



Review

Navigating the Nexus between Rural Revitalization and Sustainable Development: A Bibliometric Analyses of Current Status, Progress, and Prospects

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Abstract: Achieving sustainable rural development is challenging. However, revitalizing the rural economy is one of the most suitable strategies to overcome sustainable development problems. The rural revitalization strategy aims to create an idealized sustainable development model for rural areas which can avoid the current crisis and utilize institutional advantages to overcome the survival challenges of mostly small-scale peasant economies. The logic of the rural revitalization strategy lies in its essential value implication and practical orientation for consolidating the foundation in rural areas, including its characteristics and its ability to realize long-term sustainable development. There is growing interest in research on rural revitalization and sustainable development, but the current status, trends, and progress are unknown. This study examines the most recent advancements in research patterns for rural revitalization and the promotion of sustainable development from 1995 to 2023. It accomplishes this by thoroughly evaluating and analyzing published scholarly material. We performed a bibliometric analysis of the literature obtained from the Scopus database using VOS Viewer software version 1.6.15. We examined a total of 403 articles and evaluated them, focusing on the precise terms “Rural Revitalization” and “Sustainable Development”. We found that post-2018, there has been a notable surge in the popularity and acceptance of research related to these topics. China ranks first in terms of publishing the greatest number of research articles. The journal *Sustainability* has published the most articles on sustainable development and rural revitalization, followed by *Land* and the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. The *Journal of Rural Studies* published the most cited document. Exciting research areas include the conservation of natural resources, ecosystem cities, and rural revitalization strategies. The research findings thoroughly evaluate academic output and propose thematic areas for further investigation.

Keywords: bibliometric analysis; rural revitalization; rural development; VOS viewer; Scopus database



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1. Introduction

Approximately 50% of the global population resides in rural regions, with 90% hailing from Asia and Africa [1]. Migration has posed a significant demographic issue in rural areas and has been detrimental to their development. Furthermore, rural–urban migration, driven by factors such as alterations in farming techniques, limited employment prospects, and unfavorable economic circumstances, has resulted in significant challenges for both urban and rural regions. Rural areas have experienced demographic changes due to migration, leading to a growing elderly population, diminished human resources, the decline of villages, and the erosion of cultural legacies [2].

As a representative case, China has made significant progress in urbanization and poverty reduction, as observed by the global community [3]. China is undergoing rapid urbanization, which is one of the most significant human resettlement experiments in history. The escalating urbanization presents challenges of heightened congestion and population density. However, many obstacles still need to be addressed, such as the uncompetitive agricultural industry, the slow pace of development, low incomes, and the necessity for a thorough revitalization of rural areas [1]. Integrating the urban–rural gap is crucial for regional sustainable development, as it plays a significant role in rural revitalization [4]. Rural revitalization is a comprehensive approach encompassing various dimensions of rural life. Its objective is to counteract the decline in rural areas and improve rural communities' overall quality of life. Revitalizing rural communities holds significant potential for mitigating and fostering sustainable poverty reduction in those regions [5].

Nevertheless, the global phenomenon of urbanization has significantly increased the migration of skilled individuals from rural regions, commonly called brain drain [6]. The population decline has resulted in a scarcity of workers in rural regions and has caused disputes in regional development. To rectify this scenario, numerous nations, including Europe, Japan, and China, have progressively underscored the significance of rural development and initiated a succession of rural revitalization initiatives [7]. Academic research has extensively focused on rural revitalization, including in the areas of rural planning (Wang et al. [8]), the preservation of traditional villages (Li et al. [9]), and rural tourism (Fang et al. [10]).

However, revitalizing rural areas' economies is a highly suitable strategy to address the sustainable development challenges encountered by rural areas, as Xu et al. [11] stated. Revitalizing rural communities holds significant potential for fostering sustainable poverty reduction in those regions. China has implemented measures to revitalize rural development to enhance sustainable rural development [12]. The Rural Revitalization Strategy in China, implemented by the Communist Party of China (CPC) under the supervision of Marxist theory, seeks to address the issue of sustainable rural development [13]. In 2017, the CPC proposed fully executing the Rural Revitalization Strategy to comprehensively address the sustainable development of China's agricultural and rural areas. China has extensive documented evidence of effectively alleviating poverty by revitalizing rural regions [14].

Policies concerning sustainable development highlight the prominent importance of rural revitalization. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of comprehensive knowledge regarding the fundamental concepts and intellectual foundations of rural revitalization and sustainable development. There is scant literature on the development of the subject [15]. How have the connections and exchanges between rural revitalization and sustainable development changed? What are the areas of intense study focus and anticipated directions for future research? Accurately identifying these difficulties is challenging but essential for comprehending research hotspots and facilitating practical implementations.

This study utilized bibliometric analysis to visually represent research on rural revitalization for sustainable development using data from the Scopus database. This bibliometric analysis employs techniques such as “co-occurrence keyword clustering” and “bibliometric coupling” to uncover the research topics related to rural revitalization and sustainable development across various historical periods. Additionally, it aims to predict future trends to assist researchers in identifying potential areas of focus for rural revitalization and sustainable development. The findings of this analysis can serve as a reference for developing practical strategies and pathways for sustainable development.

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1. *What was the evolution of research issues related to rural revitalization and sustainable development?*

RQ2. *What are the commonalities and distinctions among the various stages of research development?*

RQ3. *Where are the hotspots of rural revitalization and sustainable development?*

This research contributes to critical growth areas such as conceptual development, productivity, and intellectual advancement. The study analyzes the current patterns in the literature and academic contributions by nations, authors, documents, keywords, and journals associated with rural revitalization and sustainable development. In addition, it records cross-border collaboration. It provides a co-citation analysis to comprehend the domain of “rural revitalization” and “sustainable development” and trends over twenty-eight years. Due to the increasing study focus on this subject, the comprehensive literature review summarizes the advancements made during this period. Its purpose is to assist other researchers in recognizing and tackling the challenges and deficiencies in rural tourism research, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of future research in this field.

2. Literature Review

Comprehensive innovation policies are needed to enhance the total capacity of rural innovation to achieve rural revitalization. This encompasses advancing innovation in agricultural technology, institutional and managerial methods, community-based networks, and intermediary platforms.

Several researchers have presented their perspectives on rural revitalization and the promotion of sustainable development. Irungu et al. [16] comprehensively analyzed rural revitalization initiatives prioritizing sustainable rural development. The findings demonstrated that the program’s focus on agricultural science and technology, entrepreneurship, and tourism offers a holistic strategy for advancing sustainable rural development. This signifies a transition from exclusively emphasizing agriculture to a more comprehensive comprehension of rural innovation, wherein agricultural output is regarded as but one element among others. Shi and Yang [17] investigated the levels of sustainable development and the elements that influence it in rural China using a strategy focused on revitalizing rural areas. The findings indicated that the developmental status of rural regions in China is progressing. However, this progress differs throughout all rural areas.

