

Assessing Rural Tourism's Contribution to Sustainable Cities and Communities: A Systematic Review (2022-2024) --Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	HELIYON-D-24-65649
Article Type:	Systematic review and meta-analysis
Section/Category:	Social Sciences
Keywords:	Country/regional contexts; Cultural heritage; Rural tourism; Socio-cultural aspect; Sustainable community; SDG 11; Systematic Review
Abstract:	<p>Rural tourism (RT) plays an important role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but attention to sustainable cities and rural areas (SDG 11) in the rural context is fragmented. Following the guideline of PRISMA 2020, this study presents a systematic review of 66 empirical studies on RT and SDG 11 from the Web of Science (WoS) defined categories (2022-2024, hereafter RT-SDG11). Coding frameworks were derived from the literature. Multiple criteria for data screening were adopted (see section 2.1), and interrater coding agreement reached 92%. Content analysis was then used for the data. analysis. Results showed that most RT-SDG11 studies were mainly published in 7 journals; however, the distribution of research contexts by country/region was skewed towards Asian contexts (n = 53). Second, most researchers used the socio-cultural aspect (n = 51), followed by the environmental (n = 32) and economic (n = 21) aspects. Third, the preservation of cultural heritage (SDG 11.4; n = 28) and regional development planning (SDG 11.a; n = 23) were two streams of SDG 11. Concerning the four UN principles, we found that safety (n = 37), comprising SDGs 11.1, 11.2, and 11.4) and sustainability (n = 32; comprising SDGs 11.6, 11.a, and 11.b) were most explored. Fourth, empirical studies on economic sustainability, socio-cultural, and environmental safety within Asian contexts were identified as the mainstream of RT-SDG11, while studies on community resilience are relatively scarce. The data of this research focused on the WoS-defined categories. Future research can include other databases (e.g., Scopus). Implications for the tourism industry are provided. This article was funded by the National Science and Technology Council.</p>

Heliyon

Thank you for agreeing
to review this manuscript





PRISMA 2020 Checklist

Section and Topic	Item #	Checklist item	Location where item is reported
TITLE			
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review.	p.1
ABSTRACT			
Abstract	2	See the PRISMA 2020 for Abstracts checklist.	Please see RISMA 2020 for Abstracts Checklist
INTRODUCTION			
Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of existing knowledge.	p.5; sec. 1.3
Objectives	4	Provide an explicit statement of the objective(s) or question(s) the review addresses.	p.6; sec. 1.3
METHODS			
Eligibility criteria	5	Specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review and how studies were grouped for the syntheses.	p.7; sec. 2.1
Information sources	6	Specify all databases, registers, websites, organisations, reference lists and other sources searched or consulted to identify studies. Specify the date when each source was last searched or consulted.	p.7; sec. 2.1
Search strategy	7	Present the full search strategies for all databases, registers and websites, including any filters and limits used.	p.7; sec. 2.1
Selection process	8	Specify the methods used to decide whether a study met the inclusion criteria of the review, including how many reviewers screened each record and each report retrieved, whether they worked independently, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	p.7; sec. 2.1
Data collection process	9	Specify the methods used to collect data from reports, including how many reviewers collected data from each report, whether they worked independently, any processes for obtaining or confirming data from study investigators, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	p.7; sec. 2.1
Data items	10a	List and define all outcomes for which data were sought. Specify whether all results that were compatible with each outcome domain in each study were sought (e.g. for all measures, time points, analyses), and if not, the methods used to decide which results to collect.	p.7; sec. 2.1
	10b	List and define all other variables for which data were sought (e.g. participant and intervention characteristics, funding sources). Describe any assumptions made about any missing or unclear information.	p.7; sec. 2.1
Study risk of bias assessment	11	Specify the methods used to assess risk of bias in the included studies, including details of the tool(s) used, how many reviewers assessed each study and whether they worked independently, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	n/a
Effect measures	12	Specify for each outcome the effect measure(s) (e.g. risk ratio, mean difference) used in the synthesis or presentation of results.	n/a
Synthesis methods	13a	Describe the processes used to decide which studies were eligible for each synthesis (e.g. tabulating the study intervention characteristics and comparing against the planned groups for each synthesis (item #5)).	pp.7-10; sec. 2.2
	13b	Describe any methods required to prepare the data for presentation or synthesis, such as handling of missing summary statistics, or data conversions.	pp.7-10; sec. 2.2
	13c	Describe any methods used to tabulate or visually display results of individual studies and syntheses.	pp.7-10; sec. 2.2
	13d	Describe any methods used to synthesize results and provide a rationale for the choice(s). If meta-analysis was performed, describe the model(s), method(s) to identify the presence and extent of statistical heterogeneity, and software package(s) used.	n/a
	13e	Describe any methods used to explore possible causes of heterogeneity among study results (e.g. subgroup analysis, meta-regression).	n/a
	13f	Describe any sensitivity analyses conducted to assess robustness of the synthesized results.	n/a



PRISMA 2020 Checklist

Section and Topic	Item #	Checklist item	Location where item is reported
Reporting bias assessment	14	Describe any methods used to assess risk of bias due to missing results in a synthesis (arising from reporting biases).	n/a
Certainty assessment	15	Describe any methods used to assess certainty (or confidence) in the body of evidence for an outcome.	n/a
RESULTS			
Study selection	16a	Describe the results of the search and selection process, from the number of records identified in the search to the number of studies included in the review, ideally using a flow diagram.	pp.10-20; sec. 3
	16b	Cite studies that might appear to meet the inclusion criteria, but which were excluded, and explain why they were excluded.	pp.10-20; sec. 3
Study characteristics	17	Cite each included study and present its characteristics.	pp.10-20; sec. 3
Risk of bias in studies	18	Present assessments of risk of bias for each included study.	pp.10-20; sec. 3
Results of individual studies	19	For all outcomes, present, for each study: (a) summary statistics for each group (where appropriate) and (b) an effect estimate and its precision (e.g. confidence/credible interval), ideally using structured tables or plots.	pp.10-20; sec. 3
Results of syntheses	20a	For each synthesis, briefly summarise the characteristics and risk of bias among contributing studies.	pp.10-20; sec. 3
	20b	Present results of all statistical syntheses conducted. If meta-analysis was done, present for each the summary estimate and its precision (e.g. confidence/credible interval) and measures of statistical heterogeneity. If comparing groups, describe the direction of the effect.	pp.10-20; sec. 3
	20c	Present results of all investigations of possible causes of heterogeneity among study results.	n/a
	20d	Present results of all sensitivity analyses conducted to assess the robustness of the synthesized results.	n/a
Reporting biases	21	Present assessments of risk of bias due to missing results (arising from reporting biases) for each synthesis assessed.	n/a
Certainty of evidence	22	Present assessments of certainty (or confidence) in the body of evidence for each outcome assessed.	n/a
DISCUSSION			
Discussion	23a	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence.	pp. 21-26. Sec. 4
	23b	Discuss any limitations of the evidence included in the review.	p.27. Sec. 5
	23c	Discuss any limitations of the review processes used.	p.27. Sec. 5
	23d	Discuss implications of the results for practice, policy, and future research.	p.28. Sec. 6
OTHER INFORMATION			
Registration and protocol	24a	Provide registration information for the review, including register name and registration number, or state that the review was not registered.	n/a
	24b	Indicate where the review protocol can be accessed, or state that a protocol was not prepared.	n/a
	24c	Describe and explain any amendments to information provided at registration or in the protocol.	n/a
Support	25	Describe sources of financial or non-financial support for the review, and the role of the funders or sponsors in the review.	p.29
Competing	26	Declare any competing interests of review authors.	p.29



PRISMA 2020 Checklist

Section and Topic	Item #	Checklist item	Location where item is reported
interests			
Availability of data, code and other materials	27	Report which of the following are publicly available and where they can be found: template data collection forms; data extracted from included studies; data used for all analyses; analytic code; any other materials used in the review.	p.29

From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. This work is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



