

Tourism routes: a scoping review

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Abstract

This scoping review provides an overview of the literature on tourism routes, concerning 1) the categorization of tourism routes, 2) how the research has been conducted, in terms of methodologies and main research themes, and 3) future research paths. The review includes documents from four databases, written in English, published until May 2020 and focused on tourism routes as organisations of stakeholders under a unified theme to achieve common goals. Based on 194 documents, regional-scale routes under the theme of food and drink are identified as the commonest. The main research theme is route development. Empirical studies, qualitative approaches, primary data usage, and data collection triangulation techniques predominate. Lastly, future research should focus mainly on route planning and management.

Keywords: scoping literature review; tourism route; stakeholder's networks

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1. Introduction

The concept of routes in tourism literature goes from a narrow perception based on a journey between two or more points to a broad understanding of a network where a group of stakeholders works together to achieve common goals (García-Almeida, 2019; Moulin & Boniface, 2001; Rogerson, 2007; Timothy, 2014; World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) & European Travel Commission (ETC), 2017). According to Moulin & Boniface (2001), routes and networks are different concepts; routes are an actual itinerary of travel whilst networks are a background entity to support them. Similarly, the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes (2008) understands a cultural route as a means of communication by land, water, or some other type. In contrast, a report published by the UNWTO & ETC (2017) mentions that although the initial purpose of routes was to link a theme together by creating a linear or circular itinerary to guide travellers, the purpose has been enlarged and many routes are now created with no fixed or recommended itinerary and understood as networks of similar themed products or destinations. In fact, not all routes are of the same nature nor do they operate in similar ways, but routes, as well as ways or trails, are a label to themed experiences in tourism and have different variations (UNWTO & ETC, 2017). Thus, it is possible to classify tourism routes into distinctive categories as shown by the UNWTO & ETC (2017) regarding transnational initiatives, even though a project could be classified under more than one category of initiatives:

- ✓ The Localized cross-border initiatives, which are projects of tourism promotion and development based on a common theme by two or more regions or towns that are separated by a border, e.g., the Euroregion “Country of Lakes”, an association between Latvian, Lithuanian and Belarusian.
- ✓ Itineraries and travel corridors initiatives, which are travelled by car, by train, on foot, or by any other means, e.g., the Eurovelo network.
- ✓ Thematic or cultural networking initiatives, which are partnerships between destinations, local authorities, cultural sites, academic institutions, or other bodies, based in different countries. The initiatives are led by groups or associations, bringing together public and private partners, e.g., Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe program.
- ✓ Sustainable environmental management initiatives, which are operated on a transnational basis and are instrumental in developing sustainable tourism policies, e.g., members of the UNESCO Geoparks Network or organizations concerned with environmental protection such as the Natura 2000 network.
- ✓ Theme and experience initiatives, which refer to a link to specific initiatives or institutions much looser than in the previous categories, e.g., Tasting Europe, a gastronomy portal promoted by the European Travel Commission that aids visitors to plan their European holiday.
- ✓ Strategic regional cooperation initiatives, which represent a strategic economic tool adopted between governments to promote transnational tourism, e.g., the Silk Road program.

Regarding cultural routes, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2015) suggested five criteria for grouping them, based on the following characteristics:

- ✓ Design and structure correspond to linear models, which go from one or several initial points towards an end point, and network models based on an archipelago of points and connected by themes rather than territorial continuity.
- ✓ Theme distinguishes between cultural routes that are organized around the main theme and cultural routes that include several topics involving natural, heritage, historic, and identity resources.
- ✓ Territory identifies routes according to different implementation scales, i.e., local, regional, national, or transnational.

- ✓ Historic origin or current reconfiguration divides routes between those fully grounded on strict bases and derived from actual historic situations and those with a strong historical basis that has been redesigned in the present.
- ✓ Visitor infrastructure is based on the number and type of overnight stays required to visit the route, namely no stay necessary, one overnight stay, or several overnight stays in several places.

Additionally, there are three models of cultural routes of the COE program, i.e. territorial routes, linear routes, and networks routes (UNWTO, 2015). Territorial routes are characterized by the proximity between the areas involved in the development of the thematic route, for instance, the Olive Routes. Linear routes are based on land, water, or both, and originated to connect territories through a path, for example, the Way of Saint James. The network routes correspond to an archipelago model, where geographically disconnected elements, such as sites, cities, or areas, are linked by the same common theme, for example, the Transromanica route. Furthermore, the UNWTO & ETC (2017) proposed a thematic grouping of routes based on the underlying aspirations of travellers, i.e., history, pilgrimage, roots, landscape, natural system, cultural icons, urban life, rural life, maritime life, artistic excellence in visual and performance arts, traditional crafts, food and drink, physical challenge, industrial tourism, and well-being.

One of the most well-known routes is the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (COE), which started in 1987 with the implementation of the Way of Saint James. The COE defined cultural routes as ‘a cultural, educational heritage and tourism co-operation project aiming at the development and promotion of an itinerary or a series of itineraries based on a historic route, a cultural concept, figure or phenomenon with transnational importance and significance for the understanding and respect of common European values’ (European Institute of Cultural Routes, 2018, p. 43). These routes are not only linear trails but also networks that connect territories under a common heritage (European Commission & Council of Europe, 2020).

However, in the literature, routes are addressed by a broad spectrum of terms following their touristic product, for instance, tourism routes (Antonson & Jacobsen, 2014; Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Meyer, 2004; Rogerson, 2007), wine routes (Telfer, 2001a), cultural heritage routes (Snowball & Courtney, 2010), ale trails (Plummer, Telfer, & Hashimoto, 2006), food trails (Anderson & Law, 2012), heritage travel routes (Lemky, 2017), or the pilgrimage route Way of Saint James (Blom, Nilsson, & Santos, 2016; Lois-González & Santos, 2015; Lopez, Lois González, & Fernández, 2017).

There are examples of studies on tourism routes, for instance, research related to their characterization, development, or performance assessment (Anderson & Law, 2012; Bruwer, 2003; Lemky, 2017; Meyer, 2004; Plummer *et al.*, 2006), their impacts on economic development (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Lourens, 2007; Rogerson, 2007; Snowball & Courtney, 2010), or on the importance of established partnerships within a destination (Telfer, 2001b), among others. Additionally, Moulin & Boniface (2001) presented a theoretical approach on definition, context, and impacts of routes. On the other hand, international organizations have been developing studies in this field too. The COE and the European Commission launched in 2010 a study about the impact of European cultural routes on small and medium enterprises innovation and competitiveness (Khovanova-Rubicondo, 2010), the UNWTO & ETC (2017) published a Handbook for Marketing of Transnational Tourism Themes and Routes, and the UNWTO (2015) published a report on cultural routes and itineraries, which focus on governance and partnership models, recent trends, products, innovation, and key management factors.

Considering the diversity of concepts and typologies to define tourism routes as well as the absence of a review on this topic, this literature review has three main goals, specifically the identification and analysis of 1) the categorization of tourism routes, 2) how research has been conducted on this topic, in terms of themes and methodologies, and 3) future research paths. Note that this analysis is conducted within the scope of a PhD research and was designed to provide the author, as well as future researchers, with an overall view on this topic.

Accordingly, a literature review method known as scoping review is applied to answer these questions. A scoping review is an assessment with the aim of mapping the potential extent, range, and nature of a research theme, aiming to 1) understand how the research in a given topic is conducted, 2) clarify key concepts or factors related to a concept, 3) recognize the need for a systematic review, 4) summarize and disseminate research findings, 5) identify research gaps, or 6) make recommendations for the future research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Grant & Booth, 2009; Munn *et al.*, 2018; Paré, Trudel, Jaana, & Kitsiou, 2015; Peters *et al.*, 2015; Tricco *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, this research may contribute to the application of new methodologies for literature reviews in tourism, such as the scoping review.