In addition, Yin et al. [18] introduced the rural innovation system, a multifaceted socio-economic network that seeks to rejuvenate rural areas and promote equitable and sustainable progress. This theory draws upon new growth, institutional, and innovation systems principles. Their approach introduces a rural innovation system that directly contributes to the current knowledge in rural studies, innovation systems, and public policy. In their study, Dai et al. [19] investigated the potential of rural tourism to revitalize rural areas. They investigated the process and elements of rebuilding rural spaces in a specific location in China, spurred by the growth of tourism. This was accomplished by analyzing remote sensing imagery, conducting semi-structured interviews, and observing the changes without actively participating. The focus was on understanding the cultural significance of rural areas. Their findings demonstrated that the implementation of tourist development by the government had converted the central village from a conventional rural society centered around familial connections into a commercialized rural tourism community with financial concerns.

Despite the prior studies, few authors have undertaken bibliometric studies in rural revitalization and other related areas. Liu et al. [20] examined the pertinent literature in the Web of Science database from 1991 to 2021. They observed that during the past three decades, there has been a noticeable rise in the quantity of publications focused on rural revival and policy. The prominent terms identified suggested that researchers focused on the significance of sustainable development, policy creation, and urbanization. Zheng et al. [21] analyzed 2339 relevant studies using bibliometric analysis. Their study examined the connections and interactions between villagers and rural revitalization using the Web of Science (WOS) database. They discovered that this field of research has progressed through four distinct stages, with conservation, management, and policy being the most frequently discussed topics. Li and Song [22] analyzed land consolidation and rural revitalization research statuses using publications from 1950 to 2021 in the Web of Science database. They revealed that a total of 1715 authors have authored related articles.

Most of these studies are related to rural revitalization, land issues, policy formation, and tourism. Also, there has not been any thematic analysis that provides a structure for the investigation. To our knowledge, no recent bibliometric analyses exist on the interaction between rural revitalization and broader sustainable development. We fill this gap by exploring rural revitalization in broader sustainable development concepts using a multidisciplinary database—Scopus. This will bring exciting insights into such an important study area and stir some curiosity into its investigations.

3. Research Methods

Bibliometrics is a quantitative approach used to assess the productivity, expansion, and influence of scholarly literature [23]. Its main function is to offer information about the current literature on certain subjects and organize it conceptually and intellectually. In this study, we performed a bibliometric analysis with the keywords “rural revitalization” and “sustainable development” in the Scopus database. Scopus is a comprehensive database widely used for searching scholarly papers published in reputed journals [24].

We used the search string (rural AND revitalization AND sustainable AND development) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “ar”) OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “re”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE, “final”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, “j”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, “English”)). The search was restricted to journal articles and review articles, excluding book chapters and conference proceedings, as Wijesinghe et al. [25] suggested. We conducted the search on 1 December 2023. A total of 696 research articles were found from 1995 to 2023. We restricted the search to articles and review papers that narrowed the sample to 557. Then, we again restricted to final papers, journals, and English papers, which gave us 547, 546, and 403 papers, respectively. Based on the multidisciplinary and broader perspective this article aims to achieve, all final 403 papers were included in the data analysis.

The graphical analysis of the sample was conducted using VOS Viewer, a software program that allows for the construction, visualization, and detailed analysis of various forms of bibliometric data [26]. This tool retrieves fundamental data, such as the performance of journals, prolific writers, and prominent countries. The software extracts intricate data, such as co-authorship relationships between nations, co-citations between authors, publications, and journals, and the co-occurrence of keywords. It then shows the data graphically.

4. Findings

4.1. Literature Trends by Year

Figure 1 depicts the number of research articles published yearly from 1995 to 2023. The graph shows that there was a significant increase in the number of publications in 2019. The annual publications gained a record high in 2022.

4.2. Most Impactful Authors

Table 1 depicts the number of research articles an author publishes annually (TP), total citations (TC), average citations per author (AV.CT), and rank. The graph shows that Liu, Y. and Wang, Y. both have eight articles each, which is the highest number of articles by an author on rural revitalization and sustainable development. This is followed by Li, Y., Wang, J., and Qu, L., who have seven, six, and five articles, respectively. Regarding average citations per author (AV.CT), Liu, Y. has the highest number of average citations (116.88), followed by Li X. (109.50), Li, J. (101.50), Zhang, X. (95.00), and Li, Y. (82.86). Based on the average citations, Liu, Y. is ranked the first most impactful author, followed by Li, X., Li, J., Zhang, X., and Li, Y. Figure 2 provides a graphical representation of this information.

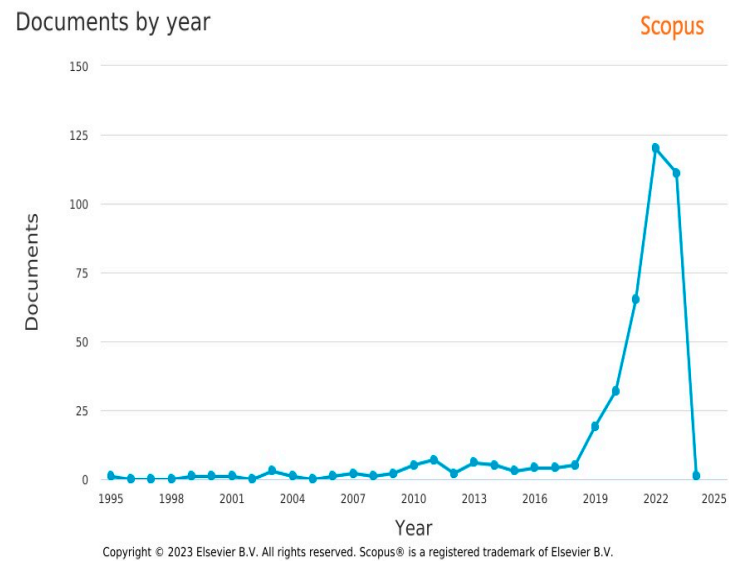


Figure 1. Document trends by year.

Table 1. Most impactful authors.