PRISMA 2020 for Abstracts Checklist

Section and Topic	Item #	Checklist item	Reported (Yes/No)
TITLE			
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review.	Yes, line 1
BACKGROUND			
Objectives	2	Provide an explicit statement of the main objective(s) or question(s) the review addresses.	Yes, lines 6-7
METHODS			
Eligibility criteria	3	Specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review.	Yes, lines 9-10
Information sources	4	Specify the information sources (e.g. databases, registers) used to identify studies and the date when each was last searched.	Yes, line 7
Risk of bias	5	Specify the methods used to assess risk of bias in the included studies.	No
Synthesis of results	6	Specify the methods used to present and synthesise results.	Yes, lines 10
RESULTS			
Included studies	7	Give the total number of included studies and participants and summarise relevant characteristics of studies.	Yes, lines 7;10-20
Synthesis of results	8	Present results for main outcomes, preferably indicating the number of included studies and participants for each. If meta-analysis was done, report the summary estimate and confidence/credible interval. If comparing groups, indicate the direction of the effect (i.e. which group is favoured).	Yes, lines 7;10-20
DISCUSSION			
Limitations of evidence	9	Provide a brief summary of the limitations of the evidence included in the review (e.g. study risk of bias, inconsistency and imprecision).	Yes, lines 20-21
Interpretation	10	Provide a general interpretation of the results and important implications.	Yes, line 21
OTHER			
Funding	11	Specify the primary source of funding for the review.	Yes, line 22
Registration	12	Provide the register name and registration number.	No

From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. This work is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit

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Assessing Rural Tourism's Contribution to Sustainable Cities and Communities: A Systematic Review (2022-2024)

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A conflict of interest statement

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

An ethics statement

This article is a systematic literature review focused on the analysis of published articles. There are no human participants in this article. Institutional review board approval for this ethical/informed consent statement was not applicable.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Harvard University's Dataverse at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/U4XOXR>.

1 **Assessing Rural Tourism’s Contribution to Sustainable Cities and** 2 3 **Communities: A Systematic Review (2022-2024)**

3 **Abstract**

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17 and sustainability ($n = 32$; comprising SDGs 11.6, 11.a, and 11.b) were most explored. Fourth,
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21 Future research can include other databases (e.g., Scopus). Implications for the tourism
22 industry are provided. This article was funded by the National Science and Technology Council.

23
24 **Keywords:** Country/regional contexts, Cultural heritage, Rural tourism, Socio-cultural aspect,
25 Sustainable community, SDG 11, Systematic review.

1. Introduction

Rural tourism (RT) is essential for preserving cultural heritage, protecting natural landscapes, and stimulating local economies (Karali et al., 2024; Lane, 1994; Valderrama & Polanco, 2022). Based on a narrative approach, Lane (1994) furnished an overview of tourism development in rural areas as a pioneering review of RT research. RT does occur as a distinct activity with unique characteristics that vary by people and place, therefore entailing a special link between RT and the notion of sustainability (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015; Telfer & Sharpley, 2007). On the other hand, RT is highlighted as experiential activities fitted to the cultural assets, emphasising visitors' engagement with the natural environment to increase the well-being of suburban regions (Hsiao & Tang, 2024). Meanwhile, it is increasingly perceived as a tool for improving the economic viability of hitherto neglected regions (Utami et al., 2023). However, it can irritate local communities due to overtourism, leading to overcrowding (Ghaderi et al., 2022).

According to a global survey conducted by the United Nations World Tourism Organization in 2023, policies for sustainable communities are mainly generated by tourism activities that transpire in rural areas. Of the 47 countries that responded to the survey, 29 had a response rate that considered RT as an indirect priority in formulating policies to make communities sustainable. Most of them, 59%, had RT as one of their top priorities. Rural destinations for sustainable development are envisioned based on the principles of edifying a prosperous economy, safeguarding nature's biodiversity, and preserving cultural heritage.

1.1 Tourism research and the UN's SDGs: from urban to rural perspectives

Tourism research has often been amalgamated with sustainable development for decades. These blended topics have captivated substantial research engagement, particularly following

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the United Nations (UN) inception of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. According to the UN (2015), one of the goals is to seek inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements, which is also known as SDG 11. The ten sub-goals of SDG 11 include: ensuring adequate, safe, and affordable housing (11.1), providing accessible and sustainable transport systems (11.2), promoting inclusive participation in planning and management (11.3), protecting cultural and natural heritage (11.4), and strengthening disaster resilience (11.5). It is also important to reduce environmental impacts by prioritising air quality and waste management (11.6), to promote positive economic, social, and environmental links between urban and rural areas (11.a), to implement tailored sustainable development policies (11.b), and to help least developed countries build sustainable and resilient buildings using local materials (11.c). However, most SDG 11 research focuses on cities or metropolitan regions (Fernández-Díaz et al., 2023). This study analysed SDG 11 from a rural perspective.

1.2 Research on the UN macro elements and ten sub-goals of SDG 11

Previous research also focused on the four UN macro elements (inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable) and 10 sub-goals (SDGs 11.1-11.7; 11.a-11.c) individually. Few scholars have related the four high-level principles to SDG 11 sub-goals. This study suggested some connections between them. First, inclusiveness ensures that everyone in the community has fair and equal access to tourism advantages and opportunities (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). Researchers say inclusive tourism may help individuals participate in their communities and make decisions. Huo et al. (2023) suggested including many stakeholders in planning and management for inclusive development. Inclusive socio-ecological regions have improved community connections and social fairness by linking place meanings to locally defined landscape units (Masterson et al., 2017). Thus, SDG 11 objectives 11.3 and 11.7 promote tourism benefits equity via inclusivity.

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79 Safety is protecting society from danger, risk, or injury (Hollnagel, 2014). Second,
80 governments and policymakers must balance sustainable development and safe living
81 circumstances. While Adabre and Chan (2019) advocate for sustainable and affordable housing,
82 Tiwari and Phillip (2021) argue for safe, high-quality public transit. Consequently, preserving
83 and safeguarding cultural and natural heritage from negative impacts is essential for
84 maintaining community safety (Bonazza et al., 2021). Thus, community safety requires
85 protecting against negative cultural and natural heritage consequences. By securing local
86 people's living environments and heritage resources, the safety aspect of RT supports SDGs
87 11.1, 11.2, and 11.4.

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89 Third, resilience involves how well communities can adapt to and recover from such
90 disturbances, whether natural or man-made, such as disasters or other economic disruptions
91 (Southwick et al., 2014). Relatedly, the available literature shows that community resilience
92 can be built through preparedness and adaptive responses to such challenges (Imperiale &
93 Vanclay, 2021). Sheller's (2020) study explores the rationale for rebuilding tourism by
94 developing resilient and sustainable tourism infrastructure based on domestic raw materials. In
95 a related article, Heijman et al. (2019) explain that rural resilience is the ability of a rural area
96 to absorb and successfully adapt to external shocks, thus ensuring that the quality of life
97 remains sufficiently good. Therefore, the resilience dimension promotes SDGs 11.5 and 11.c,
98 by raising awareness about disaster risk reduction and how local resources can be used to build
99 resilience in rural destinations.

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101 Fourth, sustainability balances current and future requirements (Hall, 2019). Scholars
102 emphasise that tourism greatly influences physical surroundings, requiring eco-friendly travel.

103 C. Liu et al. (2020) and Nooripoor et al. (2021) renegotiated two RT issues: motivating
104 communities to care for the environment and raising eco-awareness. Effective planning and
105 targeted policies yield urban-rural economic, social, and environmental benefits (Baffoe et al.,
106 2021; Pan et al., 2018). RT raises eco-awareness and reduces the effect by adopting sustainable
107 development policies, contributing to SDGs 11.6, 11.a, and 11.b.