2. Materials and methods

The scoping review method was proposed by Arksey & O'Malley (2005) and its usage has been increasing ever since (Tricco *et al.*, 2016). It uses similar methods to a systematic literature review by following an a priori protocol and aiming to be transparent and reproducible. However, a major difference between both techniques relies on the review question, since a scoping review has a much broader scope than a conventional systematic literature review that addresses clearly defined questions (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Kitchenham, Budgen, & Pearl Brereton, 2011; Munn *et al.*, 2018; Peters *et al.*, 2015; Tricco *et al.*, 2018). In addition, scoping reviews provide an overview of existing literature, as a mapping or charting of the data, and tend to consider different study designs to determine the range of evidence available regardless of its quality (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Peters *et al.*, 2015).

Arksey & O'Malley (2005) proposed a framework stage to develop a scoping review divided into five stages: 1) identifying the research question; 2) identifying relevant studies; 3) study selection; 4) charting the data; and 5) collating, summarizing and reporting the results. In response to an identified need for quality improvement of scoping reviews, Tricco *et al.* (2018) presented the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) developed by Joanna Briggs Institute. The PRISMA-ScR checklist provides guidance for the synthesis of scoping reviews and contains twenty items, plus two optional items, and is divided into seven sections, i.e., title, abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, and funding. There are examples of scoping reviews applied to tourism literature (Gaudette, Roult, & Lefebvre, 2017; Mogaka, Mashamba-Thompson, Tsoka-Gwegweni, & Mupara, 2017; Mogaka, Mupara, Mashamba-Thompson, & Tsoka-Gwegweni, 2017; Seyfi & Hall, 2020; Welling, Árnason, & Ólafsdóttir, 2015) as well as studies on medical tourism (Crooks, Kingsbury, Snyder, & Johnston, 2010; Johnston, Crooks, Snyder, & Kingsbury, 2010). All studies have applied the framework developed by Arksey & O'Malley (2005), except that by Seyfi & Hall (2020). This research applies the protocol of PRISMA-ScR to conduct a scoping review of the literature on tourism routes; therefore, the selection of the sources of evidence is divided into four stages: 1) identification, 2) screening, 3) eligibility, and 4) included.

2.1. Identification

The review intends to include all literature on tourism routes published until May 2020, written in the English language. The search was made in May 2020 on the following databases: SCOPUS, Web of Science (WOS) – Core collection, EBSCO - Academic Search Complete, and Google Scholar (Table 1).

These databases were considered to get a broader picture of the research on this topic. However, the search on the EBSCO database was limited to two types of documents, specifically articles and journal articles, due to a high number of results in the other available formats as well as their distinctive structures.

The search terms, “tourism” and “route”, tried to include a vast majority of studies on this research topic, which has been addressed according to an associated touristic product, such as wine routes, cultural routes, or themed routes, among others. Ultimately, this scoping review tried to address the organizations identified by the UNWTO & ETC (2017) as the thematic or cultural networking initiatives, which are partnerships between destinations, local authorities, cultural sites, academic institutions, or other bodies, based in different countries. Although the classification has been designed for transnational initiatives, this review includes similar tourism routes on other scales, i.e., local, regional, or national. Subsequently, the document references from all database results were exported to an Excel file and duplicated articles were deleted.

Table 1. *Electronic search strategy applied.*

Database	Terms	Searched fields	Filters	Date
SCOPUS	Touris* Route*	Title, Abstract and Keywords	Language = English	May 7th, 2020
WOS - Core collection	Touris* Route*	Topic	Language = English	
EBSCO - Academic Search Complete	Touris* Route*	Author keywords, Title and Abstract	Language = English; Document type = “Article” and “Journal article”	
Google Scholar	Tourism Route	(Not applicable)	Language = English; Patents and Citations not included	

2.2. Screening

In the next stage, a screening process was planned by all authors, and conducted by the first author. Considering the high number of returned documents, a filter based on author keywords was used to reduce the number of publications. Thus, VOSviewer software (van Eck & Waltman, 2010) was applied to map and cluster the author keywords from searched documents to identify the most suitable keywords for this study. A similar approach for keywords clustering has been applied by Garrigos-Simon, Narangajavana-Kaosiri, & Narangajavana (2019), Duarte, Braga, Marques, & Sá (2020), and Wen, Klarin, Goh, & Aston (2020).

The author’s keywords retrieved from the Scopus database were used to construct a network of co-occurrence and were then grouped into clusters. Only 262 out of 6346 keywords were selected to be included in the co-occurrence network due to the exclusion of keywords that had occurred in less than four publications, had no link between them, or derived from the searched terms, namely “route”, “route-based tourism”, “routes”, “routing”, “tourism”, “tourism route”, “tourism routes”, “tourist”, “tourists”, “tourist route”, and “tourist routes”.

According to van Eck & Waltman (2020), in VOSviewer software, a map represents a network constituted by the items, in this case, the author keywords, and the links between them. It should be noted that the size of an item is positively influenced by the number of co-occurrences and the

proximity of the keywords indicates a stronger relationship between them (Garrigos-Simon *et al.*, 2019; van Eck & Waltman, 2020). The network is represented by a map (Figure 1) which includes twenty-one clusters of items.

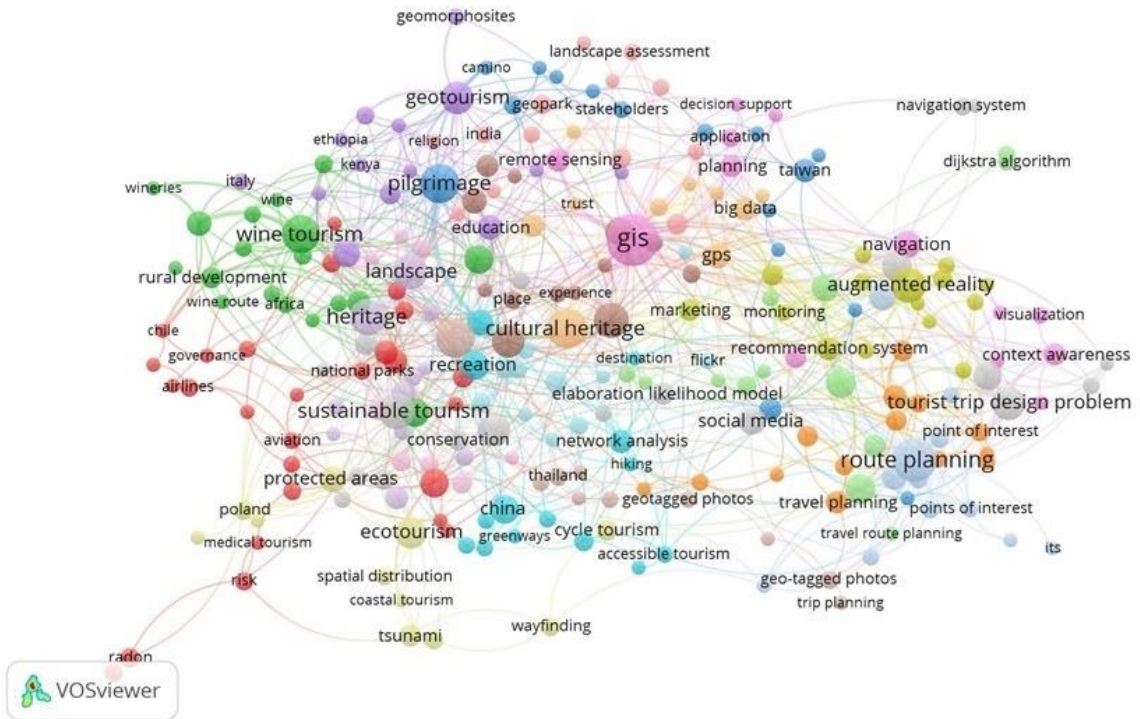


Figure 1. Map of clusters based on author keywords

The map shows the wide range of topics returned from the search for tourism routes. In fact, some keywords clusters are more suitable for our research than others, for instance, those located in the upper-left corner of the map and represented by specific keywords (and colours), such as “wine tourism” and “rural development” (green), “heritage” and “landscape” (purple), or “pilgrimage” (blue). Those clusters include keywords such as “wine route”, “gastronomic tourism”, “camino de santiago”, or “cultural routes”. In contrast, several clusters do not fit our study, particularly in the lower-left corner, the right side, and in the centre of the map, for instance, the clusters represented by “route planning” (light blue), “tourist trip design problem” (grey), “augmented reality” (dark yellow), “gis” (pink), “cultural heritage” (light orange), “network analyst” (turquoise), “airlines” (red), or “protected areas” (brown) and “ecotourism” (brown).