Author Name	TP	TC	AV.CT	Rank
Liu, Y.	8	935	116.88	1
Wang, Y.	8	333	41.63	6
Li, Y.	7	580	82.86	5
Wang, J.	6	248	41.33	7
Qu, L.	5	33	6.60	20
Su, Y.	4	35	8.75	16
Han, D.	3	22	7.33	19
Kong, X.	3	51	17.00	10
Li, T.	3	25	8.33	17
Liu, Z.	3	100	33.33	8
Ma, L.	3	79	26.33	9
Qiao, J.	3	32	10.67	11
Wang, C.	3	28	9.33	14
Wang, C.	3	27	9.00	15
Xia, P.	3	25	8.33	17
Xiong, K.	3	31	10.33	12
Yang, Y.	3	29	9.67	13
Zhang, X.	2	190	95.00	4
Li, X.	2	219	109.50	2
Li, J.	2	203	101.50	3

4.3. Highly Cited Documents

Table 2 lists the most influential publications on rural revitalization and sustainable development between 1995 and 2023. Li et al. [1] authored the most cited articles with 335 citations, followed by Gao and Wu [27] with 281 citations and Yang et al. [28] with 170 citations. For example, through an extensive literature review, Li et al. [1] interpreted why some rural areas decline while others do not. The study demonstrated that rural communities experience growth, decline, or disappearance due to the interactions between rural areas and the external environment. In a comprehensive analysis, Gao and Wu [27] put out a rural tourism-based model that aims to enhance our understanding of the connection between rural tourism and village revitalization in a cohesive manner. In addition, Yang et al. [28] investigated the spatial and temporal features of the interconnection and coordination of the three essential rural services in the research region from 2000 to 2015. The study found significant spatial and temporal changes in the degree of coordination between rural production, living, and ecological functions. The articles have received a

high number of citations because they address critical rural revitalization and sustainable development issues. This includes rural diversity, interactions in a rural environment, rural tourism, and spatial analysis.

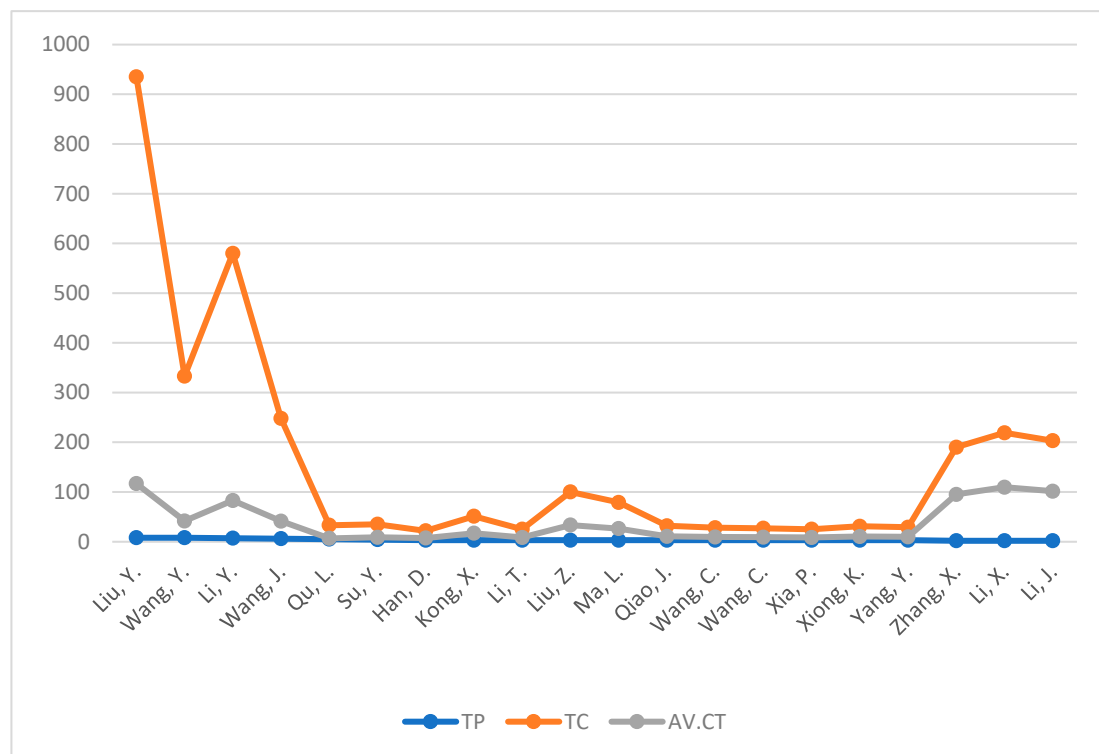


Figure 2. Most impactful authors.

Table 2. Top 10 highly cited documents.

Authors	Title	Year	Cited by	DOI
[1]	Why some rural areas decline while some others not: An overview of rural evolution in the world	2019	335	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.03.003
[27]	Revitalizing traditional villages through rural tourism: A case study of Yuanjia Village, Shaanxi Province, China	2017	281	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.04.003
[28]	Coupling coordination analysis of rural production-living-ecological space in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region	2020	170	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2020.106512
[29]	Land consolidation and rural revitalization in China: Mechanisms and paths	2020	159	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2019.104379
[30]	Effects of rural revitalization on rural tourism	2021	149	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2021.02.008
[31]	A comprehensive review of cold chain logistics for fresh agricultural products: Current status, challenges, and future trends	2021	105	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tifs.2021.01.066

Table 2. Cont.

Authors	Title	Year	Cited by	DOI
[32].	Impacts of land consolidation on rural human–environment system in typical watershed of the Loess Plateau and implications for rural development policy	2019	90	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2019.04.026
[33]	Rural land engineering and poverty alleviation: Lessons from typical regions in China	2019	83	https://doi.org/10.1007/s11442-019-1619-9
[34]	Targeted poverty alleviation and its practices in rural China: A case study of Fuping county, Hebei Province	2022	79	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2019.01.007
[35]	Measuring the symbiotic development of rural housing and industry: A case study of Fuping County in the Taihang Mountains in China	2019	71	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2018.12.013

4.4. Article Sources

Table 3 displays the most published journal sources. As indicated in the table, *Sustainability* is the leading journal that publishes the most articles, having published 72. *Land* follows this with 30 articles, the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* with 26 articles, *Land Use Policy* with 22, and the *Journal of Geographical Sciences* with 9 articles.

Table 3. Most published journal sources on rural revitalization and sustainable development.