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109 The regional context is important for RT research. Past research has sought to identify and
110 explore whether areas have unique characteristics for development. For example, Joshi et al.
111 (2024) across Europe demonstrate that RT can influence local economies through the growth
112 of communities, where sustainable preservation of heritage tends to be a priority in most cases.
113 Ramaano (2023) argues that geographic information systems benefit local people with major
114 operations in Africa through cultural and community-based activities. American researchers
115 assessed residents' notions of RT inclusivity and how it hurdles sustainability (Soulard et al.,
116 2023). Therefore, RT research emphasised that it is important to accommodate the local social,
117 cultural, and environmental conditions.

118
119 **1.3 Reviews on RT research and sustainability: A need to link RT and its relevance to**
120 **SDG 11**

121 A deeper understanding of RT and its relationship to sustainability is critical (Madanaguli et
122 al., 2023; Qu et al., 2022). Regarding systematic review, researchers have shown interest in
123 synthesising and integrating RT and sustainable concepts (Rosalina et al., 2021). A systematic
124 review underlines the potential of indicating positive impacts on rural sustainability and giving
125 directions toward further research simultaneously for creating change in the positive direction
126 in rural areas. The main purpose of this analysis is to systematically review the study trends on
127 RT and their relevance to the goal of sustainable community development in SDG 11 (RT-

128 SDG11). Most previous review studies have been applied to different contexts, such as “rural
129 tourism and rural homestay tourism” (Janjua et al., 2021), “forty years of the rural tourism
130 research” (Karali et al., 2024), and “rural tourism and sustainable territorial development”
131 (Valderrama & Polanco, 2022). Compared to related papers, the current study offers significant
132 contributions to RT research and the broader goals of SDG 11. This is achieved by establishing
133 a link to RT-SDG11, emphasising inclusive human empowerment, safety promotion, resilience,
134 and sustainable communities in rural areas. In terms of the research period, recent reviews have
135 covered the period from 2010 to 2022 as the last year of research (Joshi et al., 2024; Madanaguli
136 et al., 2023). Nevertheless, there is a need for more updated publications to observe the
137 transformation of research trends, especially after the COVID-19 outbreak (Karali et al., 2024).
138 The current research is being carried out to bring knowledge to date on research developments
139 and trends in RT-SDG11. The research raises the following research questions (RQs):

140
141 RQ1: What are the trends in empirical RT research on SDG 11 from 2022 to 2024 (first quarter),
142 including journals and countries/regions over time?

143 RQ2: What are the trends in research aspects (e.g., economic, socio-cultural, environmental)
144 that researchers have adopted?

145 RQ3: Among the empirical research in the field, which sub-goals of SDG 11 (e.g., 11.1-11.7,
146 11.a, 11.b, 11.c) have been most researched in rural tourism, and how do they relate to
147 the UN’s missions of SDG 11 (inclusive, safe, resilient, sustainable)?

148 RQ4: Among the empirical research in the field, what are the trends in the relationships
149 between aspects of rural tourism research and SDG 11 in specific countries/regions?

150

151 **2. Methods**

152 **2.1 Data**

153 Based on PRISMA, procedures for data inclusion using paper identification, screening,
154 eligibility, and finally, the included data set. In identification, we used "rural tourism" as a
155 search term to acquire applicable research papers in the categories of hospitality, leisure, sport,
156 and tourism. This research category is characterised by the Web of Science (WoS). This
157 international academic source contains publications from paramount tourism journals,
158 including the Journal of Sustainable Tourism and Current Issues in Tourism. Following past
159 research (Freire & Veríssimo, 2021), the WoS was selected to have esteemed publications
160 comprising rigorous standard that includes a well-organised peer review process in the tourism
161 area. The search timeframe was set between 2022 and Q1 2024 to ensure that we included the
162 latest research. This research was completed on April 22, 2024. Selecting 2022 as its genesis
163 was based on the global introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine in February 2021 and the fact
164 that international air travel recovered expeditiously in 2022, boosting tourism into a new phase.
165 According to the WoS, 107 articles were identified in this phase. Second, to select publications
166 per our objectives, we used the new WoS feature category "Sustainable Development Goals"
167 to identify research articles categorized by SDG 11. This yielded 74 papers. One of the last
168 requirements was that the paper relied on empirical research. Two researchers independently
169 reviewed all 74 papers, and this screening process resulted in the exclusion of 8 non-empirical
170 papers, leaving 66 papers for content analysis. There is no discrepancy between the screening
171 results of the two researchers. This review has not been registered. This article was funded by
172 the National Science and Technology Council. There are no competing interests in this review.

173

2.2 Coding framework

175 In line with the research objectives, a two-dimensional coding framework was proposed, as
176 shown in Table 1, where it is explained in more detail which dimension of focus and sub-
177 aspects within it are to be used in this current review study. Here, RT is divided into three

178 dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, and environmental. From an economic point of view,
179 tourism directly creates jobs and income for communities, thus providing a potential way to
180 alleviate poverty through entrepreneurship. It also includes cooperative development initiatives
181 with local stakeholders to enable peripheral communities to attract more tourists and thus
182 promote the development of local small businesses. In addition to economic consideration, a
183 socio-cultural aspect strengthens communities and preserves traditional ways of life. Finally,
184 environmental aspect highlights eco-awareness and empowers communities to protect natural
185 resources.

186
187 Next, a dimension looks at the four macro aspects of SDG 11 was interpreted. The first is
188 inclusive, which embodies the notion of making sure that every person in a community has
189 equal access to tourism activities and gains from them equitably. Inclusiveness includes two
190 sub-goals: inclusive planning and management (11.3) and provision of inclusive ecological and
191 community spaces (11.7). Safety, the second aspect, refers to protecting communities from risk,
192 danger, and harm. In SDG 11, the safety aspect is related to promoting safe and affordable
193 livelihoods (11.1), effective and safe transport systems (11.2), and preserving natural and
194 cultural heritage (11.4). Thirdly, it would refer to resilience, that is, the ability of communities
195 to adapt and recover from disruptions, such as natural disasters or economic crises. The
196 resilience aspect includes disaster recovery (11.5) and supporting least developed countries to
197 design durable, sustainable structures with local materials (11.c). Finally, sustainable resource
198 management satisfies current demands without compromising future needs. The aspect of
199 sustainability in SDG 11 includes prioritising air quality and waste management to reduce
200 environmental effects (11.6), planning to improve urban-rural economic, social, and
201 environmental ties (11.a), and tailoring policies for sustainable development (11.b). All 66
202 papers were then coded by two researchers using the criteria as proposed in the framework.

203 The independent coding process was finished in two rounds. This result of interrater coding
 204 agreement reached 92.42%, showing a high reliability of the coding results. Each disagreement
 205 was resolved through discussions.

Table 1. Coding Framework

Dimensions of main focus	Sub-aspects	Description
Rural tourism	Economic Aspect	RT directly contributes to generating employment and income for communities and delivering possibilities to exit poverty through entrepreneurship. RT also forms collaborative initiatives with local partners to help peripheral communities attract more visitors and promote the development of local small businesses (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019; Telfer & Sharpley, 2007).
	Socio-cultural Aspect	RT empowers local communities and safeguarding traditional lifestyles (Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Eyisi et al., 2023).
	Environmental Aspect	RT encourages communities to preserve natural resources and raising awareness about environmental issues (C. Liu et al., 2020; Nooripoor et al., 2021; Pan et al., 2018).
UN's four macro aspects and SDG 11's sub-goals	Inclusiveness	Inclusiveness embodies the principle of guaranteeing that every individual within the community has fair and equal access to the advantages and prospects of engaging in tourism activities (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). In SDG 11, inclusive aspects encompass: inclusive participatory in planning and management (11.3) (Huo et al., 2023) as well as providing inclusive ecological and communal areas (11.7) (Masterson et al., 2017).
	Safe	Safety generally means protecting communities from risk, danger, or harm (Hollnagel, 2014). In SDG 11, safety aspect represent: advancing safe and affordable living (11.1) (Adabre & Chan, 2019), effective and safe transportation systems (11.2) (Tiwari & Phillip, 2021), protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage (11.4) (Bonazza et al., 2021).
	Resilience	Resilience refers to the capacity of communities to adjust and recover from disruptions, such as natural disasters or economic crises (Heijman et al., 2019; Southwick et al., 2014) In SDG 11, resilience aspect encompass: resilience from disaster (11.5) (Imperiale & Vanclay, 2021) and supporting least developed nations in developing sustainable and resilient structures using local resources (11.c) (Sheller, 2020).