Based on this analysis, it was decided to include all the publications with one of the following terms in their title, keywords, or abstract, if available: “Wine*”, “Cultur*”, “Heritage”, “Pilgrim*” or “Gastronom*”. In the case of the documents retrieved from Google Scholar, the filter was applied to their title, which was the only data available before the full-text paper assessment, and consequently, abstracts and keywords were not considered. Nevertheless, it was possible to reduce the number of papers and ensure a close focus on our research topic.

The screening process then continued with the analysis of the titles and the abstracts of the remaining publications. This procedure resulted in the exclusion of publications not related to tourism routes but

mostly related to issues of tourism destinations and attractions, the relationship between cultural heritage and tourism, or the tourists' travel routes.

2.3. Eligibility

The full-text assessment for eligibility started with the exclusion of publications that were inaccessible, not in the English language, or not in a document type required by this research, e.g., complete books, editorials, or academic thesis. Note that most of these excluded results come from the Google Scholar database. Moreover, the full-text assessment led to the exclusion of documents not related to tourism routes as groups or associations of stakeholders, such as cultural routes of COE or wine routes. The excluded studies were mostly focused on routes merely as itineraries to travel, for instance, pilgrimage, cultural or heritage routes, and hiking trails, greenways, or scenic routes, as well as cultural heritage sites and wine tourism destinations.

2.4. Included

After the selection of the source of evidence, all authors agreed on the data required to answer the mentioned research goals. It was necessary to collect data to categorize the routes under analysis, whilst data on the research themes and on the applied methodologies would help to understand how research has been conducted on this topic. Finally, data on future research paths identified by the authors was collected.

The categorization of tourism routes was based on the aforementioned criteria of territory, which was presented by the UNWTO (2015), the thematic grouping of routes by the UNWTO & ETC (2017), and their location. On the other hand, the research themes are analysed according to a categorization based on the selected studies, which was also used in the analysis of the future research paths. The analysis of the applied methodology followed up those made by other scoping reviews in the tourism field (Gaudette *et al.*, 2017; Welling *et al.*, 2015). Thus, it focused on the type of study, i.e., empirical, or non-empirical, on the research method, i.e., quantitative, qualitative, or mixed approach, the data sources, i.e., primary, secondary, or both, and the data collection methods, for instance, in-depth interviews or questionnaire-based surveys, among others (Veal, 2018). Thus, the following data were extracted and analysed from each publication:

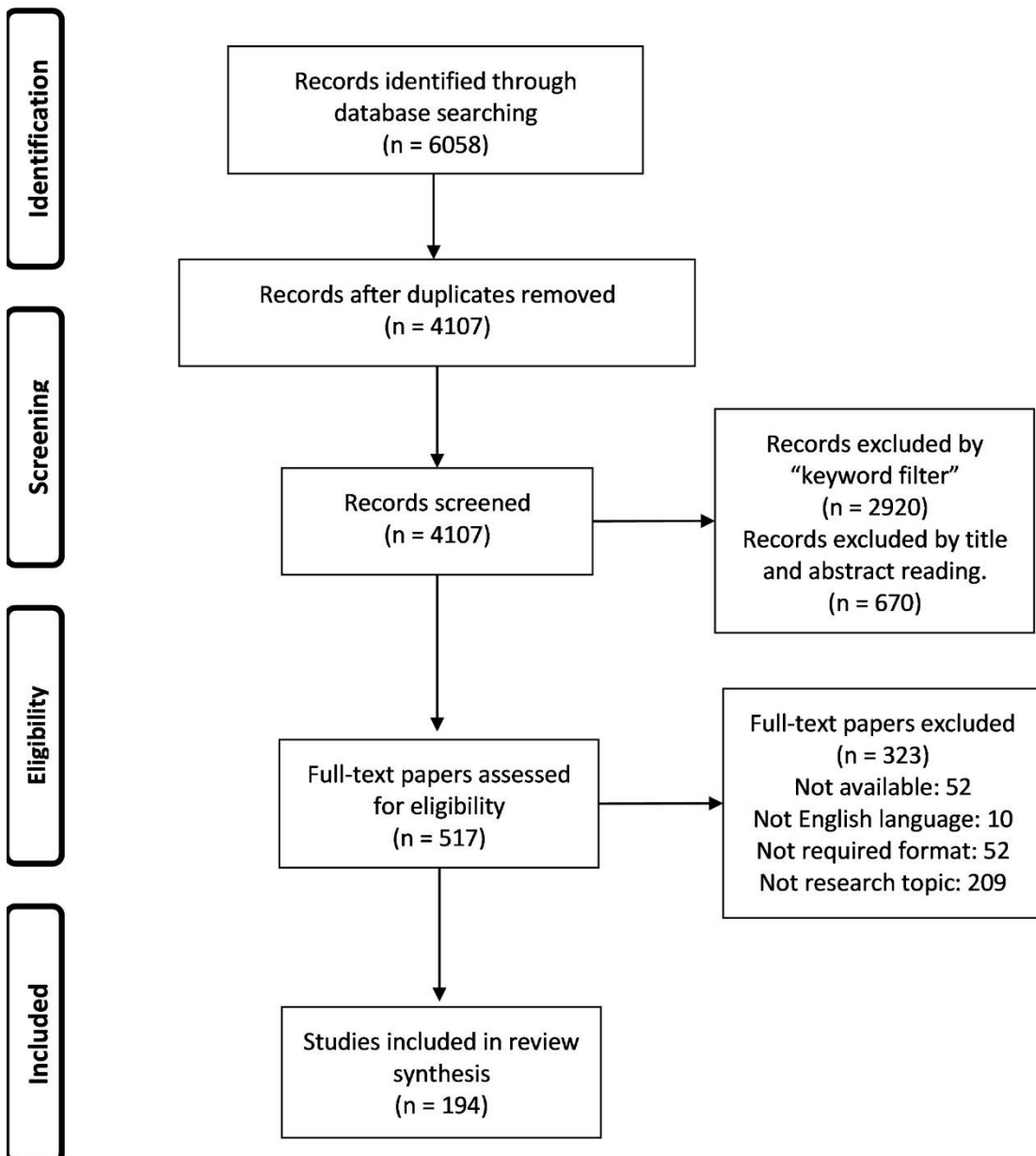
- Route's location (e.g., a specific region),
- Route's territory (e.g., regional),
- Route's thematic group (e.g., food and drink),
- Research themes,
- Type of study (e.g., empirical)
- Research method (e.g., qualitative),
- Data source type (e.g., primary),
- Data collection methods (e.g., in-depth interviews), and
- Future research paths.

Finally, a content analysis of the selected publications was conducted, and the results were presented in a narrative format, but including visual representations, such as maps and charts.

3. Results and discussion

From the electronic search, a total of 6058 documents were returned, 2547 publications from SCOPUS, 1740 from WOS, 826 from EBSCO and 945 from SCHOLAR. After the duplicate's exclusion, 4107 were identified for the screening process. The application of the author keywords to filter the results led to the exclusion of 2920 publications and reduced the number to 1187. Additionally, by reading the titles

and abstract another 670 publications were excluded, and therefore a full assessment was made of 517 documents. The unavailability of documents, the use of other languages than English and the fact that the paper did not correspond to the determined document formats led to the exclusion of 114 documents. In addition, 207 were deleted because they did not suit the research topic. Finally, the review includes a total of 194 documents, as shown by the flow diagram in Figure 2.