Rank	Source	Articles
1	<i>Sustainability Switzerland</i>	72
2	<i>Land</i>	30
3	<i>International Journal Of Environmental Research And Public Health</i>	26
4	<i>Land Use Policy</i>	22
5	<i>Journal Of Geographical Sciences</i>	9
6	<i>Habitat International</i>	8
7	<i>Agriculture Switzerland</i>	7
8	<i>Environmental Science and Pollution Research</i>	7
9	<i>Chinese Geographical Science</i>	6
10	<i>Ecological Indicators</i>	6
11	<i>Journal Of Cleaner Production</i>	6
12	<i>Journal Of Rural Studies</i>	6
13	<i>Energy Reports</i>	4
14	<i>Frontiers In Environmental Science</i>	4
15	<i>Polish Journal of Environmental Studies</i>	4
16	<i>Wit Transactions on Ecology And The Environment</i>	4
17	<i>Buildings</i>	3
18	<i>Bulletin Of Chinese Academy of Sciences</i>	3
19	<i>Heliyon</i>	3
20	<i>ISPRS International Journal of Geo Information</i>	3

4.5. Most Influential Countries

Table 4 presents the top 20 countries that promote rural revitalization and sustainable development research.

Table 4. Most influential countries.

Country	Number of Articles
China	304
United States	21
Japan	17
United Kingdom	16
Australia	10
Romania	9
Spain	8
Germany	6
Hong Kong	6
Netherlands	6
Taiwan	6
Lithuania	5
Malaysia	5
Austria	4
Iran	4
Italy	4
Poland	4
Belgium	3
Canada	3
Denmark	3

China ranked first by publishing 305 articles on rural revitalization and sustainable development. The growth and success of rural revitalization have sparked global scholarly interest [36]. The United States of America ranks second in terms of publications, with a total of 21 documents. Japan follows closely with 17 documents, while the United Kingdom has 16. The increasing number of empirical articles in developed countries has led to the recognition of rural revitalization as a promising field for achieving sustainable development.

Figure 3 depicts the co-authorship relationship among authors' affiliated countries with varying node sizes. The co-authorship connection shows that collaboration among countries in rural revitalization and sustainable development is developing. Thirteen countries have collaborations. The authors in China hold the largest node in the co-authorship network, depicting that among the collaborating countries in rural revitalization and sustainable development, authors in China have maximum collaborations with authors from other countries, serving as the hub of co-authorship publication on rural revitalization and sustainable development between 1995 and 2023. Authors in the USA, UK, Australia, Netherlands, and Japan are prominent collaborators with authors from other countries. From Figure 3, China–USA had significant relations with a link strength of 15, China–UK had a link strength of 10, and China–Japan had a link strength of 5. China also has a maximum collaboration of 304 documents with 3532 citations and a total link strength of 53, followed by the United States with 21 documents, 317 citations, and a link strength of 16. Table 5 shows the detailed co-authorship information of the 13 countries.

Table 5. Top 13 collaborating countries.

Country	Documents	Citations	Total Link Strength
China	304	3532	53
United States	21	317	16
United Kingdom	16	208	13
Australia	10	89	12
Netherlands	6	72	7
Hong Kong	5	62	6
Japan	17	66	6
Germany	6	73	4
Malaysia	5	6	4
Spain	8	78	3
Taiwan	6	36	3
Romania	9	122	2
Lithuania	5	104	1

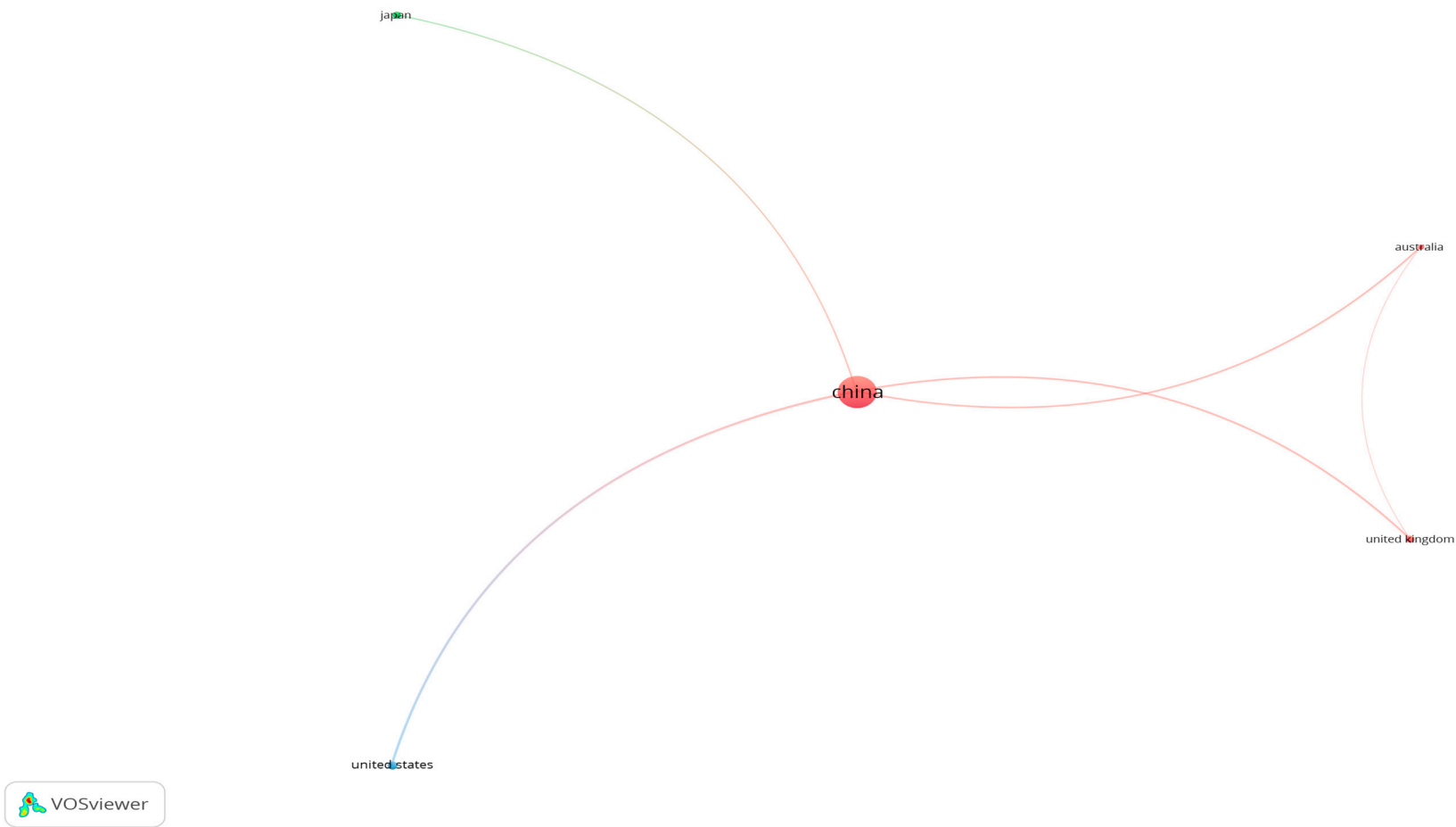


Figure 3. Co-authorship visualization analysis (countries 5 out of 58).