Sustainable

Sustainability entails the prudent use of resources in a way that satisfies present need while safeguarding the capacity of future generations to fulfill their own demands (Hall, 2019). In SDG 11, sustainable aspects encompass: prioritize air quality and waste management to reduce environmental effect (11.6) (C. Liu et al., 2020; Nooripoor et al., 2021), planning to improve urban-rural economic, social, and environmental ties (11.a) (Baffoe et al., 2021), tailoring policies for sustainable development (11.b) (Pan et al., 2018).

3. Results

This section was organised around four research questions (RQs), including the research trend and regional representation (RQ1), the distribution of research aspects adopted by RT researchers (RQ2), the relationships between SDG 11 sub-goals and UN macro-aspects in RT research (RQ3). Finally, the relationships between RT aspects and SDG11 in specific regions (RQ4) were also reported.

3.1 Results for RQ1: What are the trends in empirical RT research on SDG 11 from 2022 to 2024 (first quarter), including journals and countries/regions over time?

Table 2 presents the distribution of journals for the empirical studies on RT-SDG11 within the last three years (2022-2024). Among these, the top seven journals published 44 papers (e.g., *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, $n = 10$; *Current Issues in Tourism* $n = 9$), accounting for 66.6% of the total 66 papers. In addition to the most productive journals, the remaining 11 journals published a total of 22 papers, an average of 2 papers per journal.

Table 2. Journals for Empirical RT-SDG11 Related Research

#	Journal	2022	2023	2024	Total
1	<i>Journal of Sustainable Tourism</i>		5	5	10
2	<i>Current Issues in Tourism</i>		7	2	9
3	<i>Tourism Management Perspectives</i>	4	2		6
4	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research</i>	2	3		5
5	<i>Tourism Management</i>	3		2	5

6	<i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i>	2	3	5	
7	<i>Tourism Review</i>		4	5	
The top 7 journals (total 44 papers)		11	24	9	44
The rest of 11 journals (total 22 papers)		8	8	6	22
Total		19	32	15	66

In terms of regional contexts of research, it is dominated by the Asian context, with a total of 53 papers (see Table 3), accounting for 80.30% of the total. Both the American and European contexts consist of a total of 6 papers (Fusté-Forné, 2022; Soulard et al., 2024). African context only has one paper in this review. Such results indicate that empirical research on RT-SDG11 today mainly originated from experiences in Asia, especially China ($n = 29$). The increasing prominence of RT-SDG11 in Asian countries is drawing the attention of a growing number of experts to engage in research on this topic, while the quantity of European and American studies remains rather consistent, with only one study from Africa in 2023.

Table 3. Distribution of Research Contexts by Country/Region

#	Research contexts	2022	2023	2024	Total counts	Main countries/regions
1	Asia	16	25	12	53	China ($n = 29$)
2	Europe	2	3	2	6	Italy ($n = 2$); Spain ($n = 2$)
3	America	1	3	2	6	USA ($n = 3$)
4	Africa	0	1	0	1	South Africa ($n = 1$)

Research on the conservation of cultural heritage in attempts to enhance local economies, specifically in Asia, is usually a combination of traditional agricultural practices and tourism. For instance, in their contribution to the discourse, Dai et al. (2023) examine how tourism growth has increased income diversity and changed inhabitants' life orientation from self-service in an agrarian society to helping others in a more thorough division of labour. In contrast, Y. Liu et al. (2022) found that many farmlands have been converted for infrastructure development, leading residents to abandon their ancient agricultural practices.

1 242 Regarding the opposite depopulation of rural areas in Europe, generally, the most prevalent are
2 243 preserving historical landscapes and promoting innovative projects. For instance, Fusté-Forné
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4 244 (2022) attests that gastronomic tourism in rural Spain has improved the local economy by
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7 245 maintaining the flow of tourists but, at the same time, not interfering with local habits. In a
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10 246 different study, researchers in Italy investigated how tourism-based development projects help
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12 247 maintain rural communities from displacement and population ageing (Danzi & Figini, 2023)
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14 248 and boost rural micro-businesses with innovative tourism projects (Biconne et al., 2023).
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17 249 Meanwhile, research in England has focused more on immersing tourists in livestock farming
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19 250 activities (Caffyn, 2024).

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24 252 The results showed how the role of RT could contribute to achieving SDG 11. Much of the
25
26 253 research conducted in the American context focuses on community-based tourism and the
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29 254 active participation of local citizens in the development and planning of tourism activities. In
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31 255 their study, Soulard et al. (2024) investigated the impact of RT projects in the United States on
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34 256 environmental conservation and community resilience in rural areas facing economic decline.
35
36 257 Rocca & Zielinski (2022) showcased the construction of clean water infrastructure in Mexico
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39 258 through participatory planning by RT community enterprises. Mehlomakhulu and Buschke
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41 259 (2023) highlight the potential of RT to promote sustainable wildlife attractions for income
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43 260 generation and conservation support in South Africa.

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49 262 **3.2 Results for RQ2: What are the trends in research aspects adopted by researchers?**

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51 263 Table 4 shows the research trends in three aspects of RT and the changes in each dimension.
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53 264 The result shows that socio-cultural research is the most popular in the field, with a total of 51
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56 265 papers accounting for 49.03% of the total. Research with environmental aspects (32 papers;
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58 266 30.76%) and research with economic aspects (21 papers; 20.19%) are the second streams of
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267 the field. More specifically, we can see research with socio-cultural aspects continue to lead
 268 from 2022-2024, from 16 studies in 2022 to 21 in 2023 to 14 in 2024. The number of
 269 environmental studies peaks at 17 in 2023, double the number in 2022. The most constant thing
 270 is the number of business studies. In this case, it shows that experts are interested in how RT
 271 growth will affect the social, cultural, and natural surroundings. Focusing on social- cultural
 272 issues like inclusivity and resilience in SDG 11 is also linked to these results.

Table 4. Trends in Three Aspects of RT Research

#	Aspects	2022	2023	2024	Total	Reference
1	Economic aspect	6	10	5	21	Scheyvens and Hughes (2019) Telfer and Sharpley (2007)
2	Socio-cultural aspect	16	21	14	51	Everett and Aitchison (2008) Eyisi et al. (2023)
3	Environmental aspect	9	17	6	32	C. Liu et al. (2020) Nooripoor et al. (2021) Pan et al. (2018)

274
 275 In most cases, research on the socio-cultural dimension looks at the impact of RT on the cultural
 276 heritage of the rural community. For example, many scholars have studied local festivals in
 277 rural areas (Chi et al., 2023; Mwesiumo et al., 2022). Those events, they reasoned, catered to
 278 the tourists, built community spirit, and preserved some of the significant traditions peculiar to
 279 that region. Similarly, another researcher investigated the effects of RT on Indigenous
 280 communities in rural areas, highlighting how community-based tourism initiatives can
 281 contribute to cultural preservation (X. Li & Wang, 2023; Rosalina et al., 2023) and community
 282 empowerment (Bennike & Nielsen, 2024; Tian et al., 2023). These studies demonstrate the
 283 significant socio-cultural benefits of RT, including the fostering of social cohesion and cultural
 284 sustainability.