Source: Adapted from Tricco *et al.* (2018)

Figure 2. Flow diagram of the selection of sources of evidence

3.1. The categorization of tourism routes

The first goal of this research is to identify the diverse types of routes addressed in the literature as well as their location. Figure 3 contains a location map of the routes studied in the research selected for this review, which shows that they are mostly located in Europe (70%), such as the Way of Saint James (Murray & Graham, 1997), followed by America (17%), particularly in the United States of America (USA) and Canada, e.g. Niagara Wine Route (Telfer, 2001b) or Haw River and Surry County wine trails (Xu, Barbieri, & Seekamp, 2020); and Africa (10%), particularly in South Africa, e.g. the South African War Battlefields Route (Proos & Hattingh, 2020). Only 3% of the total studies are in Asia, while there are no studies in Oceania. However, these results may show a predominance of the usage of term “route” in the literature from European/Western countries, and this can be a limitation of this study.

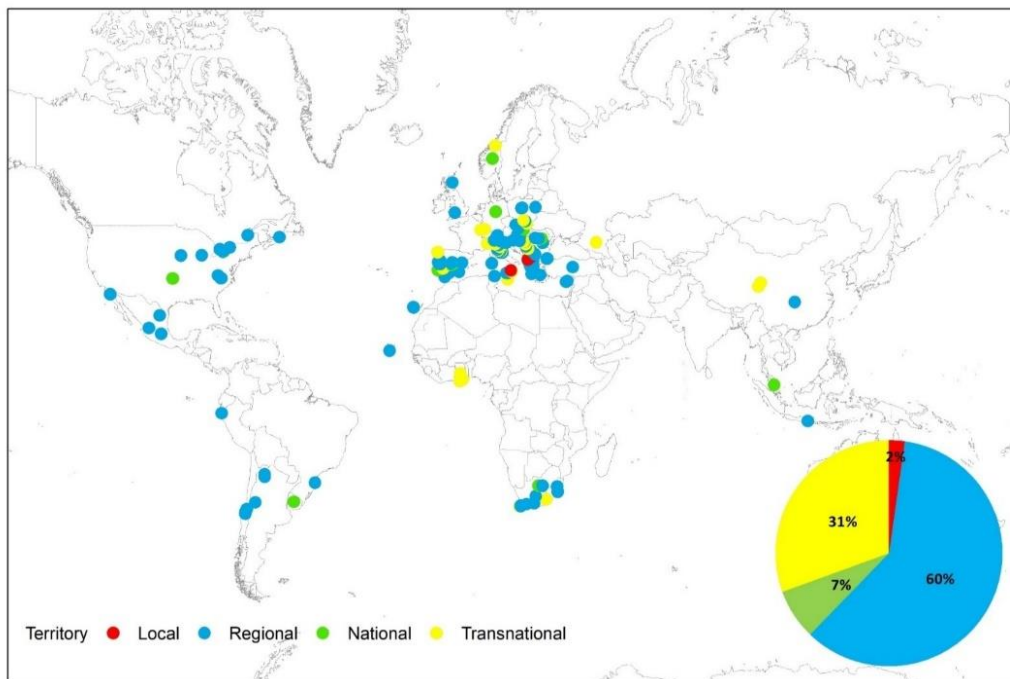


Figure 3. Route location and territory of implementation

Regarding the territory of implementation, the same map shows that more than a half of the studies focus on routes at the regional scale (61%), predominantly on wine routes, e.g. on three Spanish wine routes (Alonso & O'Neill, 2009) or the Bairrada region of Portugal (Correia, Ascensão, & Charters, 2004); and about one third (31%) focus on routes on a transnational scale, e.g., the Way of Saint James (Lois González & Somoza Medina, 2003) or the UNESCO Slave Route project (Brower Stahl, 2010). It is worth mentioning that transnational routes are more common in Europe and are mostly associated with the Cultural Routes of the COE program.

According to the thematic group, Figure 4 shows that more than half the studies focus on food and drinks routes, e.g., wine routes (Wargenau & Che, 2006). The thematic groups of pilgrimage and history comprise a third of the studies, 18% and 15% respectively. The pilgrimage group encompasses, for example, studies on the Way of Saint James (Moscarelli, Lopez, & González, 2020; Murray & Graham, 1997), and the history group is related to routes that focus on the experience and understanding of the

past, such as the UNESCO Slave Route project (Yankholmes, Boakye, & Wellington, 2010) or the Route of the Holy Grail (García, 2018). The thematic group of roots, which is associated with the heritage of one's ancestors or people, corresponds to 6% of all studies and includes, for instance, tourism routes in South Africa (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004) or the Phoenician's Route (Xuereb & Avellino, 2019). Thematic groups with a residual expression are, for instance, artistic excellence in visual and performance arts (Chaney, 2017), industrial tourism (Tufegdžic, 2013), landscape (Hemme, 2005), rural life (Yuceer & Vehbi, 2014), or traditional crafts (Underberg-Goode, 2014). The distribution of the route's thematic groups is balanced in terms of location, although there is a concentration of pilgrimage routes in Europe, particularly the Way of Saint James towards Santiago de Compostela, Spain (Gonzalo, Angulo, & De Heredia, 2012) and the Via Francigena to Rome, Italy (Martinoli & Esposito, 2014; Scidurlo & D'Angeli, 2019).

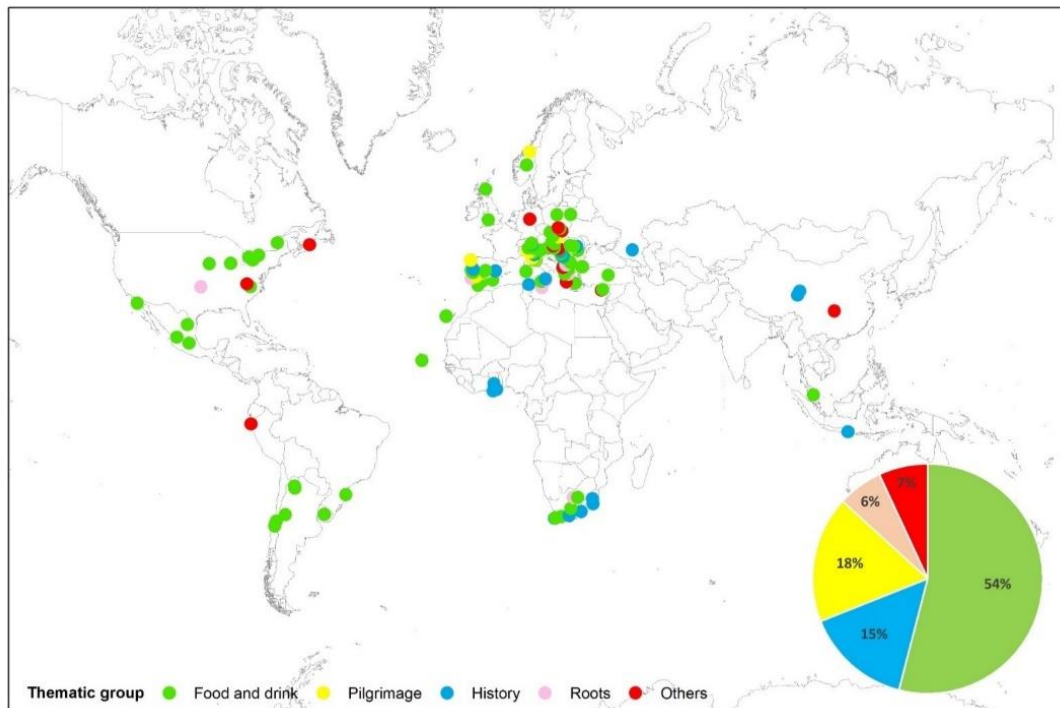


Figure 4. Route location and thematic group classification

Moreover, for a thorough understanding of the most studied type of routes, two variables are crossed, namely the route's thematic group and territory (Figure 5). The analysis shows that the most common studied routes come under food and drink theme on a regional scale (48%), and are based predominantly on wine routes (Alonso & O'Neill, 2009), but also on other gastronomic products, such as olive routes (Folgado-Fernández, Campón-Cerro, & Hernández-Mogollón, 2019). Additionally, a substantial number of routes has been registered under the pilgrimage theme on a transnational scale (16%), which correspond to the Way of Saint James (Moscarelli *et al.*, 2020) or the Via Francigena (Martinoli & Esposito, 2014; Scidurlo & D'Angeli, 2019), among others. It is also worth mentioning routes under the history theme on both transnational (8%) and regional (4%) scales. On an international scale, the studies focus on the UNESCO Slave Route project (Teye & Timothy, 2004) or the Silk Road project (Wang, Qi, & Xu, 2010), as well as on cultural routes of the COE, such as the Cultural Route of Roman

Emperors (Božić & Tomić, 2016; Djukic & Vukmirovic, 2012). On a regional scale, two examples are the studies of the Inanda Heritage Route (Marschall, 2012) and the War Battlefields Route (Proos & Hattingh, 2020), in South Africa.