4.6. Co-Citation Analysis (Cited References and Sources)

Co-citation analysis operates under the fundamental premise that frequently cited items directly correlate with the likelihood that their content is interconnected. Figure 4 illustrates the co-citation of authors who have been cited. A total of 27,475 authors were referenced, of which 282 accumulated a minimum of twenty citations. The co-citation map displays a total of 281 objects divided into six distinct clusters. It contains a network of 36,116 links, with a cumulative link strength of 579,219. Cluster 1, shown by the color red, consists of 136 items, with Wang, J. as the leader, with 248 citations and a link strength of 279. Subsequently, Li, J. has accumulated 203 citations and a link strength of 279, while Zhang, X. has garnered 190 citations, and Chen, Y. has obtained 185 citations.

Cluster 2, represented by the color green, consists of 41 items. Long, H. has 343 citations and a link strength of 278, followed by Li X with 219 citations and a link strength of 279, Yang, Y. with 166 citations, and Jiang, J. with 93 citations. Cluster 3, shown in blue, includes 40 items, led by Wang, Y. with 333 citations and a link strength of 279. Zhang, Y. follows this with 260 citations and a link strength of 279, and Li, H. with 131 citations. Cluster 4, shown in yellow, represents 40 items. Liu, Y.s. leads the cluster with 266 citations and a link strength of 276, followed by Zhou, Y. with 236 citations and a link strength of 279, and Long, H. with 154 citations and a link strength of 267. Cluster 5, shown in purple, represents 20 items. Liu, Y. leads the cluster with 935 citations and a link strength of 279, followed by Li, Y. with 580 citations and a link strength of 279, and Guo, Y. with 90 citations and a link strength of 276. Cluster 6, shown in light blue, represents four items. The cluster is led by Zhang, J. with 154 citations and a link strength of 280, followed by Liu, H. with 60 citations and a link strength of 274, and Liu, M. with 40 citations and a link strength of 269. Overall, the authors' co-citation analyses suggest that Liu, Y., with 935 in cluster 5, is the highest co-cited author.

Figure 5 depicts the co-citation of references regarding rural revitalization and sustainable development. Liu et al.'s [37] paper titled "Key issues of land use in China and implications for policy making", published in *Land Use Policy*, is the cited reference with the highest citation, 25, and the strongest connection, with a link strength of 100. This is followed by Liu's [38] paper titled "Introduction to land use and rural sustainability in China", published in *Land Use Policy*, which has 23 citations and a link strength of 90, and Liu and Li's [39] paper titled "Revitalize the world's countryside" published in *Nature*, which has 17 citations and a link strength of 51.

4.7. Keyword Co-Occurrence—All Keywords and Author Keywords

Table 6 presents the co-occurrence analysis of the most frequently discussed themes regarding rural revitalization and sustainable development between 1995 and 2023. Author keywords indicate an article's substance or relevance to its study issue [40]. The presence of author keywords appearing together suggests that the publications share a mutual theme.

The minimum keyword occurrences were 5 for the 2738 elements, and 145 met the threshold limit. As indicated in Table 6, the authors' keyword with the highest number of occurrences is sustainable development, with 190 occurrences and a link strength of 1219. China follows this with 175 occurrences and a link strength of 1324, rural development with 108 occurrences and a link strength of 800, and rural revitalization with 93 occurrences and a link strength of 534.