1 286 In RT, environmental research studies address the sustainability of tourism activities and
2 287 ecological impacts. For example, Mehlomakhulu and Buschke (2023) studied ecotourism in
3
4 288 rural Africa. They explained how sustainable tourism in such rural areas might induce the
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7 289 conservation of mountains and protected areas. Similarly, P. Zhang et al. (2023) found that
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10 290 rural summer wellness tourism among urban Chinese seniors is increasing significantly. Most
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12 291 tourists are urban seniors who evade the summer heat to villages with beautiful natural scenery
13
14 292 and cool weather. In this regard, Ghaderi et al. (2022) examined the essential relationships
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17 293 between local authorities and the population, in general, to reduce the pressure on the natural
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19 294 environment in a time mixed with mass tourism from rural Iran.
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24 296 This also implies that, for the most part, economic research in RT is targeted at the economic
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26 297 possibilities for developing tourism products in rural areas. For example, Fichter & Román
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29 298 (2023) investigated the value of RT at particular rustic destinations in Spain through a survey
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31 299 about perceptions towards recreation activities provided by the residents and visitors. Also,
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34 300 Tsang et al. (2022) examined agritourism in rural India, concentrating on visitors' buying
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36 301 behaviour towards tourism products of RT.
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41 303 **3.3 Results for RQ3: Among the empirical research in the field, which sub-goals (e.g.,**
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43 304 **SDGs 11.1-11.7, 11.a, 11.b, 11.c) have been most researched in rural tourism? How do**
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45
46 305 **they relate to the UN's missions (inclusive, safe, resilient, sustainable) of SDG 11?**
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48 306 In addition to examining three aspects of RT research, this study also identified which sub-
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51 307 goals of SDG 11 were most frequently used by field researchers. Table 5 shows the extent to
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53 308 which each of the SDG 11 sub-goals was addressed in the 66 empirical studies on RT-SDG11.
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56 309 It should be noted that because a study may address multiple sub-goals simultaneously, a
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58 310 multiple coding approach was used, resulting in the total number of sub-goals equalled to 96.
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311 Of the 96 responses, SDG 11.4 (safeguard world natural and cultural heritage) and SDG 11.a
 312 (reinforce urban-rural ties in national and regional development planning) had the highest
 313 number of responses, with 28 and 22, respectively, reflecting the high level of interest in
 314 heritage protection and urban-rural linkages.
 315

Table 5. Dissemination of Empirical Research on RT in Relation to SDG 11

Sub-category of SDG 11	Description	Counts*
11.1	Safe and affordable housing	10
11.2	Affordable and sustainable transport systems	4
11.3	Inclusive and sustainable urbanization	6
11.4	Protect the world's cultural and natural heritage	28
11.5	Reduce the adverse effects of natural disasters	5
11.6	Reduce the environmental impacts of cities	5
11.7	Provide access to safe and inclusive green and public spaces	9
11.a	Strong national and regional development planning	23
11.b	Implement policies for inclusion, resource efficiency and disaster risk reduction	5
11.c	Support least developed countries in sustainable and resilient building	1

* A multiple-coding approach was used in this analysis. Total counts of responses: 96

316
 317 For example, researchers have pointed out that cultural and natural heritage is a core tourism
 318 attraction for many rural communities (X. Li & Wang, 2023; Y. Liu et al., 2022); however,
 319 balancing heritage conservation with tourism development is a challenge. RT planning should
 320 respect local cultural traditions and involve communities in heritage use and management. In
 321 addition, Soulard et al. (2024) took the example of a rural tourist community in Illinois, USA,
 322 and suggested that improving rural infrastructure and public services is crucial to enhancing
 323 the attractiveness of tourist destinations and the life quality of villagers. At the same time, it is
 324 important to avoid over-urbanization and to break the urban-rural dichotomy.
 325
 326 Research on SDG 11.1 and 11.7 is the second most popular issue, with 10 and 8 papers,
 327 respectively. For instance, studies focusing on SDG 11.1 have highlighted the importance of

1 328 improving housing and basic services in RT areas. J. Liu et al. (2023) researched rural China,
2 329 demonstrating the critical role of institutional and social embeddedness in the successful
3
4 330 development of rural entrepreneurship, particularly in the context of bed and breakfast
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6 331 accommodations. Dai et al. (2023) demonstrated the importance of using traditional
7
8 332 architecture in villa structures and halting the tourism agenda for ancient building replacement.
9
10 333 In addition, Z. Li et al. (2024) researched rural destinations to promote idyllic settings, which
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12 334 fit with SDG 11.7, by establishing an idealised picture of rural life that strongly impacts
13
14 335 visitors' choice of rural locations. The study shows that images of landscapes with idyllic life
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16 336 themes and motifs, such as fields, forests, mountains, rivers, fruits and vegetables, and flowers
17
18 337 and plants, are important to the rural tourist' sensory image.
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26 339 Research on SDGs 11.2, 11.3, 11.5, 11.6, and 11.b is restricted, with only some papers available,
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28 340 while only one paper dealt with SDG 11.c. For instance, one study on SDG 11.2 indicated that
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30 341 trail-based tourism is becoming increasingly unsustainable in the rural Canadian setting
31
32 342 because it is expected to lead to conflict between various trail users. The findings of the study
33
34 343 show that improvement in stakeholder management and innovation in transportation and digital
35
36 344 technology planning is required to reduce potential conflict (Neumann & Mason, 2023).
37
38 345 Additionally, SDG 11.3 was explored through research in practices of inclusive planning in
39
40 346 Colombia, where the rural peripheries were brought within the urban frameworks so that the
41
42 347 rural population benefited from the social capital and presence of the municipal government
43
44 348 (Rocca & Zielinski, 2022). Other studies focused on SDG 11.5, including that of Zhai et al.
45
46 349 (2022), which dealt with promoting mental health for the public and improving places for
47
48 350 relaxation, such as lakefronts, enabling them to be fit for tourists, particularly after COVID-19.
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51 351 In China, Zhu et al. (2022) dealt with pro-environmental behaviour, encouraging it for the rural
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53 352 areas visited by tourists and advocating for recycling, conservation of water and energy, and
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353 promoting sustainable ways of disposal of waste as a way of reducing the negative
 354 environmental impacts of tourism, SDG 11.6. Only a few studies related to SDG 11.b, such as
 355 one by Ma et al. (2022) on strategic resistance to tourism development among rural Chinese
 356 residents. Ultimately, Bennike and Nielsen (2024) highlighted the potential of utilising RT to
 357 bolster economic development in rural Nepal. This emphasises the need for international aid
 358 and investment in infrastructure and capacity building, as outlined in SDG11.c.

359

360 Furthermore, based on the literature, sub-goals with similar objectives were aggregated into a
 361 higher-order construct of SDG 11 (see Table 6), providing a simpler but more meaningful
 362 typological understanding of RT research. A multi-coding approach was also adopted. A total
 363 of 90 responses were received, highlighting the diverse and multifaceted nature of research on
 364 RT-SDG11. The data reveals that RT-SDG11 has mainly addressed community safety ($n = 37$;
 365 including SDGs 11.1, 11.2, and 11.4) and sustainable communities ($n = 32$; including SDG
 366 11.6, 11.a and 11.b). The subsequent 15 papers are linked to inclusive development,
 367 encompassing the remaining themes of SDGs 11.3 and 11.7.

Table 6. Four Aggregate Aspects of SDG 11 to Further Profile Empirical Research on RT in Relation to SDG 11

#	Four aspects of SDG 11	Counts*
1	Inclusive Inclusive participatory in planning and management (SDG 11.3) as well as providing inclusive ecological and communal areas (SDG 11.7).	15
2	Safe Advancing safe and affordable living (SDG 11.1), effective and safe transportation systems (SDG 11.2), protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage (SDG 11.4),	37
3	Resilience Resilience from disaster (SDG 11.5), and aiding least developed countries in developing resilient, sustainable structures with local resources (SDG 11.c).	6
4	Sustainable prioritise air quality and waste management to reduce environmental effect (SDG 11.6), planning to improve urban-rural economic, social, and environmental ties (SDG 11.a), tailoring policies for sustainable development	32

(SDG 11.b).