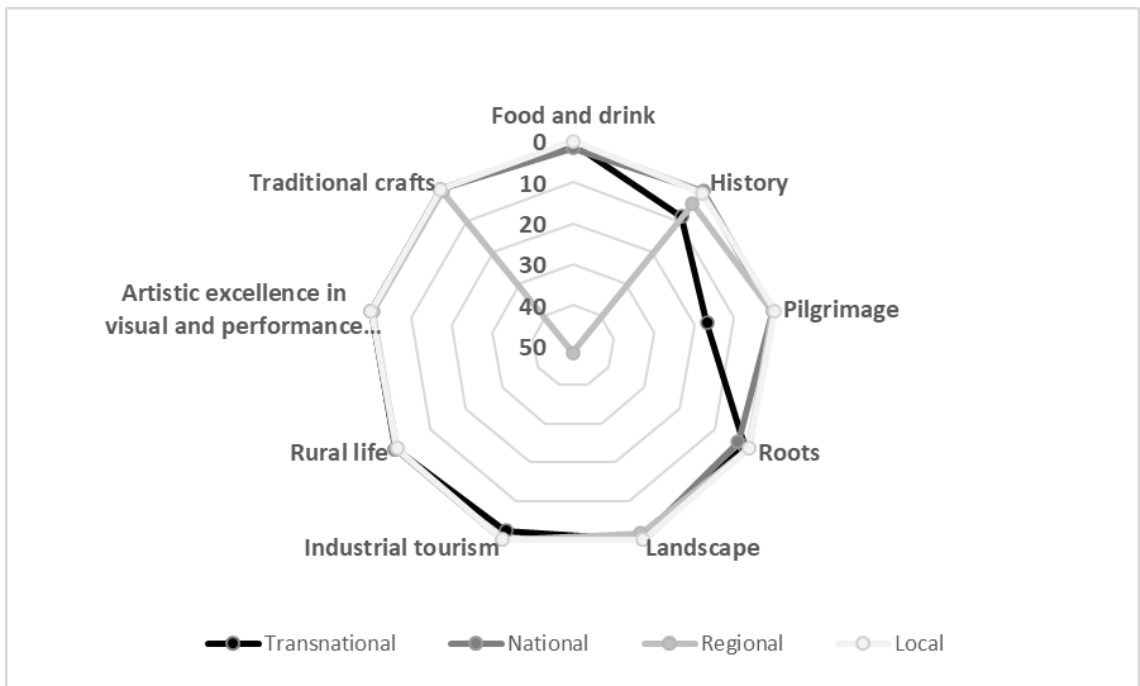


Figure 5. Route thematic groups by territory (%)

3.2. The research themes

The categories of research themes were defined after the full-text assessment of the selected studies in this review. There are six categories, i.e., consumer behaviour, route development, stakeholder relationships, territorial impact, tourism development, and others, which are described in the subsequent analysis. Although a study may be placed within more than one research theme category, it was considered one as the most important theme of the study (Figure 6).

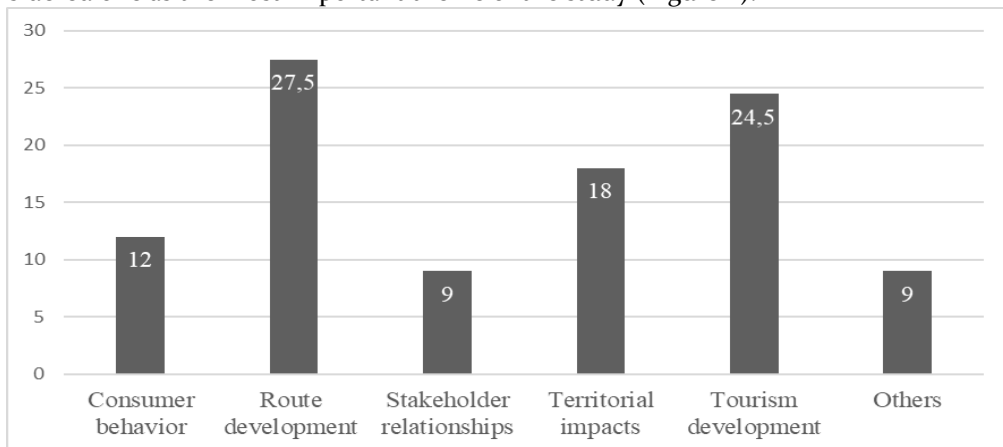


Figure 6. Research theme by category (%)

3.2.1. Consumer behaviour

The Consumer behaviour, around 12% of the studies, encompasses studies on tourist profiles (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003), motivations and expectations (Gusman, Lopez, Lois Gonzalez, & Santos, 2017), or their experiences in a destination (Caton & Santos, 2007).

3.2.2. Route development

Route development is the most representative category, around 27,5% of the total, and includes studies related to the planning and development of routes and itineraries. For instance, Efstathios, Anastasia, & Athanassios (2009) presented the development of a regional network of wine routes in Greece, and Correia *et al.* (2004) evaluated the Bairrada Wine Route performance from the point of view of its members. Moreover, this category includes a theoretical approach to route concepts and contexts (Moulin & Boniface, 2001), a study of a pilgrimage route as an example of accessible tourism (Scidurlo & D'Angeli, 2019), or studies on planning and development of route web portals (Calderon-Puerta, Arcila-Garrido, & Lopez-Sanchez, 2018; Owen, Buhalis, & Plentinckx, 2004).

3.2.3. Stakeholder relationships

Around 9% of the studies addressed the topic of stakeholder relationships, which focus on the relationship between route's members, e.g., regarding the rise and fall of an ale trail (Plummer *et al.*, 2006) or the level of satisfaction of being part of a route (Río-Rama, Peris-Ortiz, & Merigó-Lindahl, 2015), and between the route's members and other stakeholders (Festa, Shams, Metallo, & Cuomo, 2020).

3.2.4. Territorial impacts

The category of Territorial impacts accounts for about 18% of the studies and is often related to the impacts of the route and its activities on local communities, for instance on a regional scale (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016), on rural areas (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004), and in socioeconomic terms (López-Guzmán, Cañizares, & García, 2009), as well as on resident perceptions (Xu, Barbieri, Anderson, Leung, & Rozier-Rich, 2016). Also, the routes and the tourism activities are mentioned as new opportunities for heritage revitalization (Kruczek & Kruczek, 2016) and conservation (Snowball & Courtney, 2010).

3.2.5. Tourism development

The category tourism development, with around 24,5%, includes a wide range of studies related to the development of the tourism industry and specific touristic products, mainly on analysis of wine tourism (Alonso & O'Neill, 2009; Bruwer, 2003; Gatti, Incerti, & Ravagli, 2002), industrial heritage (Tufegdžic, 2013), or religious and pilgrimage tourism (Irimiás & Michalkó, 2013; Mróz & Mróz, 2013).