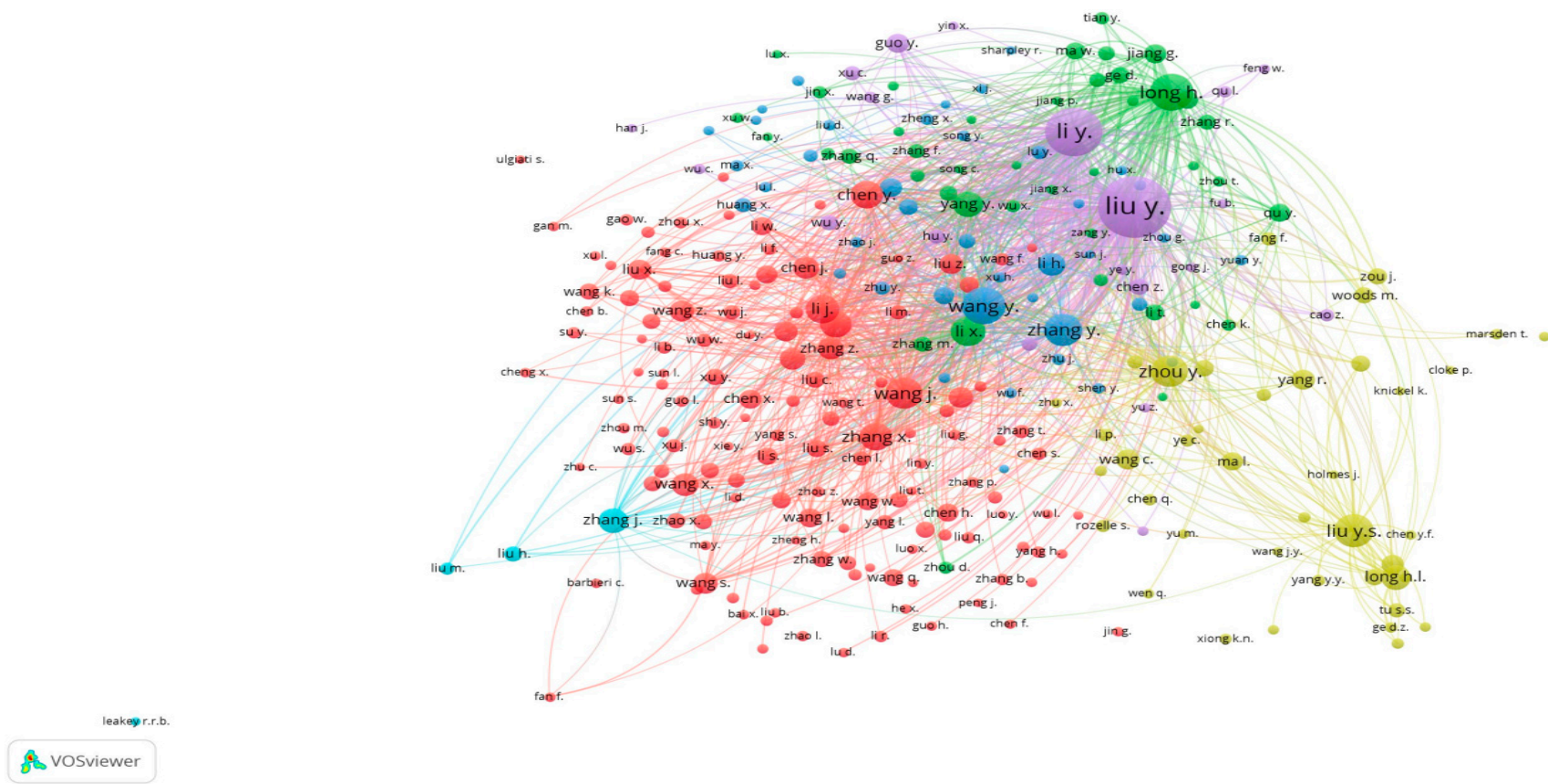


Figure 4. Co-citation analysis of cited authors.

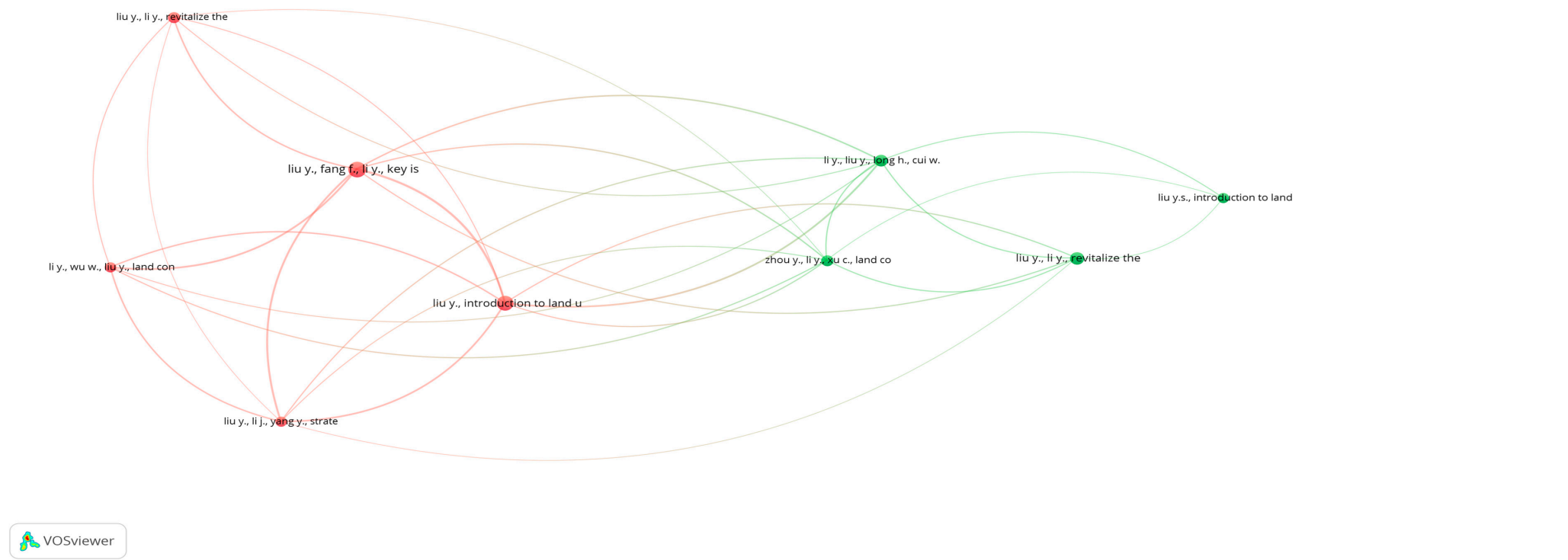


Figure 5. Co-citation analysis (cited references, min citation of a cited reference = 10; 9 out of 20,487 met the criteria).

Table 6. Analysis of keyword occurrences.

Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
sustainable development	190	1219
China	175	1324
rural development	108	800
rural revitalization	93	534
rural area	74	642
sustainability	51	349
rural areas	43	260
human	40	532
humans	35	486
agriculture	31	327
article	31	439
rural population	31	391
spatiotemporal analysis	31	270
economic development	29	264
poverty alleviation	27	161
village	22	169
rural economy	21	166
spatial analysis	21	197
regional planning	20	118
rural tourism	20	84

The network visualization provided in Figure 6 provides the network visualization of keywords. It identifies and categorizes 145 items into seven significant keyword clusters. The number of elements they contain differentiates these clusters. Cluster 1 in red contains 39 items, emphasizing terms like China, sustainable, and rural development. Cluster 2, with 32 items in green, includes keywords such as sustainability, innovation, rural planning, and revitalization. Cluster 3 has 28 items and is blue with keywords such as rural areas, ecology, economic development, and urbanization. Cluster 4 has 21 yellow items encompassing humans, ecosystem city, spatial distribution, and rural population. Cluster 5 has 13 items in purple with keywords such as spatiotemporal analysis, spatial analysis, Beijing, and optimization. Cluster 6, which has 11 items and is shown in light blue, includes keywords like rural area, food security, agricultural development, and agriculture production. Finally, cluster 7, which has one item, is shown in brown, and the keyword is rural regional system.

Figure 7 provides a keyword occurrence overlay which shows the research trends regarding rural revitalization and sustainable development over the years.

Consequently, there has been a change in the choice of terms. The prevailing keywords commonly utilized and highly noticeable in the most recent research are displayed in yellow and light green. Some of these keywords include “rural revitalization”, “rural, regional system”, “ecology”, and “sustainable development goals”.

4.8. Bibliographic Coupling (Documents and Authors)

4.8.1. Bibliographic Coupling (Documents)

Zupic and Carter [41] define bibliographic coupling as assessing the similarity between two texts by counting the number of references they have in common. The degree of overlap between the two articles’ bibliographies directly correlates with the strength of their connection. Documents exhibit bibliographic coupling when they reference the same sources and have a shared intellectual topic, as described by Kessler [42]. This method is employed to determine the thematic structure of journals.