* A multiple-coding approach was used in this analysis. Total counts of responses: 90

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370 For instance, Wu et al. (2022) pointed out that their research is focused on one of the civic
371 behaviours of rural residents and discussed the construction of a mutually supportive, caring,
372 safe, and inclusive community environment; hence, it contributes evidence to the aims of
373 community safety. Zhu et al. (2022) explained the environmental behaviours of RT enterprises
374 in China. They emphasised trust and cooperation building at the level of community,
375 enterprises, and the government to achieve mutual benefits between environmental protection
376 and economic development to harmonise the conflicting goals to build sustainable
377 communities. In addition, Soulard et al. (2023) studied inclusive perception in America's RT
378 destination development. They, therefore, examined how consistent and non-discriminatory
379 procedures are established so that there will be a fair distribution of benefits and costs, access
380 to resources, and meaningful participation in decision-making for small tourism business
381 entrepreneurs.

382

383 **3.4 RQ4: Among the empirical research, what are the trends in the relationships between**
384 **rural tourism aspects and SDG 11 in specific countries/regions?**

385 Fourthly, one would have examined the interplay between facets of RT and aggregate facets of
386 SDG 11. Moreover, for every scenario, the most studied research context by country/region
387 was indicated, according to Table 7. Regarding economic issues, RT research mostly dealt with
388 sustainability issues with $n = 14$ and safety with $n = 10$, while fewer studies were on issues
389 related to inclusive communities with $n = 6$ and community resilience with $n = 4$. Relating to
390 contextual dispersion, it is observed that Asia-related contexts generate the highest share of
391 studies ($n = 25$), with the most concentrated being in China. For example, J. Liu et al. (2023)
392 evaluated the entrepreneurship of the rural accommodation business. They concluded that

393 embeddedness made a difference in developing economic sustainability for bed-and-breakfast
 394 businesses. The second majority of research was related to European contexts ($n = 7$). For
 395 example, Fichter and Román (2023) compared the economic preferences of residents and
 396 tourists in rural Spain and gave insights on developing differentiated product strategies.

397

398 Table 7. Relationships Between RT and SDG 11

Relationships and research contexts	Inclusive	Safe	Resilience	Sustainable
Economic aspect	6 (Asia, $n = 5$; America, $n = 1$)	10 (Asia, $n = 9$; America, $n = 1$)	4 (Asia, $n = 3$ Europe, $n = 1$)	14 (Asia, $n = 8$; Europe, $n = 5$; America, $n = 1$)
Socio-cultural aspect	14 (Asia, $n = 10$; America, $n = 4$)	29 (Asia, $n = 25$; America, $n = 3$; Europe, $n = 1$)	3 (Asia, $n = 3$)	25 (Asia, $n = 20$; America, $n = 3$ Europe, $n = 1$)
Environmental aspect	5 (Asia, $n = 4$; America, $n = 1$)	20 (Asia, $n = 17$; America, $n = 2$; Africa, $n = 1$)	1 (Asia, $n = 1$)	17 (Asia, $n = 12$; Europe, $n = 3$; America, $n = 2$)

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400 We also found that the largest amount of RT-SDG11 research is related to the socio-cultural
 401 aspect. Among which, a total of 29 studies are related to community safety, 25 to a sustainable
 402 community, and 14 to an inclusive community. However, only 3 of them are related to
 403 community resilience, which means that research regarding community resilience is not yet
 404 well developed. However, only 3 of them are related to community resilience, which means
 405 that research regarding community resilience is not yet well developed. In terms of research
 406 contexts, Asian cases dominate with 58 entries. For example, M. Wu et al. (2023) examined
 407 the interaction rituals of residents in rural communities in China, which influenced their impact

1 408 on community relationship networks and placed an emphasis on the requirement to foreground
2 409 the physical nature of village democracy and increase the sense of participation and
3
4 410 accessibility. In addition, Merkel Arias and Kieffer (2023) found a negative impact on local
5
6 411 communities. The authors emphasise that some rural projects became frightening for
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8 412 participants who remained silent during the activities. However, it is less common for research
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10 413 on socio-cultural aspects to use Europe and Africa as cases.
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16 415 Finally, it is interesting to note that the environmental aspect focused more on safety ($n = 20$)
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18 416 and sustainability ($n = 17$) than the previous two. However, there were fewer studies related to
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20 417 inclusion and resilience. Asia-related research still dominates ($n = 33$). For example, J. Chen
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22 418 et al. (2023) explored how the RT experience can secure green consumption and environmental
23
24 419 protection in rural communities in China. It is worth noting that compared to economic and
25
26 420 socio-cultural aspects, studies on rural ecotourism are more prevalent in regions other than
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28 421 Asia. We seldom find any empirical research with a cross-regional context in this analysis. Chi
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30 422 et al. (2022) discussed the impact of image elements on loyalty intentions towards the Qingdao
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32 423 Beer Festival in China. The event is part of the four significant events writers define as global
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34 424 beer extravaganzas, alongside Munich's Oktoberfest, the Denver Beer Festival, and the London
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36 425 Beer Event. The authors propose cross-country studies with foreign travellers as one of the
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38 426 future research directions.
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47 48 428 **4. Discussion**

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51 429 Findings from the present study and related literature are discussed to provide directions for
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53 430 future research and implications for practitioners and industries.
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57 58 432 **4.1 The inequality in regional representation**

1 433 The results showed that empirical RT-SDG11 research is strongly represented by Asian studies,
2 434 particularly in mainland China ($n = 29$). Research in rural Asia discussed integrating digital
3
4 435 intelligence and festival branding (Chi et al., 2022). Studies in the European and American
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6
7 436 contexts are equal in number of papers ($n = 6$). However, we found that RT empirical studies
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9
10 437 with European contexts in this study concentrated on the importance of tourism practices as
11
12 438 intermediaries in preserving cultural heritage and combating rural population decline (Danzi
13
14 439 & Figini, 2023; Fusté-Forné, 2022). Other studies also highlighted the significance of farm-
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16 440 based tourism and the openness to create innovative tourism projects in rural micro-businesses
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18
19 441 (Biconne et al., 2023; Caffyn, 2024). In the context of research in the Americas, the focus has
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22 442 emerged on active involvement in community-based tourism development (Merkel Arias &
23
24 443 Kieffer, 2023; Soulard et al., 2023). In contrast, the single publication in the African context
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26 444 underlines the capacity of RT to drive sustainable development in Africa (Mehlomakhulu &
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28
29 445 Buschke, 2023).

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34 447 The regional representation of RT-SDG11 research shows numerous important factors. First,
35
36 448 the dominance of empirical research in Asia demonstrates the region's focus on digital
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39 449 intelligence, festival branding, and sustainable practices within RT. It is hinging on the
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41 450 conjecture that the Asian government has allocated substantial financial resources to the
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44 451 campaign for rural advancement and awareness of SDGs. Conversely, Europe relies on
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46 452 initiating novel projects to spin the economic wheel velocity in rural areas. It portrays the
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49 453 necessity of addressing the emerging demographic challenges facing rural regions.
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51 454 Community-based tourism and local inclusion exemplify a bottom-up planning model for long-
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53 455 term regional development in the Americas. It is moulded by a dynamic tapestry of socio-
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56 456 cultural backgrounds and robustly inclusive policies. Ultimately, the study in Africa
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58 457 underscores the intrinsic value of wildlife attractions. It illustrates both the immense potential
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1 458 and the constraints of RT-SGD11 research. Underinvestment in research infrastructure and
2 459 other more pressing research gaps, such as finding solutions to economic challenges, might be
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4 460 a limiting factor. This regional representation disparity shows inequality in global research
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7 461 efforts, implying the demand for a more academic and practical focus across regions. This will
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10 462 improve international understanding of RT's role in sustainable development and address
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12 463 varied regional contexts and distinct issues.
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17 465 **4.2 The socio-cultural aspect has gained prominence as a key focus in RT research**