3.2.6. Others

Finally, the category others has 9% of the studies and covers a diversity of themes, for instance, sustainable businesses development (Coros, Pop & Popa, 2019), the transformation of businesses in post-industrial heritage sites (Szromek & Herman, 2019), the routes as a framework for intercultural dialogue (Xuereb & Avellino, 2019), or the different typologies of the route's surrounding landscapes (Diti, Torreggiani, & Tassinari, 2015).

3.2.7. Evolution of research themes categories

Looking at the percentage of reviewed documents by research theme per year (Figure 7), the importance of the categories of route development and tourism development is evident, as they have increased their weight over time, similarly to the total number of publications per year. On the other hand, territorial impact keeps a regular distribution. The consumer behaviour and the other categories appeared more

consistently in the last decade and had a slightly rising trajectory. Furthermore, the category of stakeholder relationships is more irregular and sporadic than the others.

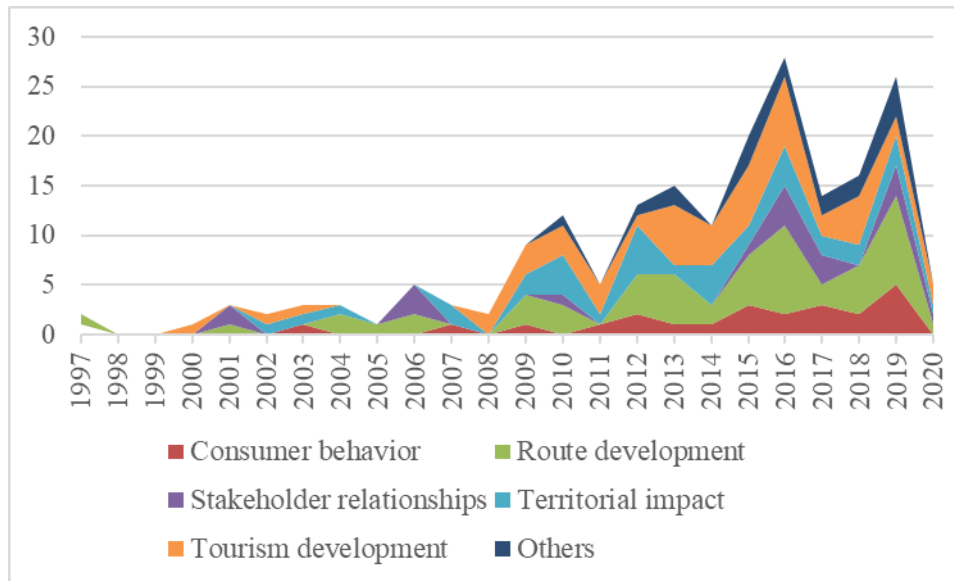


Figure 7. Documents by research theme per year (%)

3.3. The Methodological approaches

3.3.1. Type of study

According to Veal (2018), empirical research involves the collection and/or analysis of data, based on observation or information from the “real world” whilst non-empirical or theoretical research involves only theory and the literature. However, an empirical study usually has a conceptual framework and both research types coexist in a research project. Our results show that 88% of the studies are empirical research, e.g., the analyses of the contemporary utilization of the Way of Saint James (Murray & Graham, 1997), and the others 12% are theoretical, for instance, the study of Moulin & Boniface (2001) on the definition, context, and example of routes.

3.3.2. Research method

Empirical research involves the collection and/or analysis of data which may be quantitative or qualitative and primary or secondary (Veal, 2018). In this research, the studies are analysed based on both elements, the methodological approach (Figure 8), i.e., qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods, and the research data sources, i.e., primary, secondary, or both (Figure 9).

A quantitative approach relies on numerical evidence to draw conclusions or to test hypotheses and it can be derived, for example, from questionnaire surveys whilst a qualitative approach is generally concerned with obtaining a full and rounded account and understanding of a topic, which uses information in the form of words, images, or sound that can be derived, for example, from in-depth interviews or observation. Alternatively, it is possible to use both qualitative and quantitative methods in unique research, known as a mixed-methods approach (Veal, 2018). Our results show a predominance of qualitative studies (42%), followed by the mixed methods approach (34%), and with less expression the quantitative methods (24%). One example of a qualitative study is the research on the development of rural tourism routes in South Africa by Briedenhann & Wickens (2004) whilst Hashimoto & Telfer

(2003) developed a quantitative study to investigate the markets visiting the Niagara Wine Route in Canada. On the other hand, Pikkemaat, Peters, Boksberger, & Secco (2009) adopted both methods to study the South Tyrolean Wine Route in Italy.

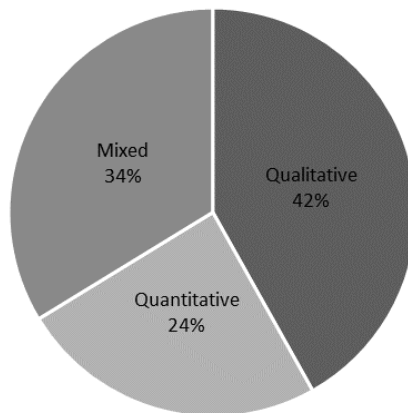


Figure 8. *Research method (%)*

3.3.3. Data sources

According to Veal (2018), the primary data is gathered by the researcher for the study and the secondary data is existing data gathered by other people/organizations for other purposes. In terms of data sources, our results are divided into three categories, i.e., primary, secondary, or both. The results presented in Figure 9 show that 56% of the studies require primary data, e.g., to explore the value of a region as a wine tourism destination (Trišić, Štetić, Privitera, & Nedelcu, 2020), 17% uses primary and secondary data, e.g. to study the potential of a region to develop wine tourism (Gatti *et al.*, 2002), and 27% use only secondary data, e.g., to define a network of wine routes (Efsthios *et al.*, 2009).

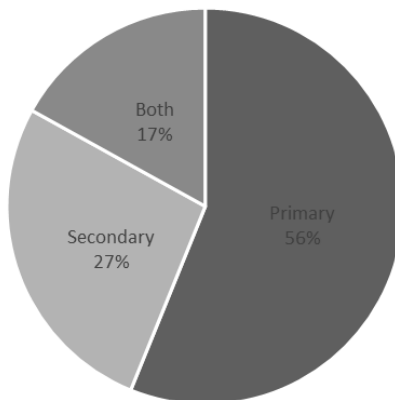


Figure 9. *Research data source (%)*

3.3.4. Data collection methods

Regarding the data collection methods, the results were also classified based on Veal (2018). The analysis shows that 49% of the studies applied a triangulation of method, when more than one data collection method is applied, while the remaining half applied only one method. Looking at those who applied only one method (Figure 10), the most common methods are the questionnaire-based survey (24%),

e.g., Alonso and O'Neill (2009) research on wine tourism development issues in three wine regions, and in-depth interviews (12%), e.g. Stewart *et al.* (2008) analysis of wine and culinary tourism in the Niagara region, Canada. The action research and analysing texts techniques were applied respectively on 4% and 3% of the studies. For instance, action research was applied by (Cloutier, Renard, Arcand, & Laviolette, 2016) to investigate the collaboration for innovation among stakeholders of a cider Route in Canada, and analysing texts was applied by Payne & Hurt (2015) to explore what heritage themes the Route 66 sites convey to tourists. Finally, other techniques correspond to 8% of the total, for instance, big data (Tikunov, Belozerov, Panin, & Antipov, 2018), biographical method (Teye & Timothy, 2004), and the Delphi technique (De La Torre, Caridad Y Ocerín, Fuentes, & Hidalgo, 2014), among others.