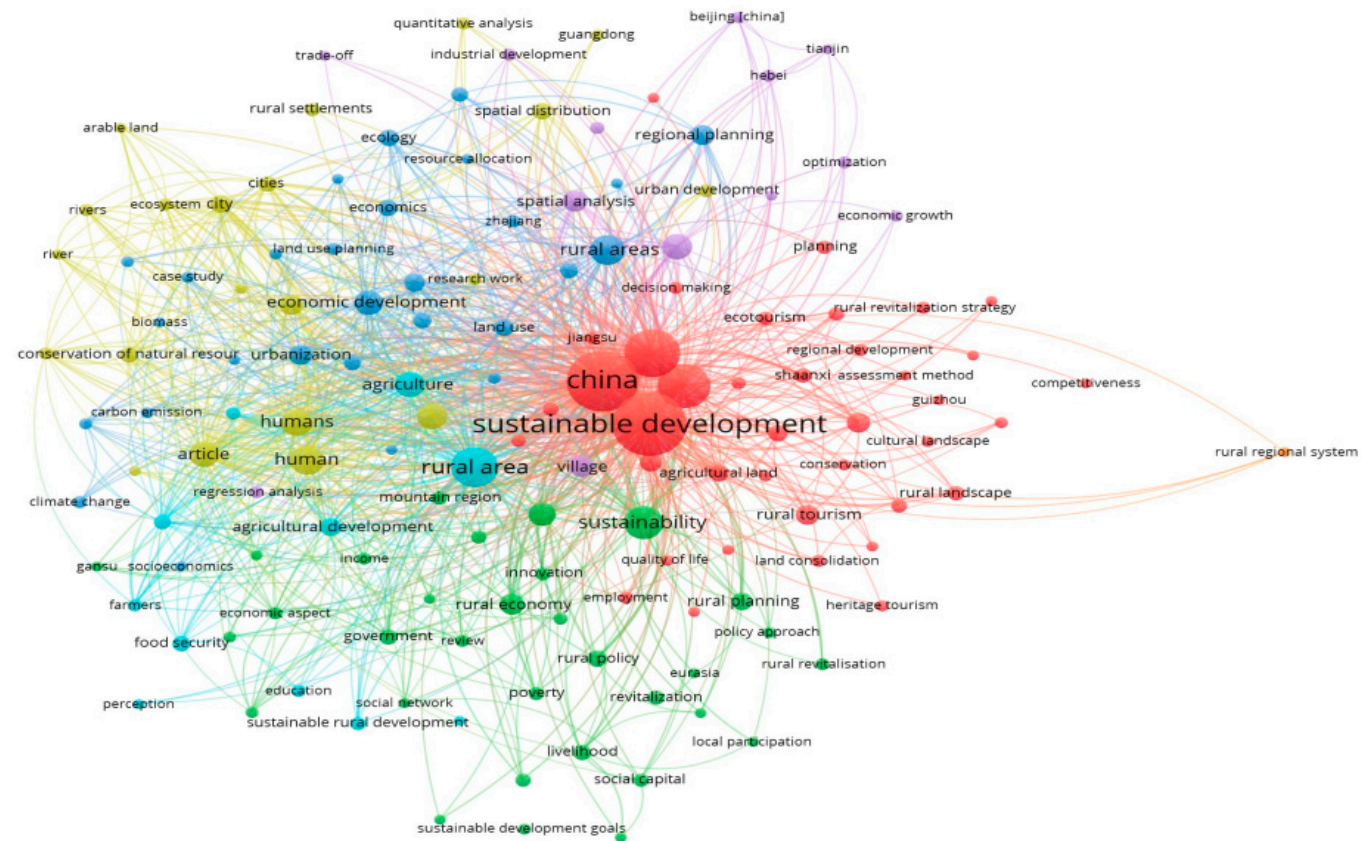


Figure 6. Network visualization of keywords.

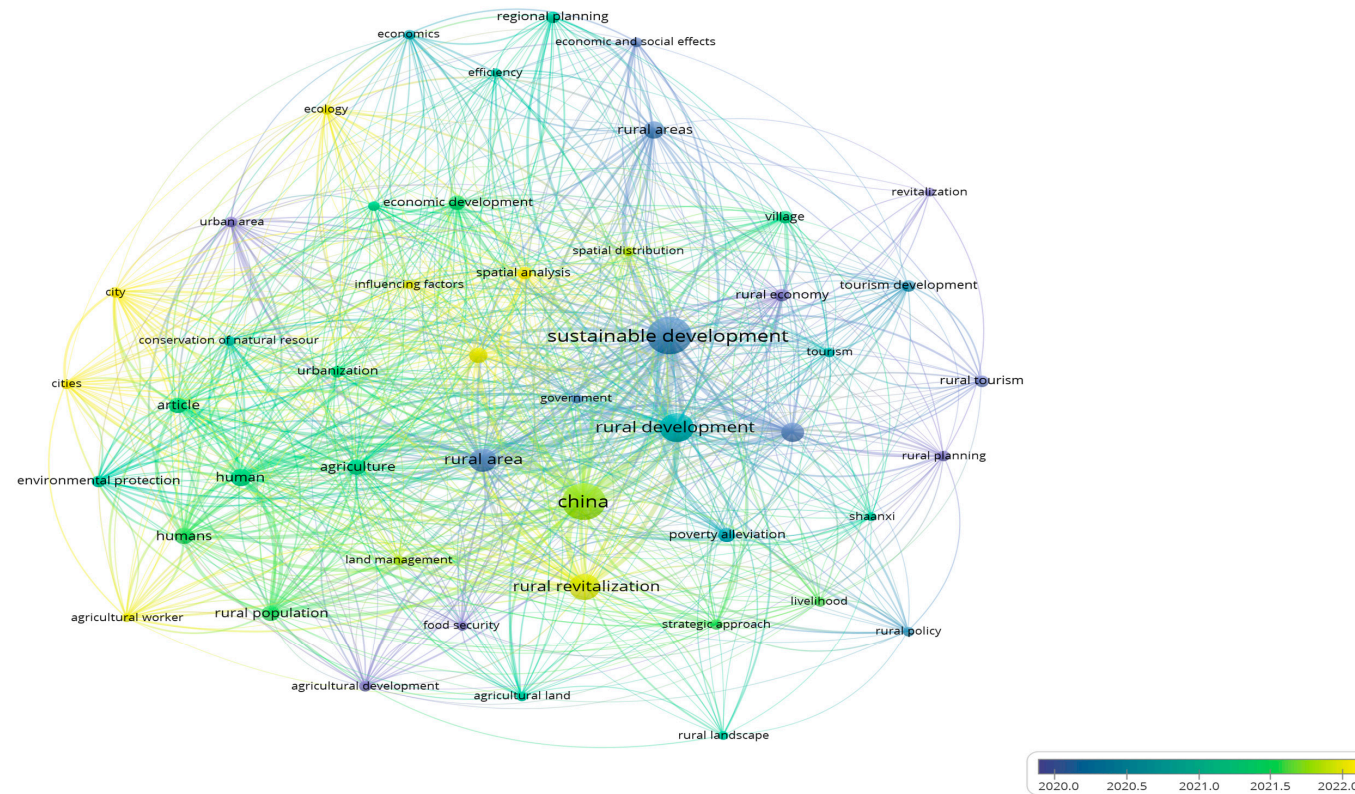


Figure 7. Keyword co-occurrence overlay (min number of occurrences of keyword = 10; 48 out of 2738 met the criteria).