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19 466 Based on the compelling evidence from previous reviews, it is imperative to categorise RT into
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21
22 467 various components. Researchers (Rosalina et al., 2021; Telfer & Sharpley, 2007; Valderrama
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24 468 & Polanco, 2022) concurred that RT consists of three sub-categories, all dedicated to driving
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26
27 469 sustainable development. These sub-categories include economic progress, social and cultural
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29 470 preservation, and environmental protection. The research confirms our results by identifying
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31
32 471 economic, socio-cultural, and environmental RT. Moreover, Janjua et al. (2021) explored
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34 472 research on RT and SDG, which mainly focused on the social pillar, followed by economic
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36 473 aspects, while the environmental aspect needed to be adequately addressed because of a lack
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39 474 of studies. However, despite the RT nexus with SDG 11 on socio-cultural issues being the most
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41 475 focused publications ($n = 52$), our research concluded that the environmental aspect received
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43
44 476 the second-highest number of study papers ($n = 32$). In contrast, the economic aspect received
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46 477 the fewest ($n = 21$).
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51 479 A major focus of previous socio-cultural studies has been on how RT can be used to empower
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53 480 local communities and protect culture and traditional ways of life (Everett & Aitchison, 2008;
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56 481 Eyisi et al., 2023). While the values of togetherness and cooperation are at the forefront of our
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58 482 review, maintaining harmonious relationships between villagers and ensuring that future
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1 483 generations inherit this is also highlighted (Dai et al., 2023; Mwesiumo et al., 2022). Similarly,
2 484 RT reiterates that community-based tourism development supports cultural sustainability and
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4 485 enhances the well-being of community members (Bennike & Nielsen, 2024; Tian et al., 2023).
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7 486 It is a mechanism for safeguarding distinctive practices, providing an authentic experience and
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10 487 defining cultural distinctiveness (Fusté-Forné, 2022; Wu et al., 2022). In conclusion, RT offers
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12 488 harmonious living, empowers communities and helps to embed authenticity and identity in
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14 489 rural destinations.

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19 491 Extensive research has consistently shown that RT plays a significant role in fostering the
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22 492 preservation of natural resources and promoting community awareness of environmental issues
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24 493 (Nooripoor et al., 2021; Pan et al., 2018). This study, however, found that some researchers
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26 494 emphasise how ecotourism and wellness tourism may elevate natural resource conservation
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29 495 and sustainability (Mehломakhulu & Buschke, 2023; P. Zhang et al., 2023). Accordingly, RT
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31 496 drives to preserve natural resources, accentuate the sustainability effect of tourist operations,
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34 497 and raise environmental awareness while promoting a healthy and eco-friendly lifestyle.

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39 499 Finally, regarding economic aspects, prior research defines RT as generating employment and
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41 500 delivering possibilities to exit poverty through entrepreneurship (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019).
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44 501 It also forms collaborations with local partners to attract more visitors and promote the
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46 502 development of local small businesses (Telfer & Sharpley, 2007). Recent studies have
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49 503 pinpointed strategies to achieve economic benefits and consolidate entrepreneurship in this
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51 504 sphere of activity. To be precise, studies point out the possibility of products such as
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53 505 agritourism and customised tour packages as means of RT to create a positive trend in the rural
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56 506 economy (Fichter & Román, 2023; Tsang et al., 2022). Thus, RT is the embodiment of
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1 507 entrepreneurial activities that link to the rural economy but also the catalyst that boosts rural
2 508 infrastructure for such initiatives.

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7 510 **4.3 The two most researched sub-goals of SDG 11 are SDGs 11.4 and 11.a, providing a**
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9 511 **link with the UN's main focus on community safety and sustainability for rural areas**

10 512 The ten sub-targets give specific insight into SDG 11. Our findings suggest that research has a
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12 513 stronger focus on protecting cultural heritage (SDG 11.4, $n = 28$) and national and regional
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14 514 development planning (SDG 11a, $n = 23$). By preserving cultural authenticity, it can boost
15
16 515 positive experiences and place attachment (X. Li & Wang, 2023). Moreover, national and
17
18 516 regional development planning addresses issues of infrastructure adequacy, limited public
19
20 517 services, and unpreparedness of governance exposed by the pandemic (Rocca & Zielinski,
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22 518 2022). As robust planning is needed to address current and future crises, SDG 11.a has received
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24 519 increased attention.

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29 521 However, few researchers have tried to associate sub-goals with the UN's four main themes
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31 522 (inclusiveness, safety, resilience, and sustainability) of SDG 11. A review by Karali et al. (2024)
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33 523 considered RT sub-themes as codes of analysis, which were further merged into broader themes.
34
35 524 Themes and sub-themes also show how frequently the writers used RT subjects to broaden
36
37 525 their deconstruction aims and fill research gaps. This study picked SDG 11 as the interwoven
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39 526 thread of this RT research because it emphasises the importance of rural regions in accelerating
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41 527 SDG's achievement. Findings showed that past empirical research has primarily focused on
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43 528 community safety ($n = 37$; comprising SDGs 11.1, 11.2, and 11.4) and sustainable communities
44
45 529 ($n = 30$; comprising SDGs 11.6, 11.a, and 11.b), followed by inclusive development ($n = 13$;
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47 530 comprising SDGs 11.3 and 11.7). In this study, integrating SDG 11 sub-goals into four higher-
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49 531 level themes in RT research improves understanding of how RT supports SDG 11. Moreover,
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1 532 grouping these sub-goals into high-level ideas can simplify the framework for policymakers,
2 533 academics, and practitioners. Overall, amalgamating similar sub-goals into higher-level
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4 534 constructs illustrates that research on RT has significantly contributed to SDG 11 targets by
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6
7 535 highlighting community safety, promoting sustainable communities, and fostering inclusive
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10 536 development. The broad areas of inclusion, safety, resilience, and sustainability make
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12 537 analysing and reporting progress easy. We acknowledge and utilise these relationships by
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14 538 integrating sub-goals into wider ideas, creating more synergistic and effective treatments of the
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17 539 nexus.

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20 21 22 541 **4.4 Three streams of RT-SDG11 research**

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24 542 Our study showed that recent RT-SDG11 research has shifted its focus to socio-cultural aspects,
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26 543 especially community safety, which has the largest proportion of empirical studies. This
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29 544 finding indicates a change in research trend, as previous studies emphasised the importance of
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31 545 socio-cultural elements in sustainability (Valderrama & Polanco, 2022). These are the issues
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34 546 being fostered regarding the safeguarding of cultural values and prevention from being down
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36 547 seriously by tourism. The most investigated context about socio-cultural safety has been Asia,
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38
39 548 above all China, with 25 studies. These works outlined that protection is required by the cultural
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41 549 authenticity of X. Li and Wang (2023) and traditional architecture in the construction of
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43 550 housing structures of Dai et al. (2023). Counterparty, however, the socio-cultural aspects of
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46 551 European and African domains are somehow less pragmatically researched.

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51 553 Economic sustainability has also become equally important among researchers who primarily
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53 554 deal with small businesses, rural entrepreneurship, and planning and governance in rural
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56 555 development. Small businesses and rural entrepreneurship primarily attracted empirical
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58 556 research from Asia (J. Liu et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2022), while European studies concentrate

1 557 on the link between sustainable economic projects and naturally based products (Caffyn, 2024;
2 558 Danzi & Figini, 2023; Fichter & Román, 2023). In the American case of research, it is
3
4 559 discovered that the management of governance is a vital issue in rural areas (Rocca & Zielinski,
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6
7 560 2022).

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11 562 Environmental security has also gained significance as a key research problem by addressing
12
13 563 topics such as environmental degradation, land use conflicts, and biodiversity conservation.
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15 564 Asia is still the top priority in research ($n = 16$), and the area of study is mainly green
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17 565 consumption and biodiversity conservation (J. Chen et al., 2023; Mehlomakhulu & Buschke,
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19 566 2023). Most of the empirical studies conducted in the case of America scourge mainly on the
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21 567 development of the conflict over land use (Neumann & Mason, 2023; Rocca & Zielinski, 2022).