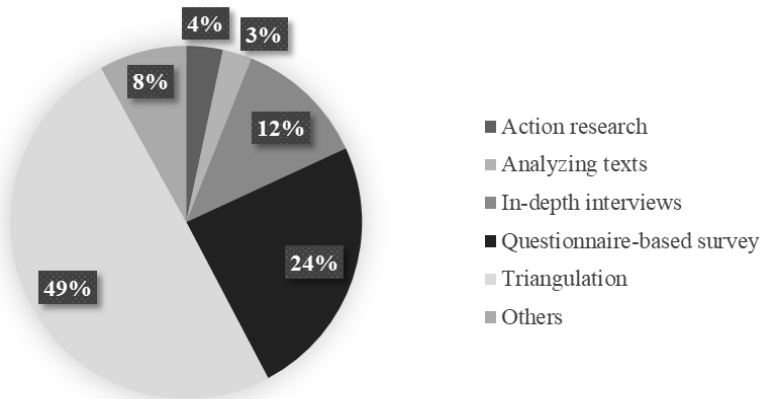


Figure 10. Research data collection methods (%)

Looking at studies that applied a triangulation of methods (Figure 11), the most used techniques are in-depth interviews (73%), analysing texts (52%), observation (48%), and questionnaire-based surveys (31%). Nevertheless, specific triangulations are more common, as they occurred three or more times, namely in-depth interviews and observation, in-depth interviews and questionnaire-based surveys, or the combination of analysing texts and in-depth interviews with one other technique.

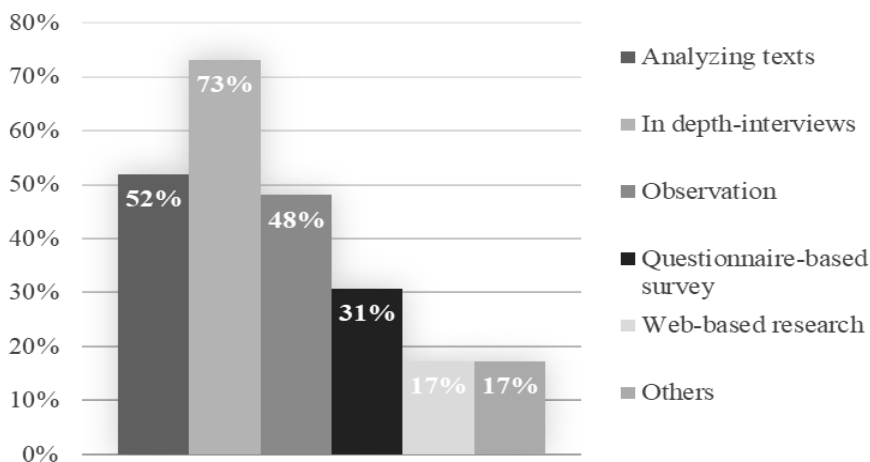


Figure 11. Triangulated data collection methods (%)

For example, Correia *et al.* (2004) evaluated the Bairrada Wine Route by gathering data from winery managers through in-depth interviews and observation. Ritchie & Webber (2013) applied in-depth interviews and questionnaire-based surveys to assess the potential development of wine tourism via a wine route in Wales. Carden (2006) collected data through analysing texts, in-depth interviews, and observation to examine the historical phases of Route 66, and Mei, Lurfald, & Bråttå (2017) identified the challenges and possibilities of networking and collaboration in a food tourism project through analysing texts, in-depth interviews, and a questionnaire-based survey.

3.4. Future research paths

The classification used in the analysis of the research themes is applied to analyse the future research paths found in the literature, namely, consumer behaviour, route development, stakeholder relationships, territorial impacts, tourism development, and others.

3.4.1. Consumer behaviour

New research paths concerning the context of consumer behaviour on tourism routes are often recommended for a deeper analysis of tourists' demographic profile (Bruwer, 2003; López-Guzmán, Canalejo, & López, 2014; Reigadinha & Cravidão, 2015; Telfer, 2001b), behaviour in the destination (Bruwer, 2003; Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003; Kunc, 2010; López-Guzmán, *et al.*, 2014; Santos, Vavdinos, & Martinez, 2020), experiences (Alonso, 2013; Brandano, Osti, & Pulina, 2019; Bruwer, 2003; Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Caton & Santos, 2007; Mei *et al.*, 2017; Pikkemaat *et al.*, 2009; Proos & Hattingh, 2020), or motivations (Fernandes, Pimenta, Gonçalves, & Rachão, 2012; Grybovyč, Lankford, & Lankford, 2013; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011). Those research lines often suggest the replication of a study and the comparison of results on different study areas (Pikkemaat *et al.*, 2009; Reigadinha & Cravidão, 2015), over time (Kim, Kim, & King, 2016), using different methodologies (Kim *et al.*, 2016; Santos *et al.*, 2020) or expanding the research sample (Kim *et al.*, 2016; Paiva, Seabra, & Abrantes, 2019). Furthermore, Bruwer & Alant (2009) suggest the segmentation of the wine tourist market, between specialist' and 'generalist' wine tourists, and more research on the perceived and preferred wine region imagery and on the multiplier effect of wine tourism on wine sales in the retail trade. Also, Moulin & Boniface (2001) stress the need for research on tourists' reactions to routes as tourism products. Other research lines are directed to tourists in their place of origin, namely on wine purchasing behaviour produced by the wineries visited (López-Guzmán, Vieira-Rodríguez, & Rodríguez-García, 2014) or the identification of potential visitors (Ispas, Constantin, & Candrea, 2015). Ispas *et al.* (2015) also propose an investigation on different marketing, sales and communication channels, partnerships to reach out to the target audiences or other types of promotional activities for awareness-raising purposes. Ramos, Cuamea, & Galván-León (2019) point out future research paths considering the moments before, during, and after the trip, namely research on previous destination image and the effect of prior knowledge in visitor's experience, the impact of road infrastructures and accessibilities on visitor's satisfaction and behaviour during the visitation, and word of mouth and electronic word of mouth in a post-visit dimension. In addition, Tomljenović & Getz (2009) mention the need to explore 'the value of direct cellar door sales to tourists and how tourist visits shape future consumption and brand-related decisions' (p. 47). Other research paths include the visitor's willingness to pay for organic products (Brandano *et al.*, 2019), the influence of involvement and satisfaction on tourist behaviour (Paiva *et al.*, 2019), and the focus on visitor satisfaction, impacts on local businesses and communities and visitors' interest in participating in similar routes (Chountala, Chountalas, Magoutas & Mavragani, 2019). A broader study should involve tourist's perceptions, satisfaction, demands or overall experience (Alonso & Liu, 2012; Alonso & O'Neill, 2009).

3.4.2. Route development

Regarding the development of tourism routes, Moulin & Boniface (2001) state the need for future research on methodologies for route planning or further investigation on the success factors of routes. Similarly, methodological advances are called for in the creation of an integrated cultural route offer (Cojocariu, 2015), the development of a landscape network of traditional settlements (Li & Hu, 2019), or the support of a decision-making process for the recovery of historical paths (Fistola & Roca, 2018). Others future research paths should focus on the evaluation of route development (Alonso & O'Neill, 2009), the organizational form of thematic routes and a thematic route qualification system (Nagy, 2012), and wine routes structures and activities (Festa *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, the replication of a study to compare and analyse different routes' dynamics, in time and space is often recommended (Correia, 2006; Li & Hu, 2019), or to increase the data collected on a particular issue (Li & Hu, 2019). Bellens *et al.* (2016) mention the possibility of extending the analyses of routes' social media to other platforms than Instagram or other cultural routes, as well as to confirm their results through a different methodology, such as interviews.

