflict governance has always been an important mission for tourism management departments and researchers. At the theoretical level, scholars propose adhering to integrated concepts, improving multicenter governance systems, and strengthening departmental and regional coordination (Hall, 2011). Emphasis is placed on the role of communities and residents in planning and decision-making, establishing sound benefit-sharing mechanisms, and enhancing public participation and a sense of gain (Damanik, 2024). In practice, scenic areas generally have strengthened ecological and environmental education, refined visitor behavior guidance, and optimized tour route design (Cole, 2006). By building multistakeholder consultation and dialog platforms and innovating community participation models, understanding is enhanced, and conflicts are resolved through seeking common ground while preserving differences (Liu et al., 2014). Governance research provides theoretical guidance and practical wisdom for mitigating conflicts, but further deepening is needed in terms of system construction and mechanism innovation. It is also necessary to strengthen the coupling of theory and practice, macro and micro levels, and extract universally applicable conflict governance paradigms.

4.1.5. *Reflections on tourism conflicts from a sustainable perspective*

In addition to focusing on specific conflict scenarios, causes, and countermeasures, some scholars have begun to reflect on tourism conflict issues from a more macro perspective. Sustainable tourism emphasizes coordinating the relationship between tourism activities and the environment, society, and culture within the scope of resource and environmental carrying capacity, pursuing long-term and lasting comprehensive benefits (Liu, 2003). In this context, tourism conflicts involve not only the struggle for rights and interests at the individual/group level but also the sustainable development of regions, countries, and even all of humanity (Hall, 2021). This requires us to examine deep-seated issues such as "whose interests," "whose tourism," and "whose development" (Bianchi, 2018) and to guide conflict governance with the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, achieving exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations through "multiparty participation, coconstruction, and sharing" (Winter, 2020). Sustainable development has become valuable for tourism conflict research, but how to coordinate tourism development and conflict governance on a larger scale and construct a new paradigm of civilizational exchanges featuring "harmony in diversity and win-win cooperation" at a higher level remains a cutting-edge issue that urgently needs to be explored.

4.2. *Research gaps and knowledge voids*

A systematic review of research hotspots and evolutionary paths in tourism conflict studies revealed that significant progress has been made in theoretical construction, empirical analysis, and governance practices. However, considering the nearly 20-year research history, there are still some knowledge gaps that urgently need to be bridged.

4.2.1. *Lack of a tourism conflict analysis paradigm and measurement system*

Although tourism conflict research from different disciplinary perspectives is flourishing, a unified theoretical analysis framework and measurement index system have not yet been formed. Existing studies either focus on specific conflict scenarios such as environmental capacity conflicts (Long et al., 2022) or cultural commodification conflicts (Bai & Weng, 2023) or emphasize superficial descriptions such as uncivilized tourist behavior (Cole, 2006) and negative resident perceptions (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011). Few studies have systematically outlined the generation logic, evolution mechanism, and governance paths of conflicts at the macro, meso, and micro levels. This is partly due to the weak theoretical foundation. Cocitation analysis of the literature shows that there is currently a lack of systematic interpretation of the basic characteristics, causal mechanisms, and dynamic processes of tourism conflicts, making it difficult to form universally applicable explanations for different research contexts and cases. The root cause of this problem lies in the fact that tourism conflicts involve multiple dimensions, such as social, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects, with a wide range of stakeholders and prominent specificity in different conflict scenarios, making it difficult to extract commonalities.

4.2.2. *Lack of dynamic analysis of multistakeholder interactions*

Tourism conflict is a dynamic process of multistakeholder interactions, but current research lacks a detailed portrayal of the corresponding process mechanism. Static and cross-sectional descriptions are common, whereas dynamic and longitudinal analyses are rare. More attention has been given to the binary game between tourists and residents (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Yang et al., 2013), while a systematic examination of the interactions among multiple actors such as the government, enterprises, and communities is lacking (Bello et al., 2016). The motivational analysis of behavioral strategy choices among actors needs to be deepened, and the hypothesized relationships between attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral responses need to be tested. Future research should draw on theoretical methods such as evolutionary game theory (Yan et al., 2021) and multiagent modeling (Balbi et al., 2013) to simulate the decision-making processes of multiple actors dynamically and reveal the general patterns of interest structure evolution and rule order generation.