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25 569 It is worth noting that empirical studies on resilience were understudied in the field, as
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27 570 evidenced by the fact that only eight had an economic, socio-cultural, and environmental
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29 571 component ($n = 4, 3, 1$). As Tian et al. (2023) pointed out, this translates to a socio-cultural and
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31 572 economic resilience that is needed in RT ethnic communities where residents compete with
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33 573 outside developers despite a lack of skills. This justifies the gap in past RT-related research as
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35 574 most have dwelt on immediate economic benefits, such as employment and income generation
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37 575 (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019). This gap, therefore, means that during the formulation of future
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39 576 research, this work should take centre stage in developing long-term resilience strategies
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41 577 against the myriad challenges presented by life in the rural community.
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52 579 **5. Conclusion**

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54 580 This paper systematically reviews 66 empirical studies from 2022 to early 2024. Key findings
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56 581 are highlighted. First, the study shows that there is a reasonable regional imbalance in research
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582 on RT-SDG11, with many studies focused on Asian countries, especially China. This indicates
583 a need for more balanced global research. Second, there is evidence that the socio-cultural
584 dimensions, particularly in terms of safety and sustainability, have been at the forefront of
585 recent research on RT-SDG11. Third, this study integrates the sub-goals of SDG 11 with the
586 four UN principles of inclusiveness, security, resilience, and sustainability. The findings
587 provide a simplified framework for assessing RT research's contributions to sustainable
588 development. The findings also identify that community safety and sustainability have been
589 well-researched. However, this work contributes to the still very limited research on inclusive
590 development and resilience and suggests potential lines of future inquiry. Fourth, possible new
591 trends in RT-SDG11 research tend to be: a) rise in attention to economic sustainability due to
592 small businesses and rural entrepreneurship; b) in tourism products based on nature, there is a
593 growing focus on environmental security.

594
595 This study has two limitations. First, it relies on data from a single database. This research aims
596 to use the WoS-defined categories (tourism, leisure, and hospitality; sustainable development
597 goals) to isolate relevant tourism articles in which the subjects are under investigation. Future
598 research can increase this scope of the study with other databases like Scopus; however,
599 definitions for different categories will need to be recalibrated. Second, this study focused on
600 SDG 11 because RT research is highly relevant to SDG 11. Other future SDGs, such as tourism
601 education (related to SDG 4), can be included in the discussion. Further research is suggested
602 to compare tourism education in rural and urban zones. In addition to the research implications,
603 the following are implications for the tourism industry.

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605 **6. Implications for the tourism industry**

606 From the findings, four key implications for the tourism industry were provided as follows:

- 607 ● Accommodation services. One finding points out that creating a more sustainable
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2 608 accommodation service model that benefits the local community and provides a unique
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5 609 experience for visitors is a global trend. Therefore, we recommend that a) local
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7 610 accommodation enterprises take full advantage of the local traditional architecture and
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10 611 interiors comprising local material to respect the local culture and environment of the
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12 612 local region (Dai et al., 2023); b) local ownership and management of the
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14 613 accommodation enterprises were encouraged to deliver direct remuneration to the local
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16 614 economy (J. Liu et al., 2023).
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19 615 ● Attraction services. From the perspective of sustainable development, eco-tourism and
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21 616 related local products provide tourists with a deeper and more meaningful travel
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23 617 experience and promote the sustainable development of local communities. It is
24
25 618 therefore suggested that tourism managers: a) collaborate with stakeholders in the
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27 619 management of attraction products; b) encourage more promotion of ecotourism and
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29 620 health tourism products within the premises of local attraction enterprises; c) provide
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31 621 farm visits and immersive experiences for tourists (Caffyn, 2024).
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34 622 ● Transportation, food and beverage services. This study also found that regional
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36 623 characteristics are one key aspect of rural tourism. Based on the findings and literature,
37
38 624 we make the following recommendations: a) eco-friendly vehicle units and digitalised
39
40 625 route planning information are suggested to provide for international tourists (Neumann
41
42 626 & Mason, 2023); b) creating events to promote unique regional culinary through
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44 627 festivals is highly recommended, such as Gastronomic Mushroom Festival in Spain,
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46 628 Trænafestivalen in Norway and Qingdao International Beer Festival in China (Chi et
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48 629 al., 2022).
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640 The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

642 **CRedit authorship contribution statement**

643 **Carlos Iban:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Data curation.

644 **Kai-Yu Tang:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review
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647 **Declaration of competing interest**

648 The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal
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651 **Data availability**

652 The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Harvard University's
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REVIEW RESULTS

1. Relevance of the Title and Abstract

Title:

The title, "*Assessing Rural Tourism's Contribution to Sustainable Cities and Communities: A Systematic Review (2022-2024)*," is highly relevant and accurately reflects the content of the article. It explicitly highlights the focus on the relationship between rural tourism and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11.

Abstract:

The abstract provides a clear summary of the research objectives, methods (PRISMA 2020), key findings, and contributions to the literature. However, it could be improved by briefly including the policy implications discussed in the article's conclusion.

2. Quality of the Introduction

The introduction provides a comprehensive background on the role of rural tourism in supporting SDG 11. The authors effectively discuss key concepts such as sustainability, rural tourism's socio-economic and environmental impacts, and its relevance to sustainable development goals.

However, the discussion on research gaps, particularly in non-Asian geographical contexts, could be expanded to highlight the novelty of the study.

3. Methodology

The methodology employs a systematic review approach using PRISMA 2020 guidelines, which is a robust and well-established method for this type of research. Details such as inclusion and exclusion criteria, coding process, and data sources (Web of Science) are clearly explained.

Strengths:

- Transparency in the research process is demonstrated through the use of a PRISMA flow diagram.
- An interrater coding agreement of 92% indicates the reliability of the coding process.

Weaknesses:

- Reliance on the Web of Science database may limit the generalizability of findings. The authors acknowledge this and recommend incorporating other databases, such as Scopus, in future studies.

4. Analysis of Results

The authors analyze research trends across three main dimensions of rural tourism—socio-cultural, environmental, and economic—and their relationships with SDG 11 sub-goals.

Strengths:

- Results are presented systematically, supported by well-organized tables.

- The study makes a significant contribution by identifying research gaps, such as the limited focus on community resilience.

Weaknesses:

- The results section is largely descriptive. A deeper critical analysis of how these trends impact policy or practice would enhance the study's contribution.

5. Discussion and Implications

The discussion effectively links the findings to previous literature and highlights implications for future research. However, it tends to repeat the results without providing deeper insights into how the implications can be applied in various geographical or policy contexts.

6. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Article

Strengths:

- The article provides a comprehensive overview of rural tourism's contributions to SDG 11.
- The use of PRISMA 2020 enhances the credibility of the methodology.
- The authors effectively identify research gaps, particularly the need for studies beyond Asia.

Weaknesses:

- Narrow geographical focus, primarily on Asian contexts.
- Limited critical analysis of results and their policy implications.

7. Conclusion

The article makes an important contribution to the literature on rural tourism and sustainability. However, its impact could be strengthened by emphasizing broader policy analyses and implications across diverse geographical contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has a strong foundation for acceptance in a Scopus journal. However, addressing the identified weaknesses through the suggested revisions will significantly improve its quality and relevance. If these improvements are implemented, the chances of publication in a Scopus journal are highly favorable.

Weaknesses to Address:

1. Limited Geographical Focus:

- The article is overly concentrated on Asian contexts. For an internationally-focused Scopus journal, expanding the geographical scope (e.g., incorporating more data from Africa, the Americas, or Europe) would enhance the article's appeal and relevance.

2. Shallow Analysis:

- Some sections, especially the discussion, are descriptive. Adding critical analysis linking the findings to global policy implications or practical applications would strengthen the article.

3. Restricted Database Usage:

- Relying solely on the Web of Science may be seen as limiting the scope of the research. Incorporating data from Scopus or other relevant databases could boost the article's credibility.

Recommendations to Enhance Acceptance:

1. Expand Geographical Discussion:

- Include more analysis or discussion on non-Asian contexts, particularly from underrepresented regions such as Africa or Latin America.

2. Critical Policy Analysis:

- Strengthen the discussion with practical insights on how the findings can be applied to policy development or sustainability strategies.

3. Utilize Additional Data Sources:

- Incorporate studies from other databases to broaden the literature scope.

4. Align with the Target Journal's Scope:

- Ensure the article aligns with the focus and scope of the target journal, including adherence to formatting and writing style requirements.