3.4.3. Stakeholder relationships

The issues of stakeholder relationships between route members and non-members are a prominent research line. Moulin & Boniface (2001) point out the need for research on the relationship between route members and on the implementation of common initiatives. Telfer (2001b) suggests further investigation on strategic alliances of route members both at the horizontal and vertical levels and on the perspective of other stakeholders about strategic alliances. Also, some authors state the need for research on the involvement between different stakeholders, such as the tourism industry, the local community, for instance, wine producers, or local government (Correia, 2006; Festa *et al.*, 2020; Kunc, 2010; Sheridan, Alonso, & Scherrer, 2009). The replication of studies is a research line suggested to compare results in different study areas or overtime, i.e. Lavandoski, Pinto, Silva, & Vargas-Sánchez (2016) suggest a longitudinal study of the institutionalization process of a wine route, a replication of the same study in other wine regions, or to consider non-members in the analysis. Bregoli, Hingley, Del Chiappa, & Sodano (2016) recommend research on stakeholder collaboration in a different study area, and Mei *et al.* (2017) suggest extending their study to other stakeholders. On the other hand, more research lines worth following include the analysis of the role of stakeholders, such as local public bodies, in terms of political power and functions, and policies and strategies (Brás, Costa & Buhalis, 2010), the application of the boundary objects theory on tourism networks (Del Chiappa, Bregoli, & Kim, 2019), the influence of institutional pressure on cooperative businesses (Lavandoski *et al.*, 2016), or using a multi-actor approach to show its empirical interest (Severo, 2017).

3.4.4. Territorial impacts

Moulin & Boniface (2001) stress the need for further research on route impacts, particularly on heritage conservation and socio-economic development issues. Similarly, other authors have suggested future investigations to identify and measure wine tourism impacts (Correia, 2006; Tomljenović & Getz, 2009). Mariotti (2012) suggested future research on the relationship between cultural routes and local tourist systems, on the dynamics of cultural routes networks and sub-networks, and the integration of cultural routes into local tourist systems. Stoffelen & Vanneste (2016) call for future research on the impact of tourists on empowering the community and local entrepreneurial stakeholders at a destination. Furthermore, it is also suggested to replicate investigations in other study areas to compare their results (Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019; López-Guzmán *et al.*, 2009; Yankholmes *et al.*, 2010), as well as longitudinal studies to 'monitor changes in the synergistic relationship between tourism and social capital along wine trails at different development stages' (Xu *et al.*, 2020, p. 10). Regarding the residents perspective, studies should focus on the type and scale of tourism favoured by residents of former slave markets on

Ghana's Slave Route (Yankholmes *et al.*, 2010), on new moderation and mediation models on tourism performance, particularly related to psycho-social characteristics of the destination (Vana & Malaescu, 2016), or on the benefits for residents benefits of living near wine trails and how the geospatial attributes of wine trails influence the resident's perception about them (Xu *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, Xu *et al.* (2020) recommended exploring the spatial attributes of wine trails, such as residents' distance to main attractions, or the social capital in other linear tourism route settings.

3.4.5. *Tourism development*

The tourism development category, the future research paths encompass a wide range of themes related to wine tourism, such as its promotion by destination marketing organizations (Tomljenović & Getz, 2009), challenges to maximize its tourism potential and to ensure its sustainable development (Alonso & Liu, 2012), the life-cycle of tourism destinations (Tomljenović & Getz, 2009), the relationship between the wine tourism and culinary tourism sectors (Holland, Smit, & Jones, 2014), or the application of a framework of terroir tourism to different study areas (Holland *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, Alonso & Liu (2012) state that longitudinal research should be developed to provide more data on the perceived benefits of wine entrepreneurs to wine tourism and to explore wine entrepreneurship and wine marketing, and Kunc (2010) call for future research on cellar door operations, since 'it is a key factor in tourists' satisfaction' (p. 59). Ergüven (2015) suggested further quantitative studies on the different perspectives between visitors and business entrepreneurs, and on the inexistence of accommodation facilities at the destination. Furthermore, Alonso (2013) recommended an analysis of a sustainable gastronomic concept and on the extent to which wineries and other businesses are adopting social media to promote local gastronomy and products as well as to follow up events and developments from the supply and demand sides over time. Kirkman, Strydom, & Zyl (2013) stated that further research must address two obstacles, namely the low levels of wine sales to wine tourists and the inability of wine tourism to differentiate a wine product. Jurigova & Lencsesova (2015) point out the need for further research on the sustainable development of tourism destinations, besides cultural and mountain destinations, and Mei *et al.* (2017) indicated the management of touristic products as a future research path. Lopez, Nicosia, & González (2018) recommend future research on the advantages of film-induced tourism for destination management organizations and its impact on tourism destination, while Carden (2006) suggests to 'monitor the type of public relations activities being used by travel and tourism destinations and the effectiveness of those activities' (p. 140). The replication of studies may involve the extension of the research sample to other stakeholders or the analysis of other study areas (Petrevska & Namicev, 2017). Furthermore, Tomljenović & Getz (2009) suggest future research to encourage systematic benchmarking between wine tourism regions. Petrevska & Namicev (2017) mention the introduction of other research hypotheses to find how to reanimate Ottoman heritage more efficiently from a tourism perspective. Other research paths should focus on different perspectives of wine tourism in the Portuguese context, such as 'wine tourism and the use of space in some regions, the sharing economy in transportation and hospitality, the human resources challenges of tourism in rural areas...' (Santos *et al.*, 2020, p. 168).

3.4.6. *Other*

Other research paths should address methodological and statistical analysis improvements for a land classification method along a cultural route, in terms of the study area, criteria, and data collection (Diti *et al.*, 2015), or for a tool for the analysis and the documentation of spatial features of the slow route (Scandiffio, 2019).

4. Conclusion

This scoping review on tourism routes provides an overall view on the topic by identifying the commonest categories of routes, research themes, applied methodologies and identified future research paths. In broad terms, tourism routes are understood as organizations that result from partnerships between stakeholders under a common theme to promote tourism development.

So far, the study of tourism routes has been focused on two main types of routes, one under the thematic grouping of food and drink on a regional scale, such as wine, and another under the thematic grouping routes of pilgrimage and history on an international scale, such as the cultural routes of COE. Most of the routes studied in the selected sources of evidence are located in Europe, however, the result may be influenced by the selected keywords, i.e. “tourism” and “route”, and their usage by European/Western authors.

The research themes were grouped in six categories, i.e., consumer behaviour, route development, stakeholder relationships, territorial impacts, tourism development, and others. Over time, the most representative theme category is route development, which considers planning, management, or assessment processes of tourism routes. Moreover, there are a considerable number of studies related to general issues of tourism development, stakeholder relationships within or outside the route, the territorial impacts on the local community, particularly in economic terms, and the consumer behaviour of tourists in the destination, considering their profiles, motivations and experiences.

In terms of methodologies, most studies applied a qualitative approach or mixed methods approaches, and more than half use primary data. The most common data collection methods are the triangulation of techniques, particularly using in-depth interviews, analysing texts, and observation, and the application of questionnaire-based surveys.

Future research is especially needed on the methodologies for route’s planning and management, the assessment of route performance, and the investigation on the success factors of routes. Besides, there is a need for further research on the relationship between stakeholders from the tourism industry, governments, local communities, and others, both members and non-members, as well as on the consumer behaviour to better understand tourist’s profiles, motivations, and behaviour, or the socio-economic impacts of routes in tourism destinations. Moreover, it is commonly suggested to all categories to replicate research by expanding their samples, the period of analysis, or the study areas.

This review proposed to present a review on tourism research, thus, the theoretical contributions rely on providing an overall view on this topic to future researchers by identifying the commonest categories of routes, the main research themes, the applied methodologies on tourism routes research and the future research lines. Regarding the practical contributions, it is worth mentioning the usage of VOSviewer to identify the main terms used in the literature on tourism routes, such as wine route or cultural route. Furthermore, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, this is the first literature review using PRISMA scoping review approach in the tourism field.

This scoping review has three main limitations. First, the choice of the keywords “tourism” and “route” may influence the representativeness of European/Western research. Second, the application of a filter based on the author keywords using VOSviewer may have resulted in the exclusion of studies on routes associated with other touristic products than those included in the selected keywords. Third, another limitation is related to the PRISMA-ScR format, namely the exclusion of the results of individual sources of evidence reporting all relevant outcomes data for each source. Additionally, adjustments were made

to match the journal guidelines for publications, namely the abstract is not written by topics as it should be, although it includes the same information; the results and discussion are together in a single section, and an acknowledgements section was added to include the funding data.

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