4.2.3. *Lack of conflict governance system design*

The fundamental solution to resolving conflicts lies in institutional and mechanism innovation, but current research still lacks a systematic design of the conflict governance system. Some studies propose governance paths such as optimizing top-level design, strengthening departmental coordination (Hall, 2011), and improving community participation (Tosun, 2006), but they lack actionable plans in terms of institutional arrangements and mechanism construction, and the summary of existing governance experiences is insufficient, making it difficult to form best practices for reference. Cocitation cluster analysis of the literature shows that tourism conflict governance involves multiple actors, such as scenic areas, communities, residents, and the government, and requires collaborative efforts in various aspects, such as laws and regulations, planning formulation, organizational structure, and cultural guidance. However, current research on the top-level design and systematic construction of the governance system is still rudimentary and lacks systematicity and operability. As a systematic project, tourism conflict governance is inseparable from the coordinated efforts and dynamic optimization of elements such as laws, policies, planning, standards, organizations, and culture. It is necessary to reshape the governance system of scenic areas, strengthen interest coordination and integrated management (Wang & Yotsumoto, 2019), innovate community participation models, guide multiparty dialog, enhance benefit sharing (Bello et al., 2017), strengthen behavioral norms, increase education and guidance efforts, enhance public civilized awareness (Cole, 2006), improve risk early warning and emergency response mechanisms, and enhance crisis management capabilities (Ritchie, 2004).

4.2.4. *Insufficient attention to cultural inheritance*

Tourism conflicts not only reflect the struggle for interest but also concern the overall development of people and the sustainable inheritance of civilizations. However, previous studies have focused mostly on economic and environmental performance, with insufficient consideration of cultural diversity, identity recognition, emotional exchange, and social inclusiveness. Merely relying on interest compensation measures and behavioral control measures can only temporarily alleviate symptoms but cannot fundamentally resolve the contradictions between actors. There is a lack of in-depth examination of the deep-seated needs of different stakeholders and a limited pursuit of the goal of promoting social fairness and justice. The significance of tourism conflict governance is not only to promote industrial upgrading but also to enhance people-to-people friendships and eliminate civilizational barriers through equal exchanges and mutual learning (Winter, 2020).

5. Conclusion

This study employs a scientometric perspective to systematically review 804 SSCI/SCI papers published from 2004--2024, aiming to present a multidimensional and dynamic overall picture of tourism conflict research. The results show that China, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia are the main contributing countries in this field, with collaboration

networks gradually evolving toward multilateralization and flattening. The research themes have undergone a progressive development from perception to roots, from individual cases to general patterns, and from phenomena to essence, gradually forming five major research topics: 1) the conceptual connotation and theoretical interpretation of conflict, 2) different conflict scenarios and typical cases, 3) causes and impacts of conflicts, 4) conflict governance from theory to practice, and 5) reflections on tourism conflicts from a sustainability perspective. These themes are intertwined and jointly promote the development of tourism conflict research.

In the future, tourism conflict research should address the theoretical and practical issues revealed by knowledge mapping and expand in the following directions:

(1) Drawing on theoretical methods such as evolutionary game theory and multiagent modeling to strengthen the general interpretation of tourism conflict generation mechanisms and evolutionary paths. To clarify the conceptual connotations, we systematically compare the commonalities and characteristics of different types of conflicts, dynamically simulate the decision-making processes of stakeholders, and reveal the general patterns of cooperation and games among actors.

(2) Focusing on typical conflict cases and conducting empirical research across scenarios and cases. By constructing a systematic evaluation index via comparative analysis and process tracing methods, the success and failure experiences of scenic areas and communities at different development stages and governance models can be analyzed in detail, and best practices can be extracted for reference.

(3) Improving the conflict governance system with multistakeholder participation. At the meso level, top-level design should be optimized, comprehensive coordination should be strengthened, and sound information sharing and interest coordination mechanisms should be established. At the micro level, community participation models should be innovated, employment channels for residents should be expanded, public discourse power should be increased, the sense of gain should be increased, and a long-term mechanism for source governance, dynamic governance, and refined governance should be formed.

(4) Expanding the cultural and ideological connotations of conflict governance. Excellent traditional cultural resources in different regions should be explored, emotional identity should be enhanced, and spiritual life should be enriched. The interest compensation and sharing mechanisms should be improved, the gap between the rich and the poor should be narrowed, and social inclusiveness should be enhanced. Tourism activities should be guided by the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, and the well-rounded development of people and the symbiosis of different civilizations through equal exchanges and mutual learning should be achieved.

(5) Increasing the application of new technologies such as AI in tourism conflicts. Big data can be used to obtain real-time information on the carrying capacity of tourism destinations, AI can be used to analyze tourists' social media expressions, and potential conflicts can be promptly discovered, which can play an important role in early warning, monitoring, and analysis of tourism conflicts.

Ethical Considerations

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

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