Figure 8 depicts the bibliographic coupling of documents published relating to rural revitalization and sustainable development from 1995 to 2023. Zhou, Y.; Li, Y.; Zu, C. (2020) and Liu, Y.; Wang, Y. (2019) exhibit the strongest connection. This is followed by Guo, Y.; Liu, Y. (2021) and Zhou, Y.; Li, Y.; Xu, C. (2020) and Zhang, B.; Niu, W.; Ma, L.; Zuo, X.; Kong, X.; Chen, H.; Zhang, Y.; Chen, W.; Zhao, M.; Xia, X. (2019) and Zhou, Y., Li, Y., Xu C. (2020). This information suggests more frequent collaborations among authors.

4.8.2. Bibliographic Coupling (Authors)

The bibliographic coupling of authors is also depicted in Figure 9. It indicates that Zhou and Chen exhibit the strongest association. Zhuo and Guo and Liu and Guo follow this. This suggests that Zhuo shares many references with most of the authors who publish on rural revitalization and sustainable development and provides an idea of the thematic structure of rural revitalization and sustainable development.

4.9. Clustering of Rural Revitalization and Sustainable Development Articles Based on Bibliographic Coupling

Kessler [42] posited that scientific research exhibits conceptual similarity using its referencing structure. When two articles reference a shared third article, both papers center their talks around comparable topics [43]. Wallin [44] stated that bibliographic coupling operates assuming that two texts referencing the same literature have similar content.

The technique of bibliographic coupling was employed to condense the corpus on rural revitalization and sustainable development into key themes. Bibliographic coupling is a method that groups articles based on the references they have in common. It helps us understand the recurring themes that the journal has focused on over the years [43]. By utilizing bibliographic coupling, we formed eight topic groupings. We further investigated the major focus of each theme cluster.

We present each cluster and corresponding theme below.

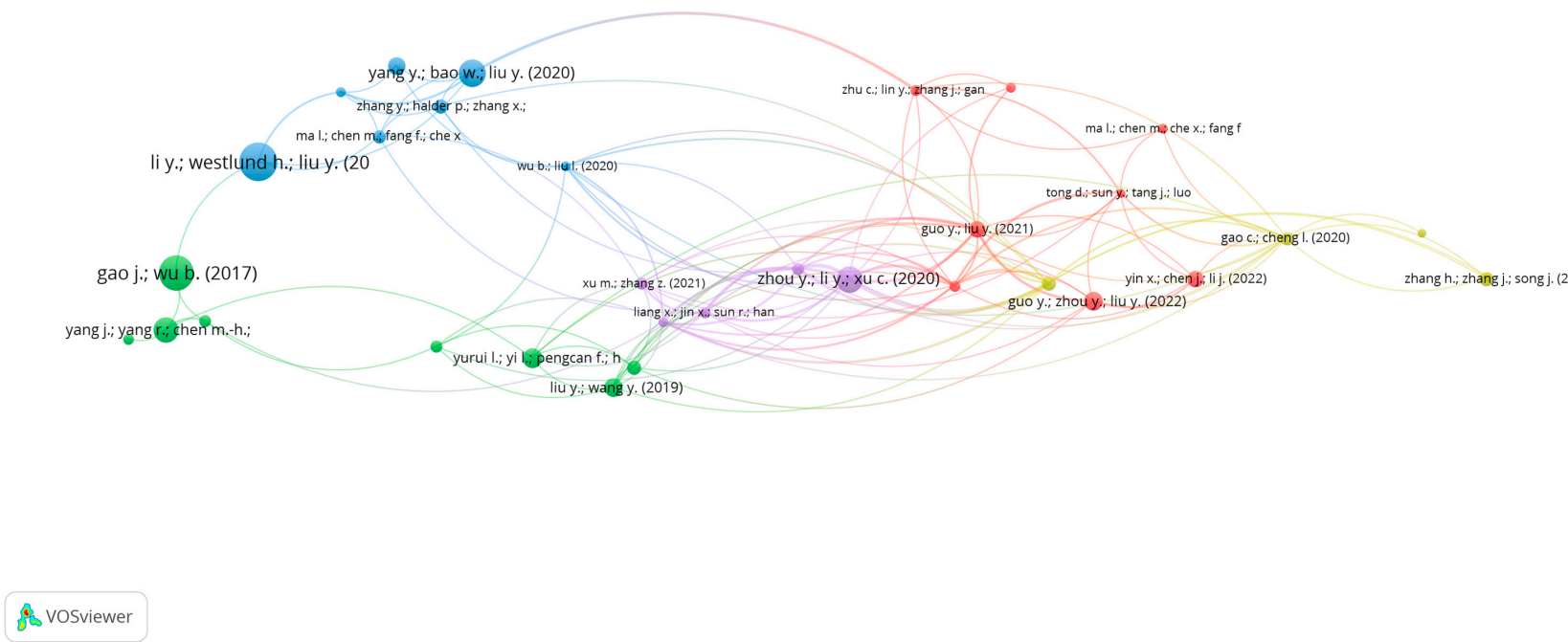
4.9.1. Cluster 1 Theme: Assessing Rural Revitalization and Sustainable Development Nexus

This cluster contains 10 articles. The articles in this cluster tend to focus primarily on assessing rural revitalization and the sustainable development nexus. The authors focus on topics such as classification-based sustainable revitalization (Liu et al. [45]), assessing eco-villages (Liu et al. [46]), rural revitalization assessment (Li et al. [47]), cultivated land multifunctional assessment (Su et al. [48]), and sustainable development strategy (Hu et al. [49]).

Assessing the nexus between rural revitalization and sustainable development involves examining the interplay between efforts to revitalize rural areas and sustainability goals. This assessment typically considers various economic, social, and environmental dimensions. By thoroughly examining these dimensions, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners can gain insights into the effectiveness and challenges associated with the nexus between rural revitalization and sustainable development. This holistic approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in rural areas.

4.9.2. Cluster 2 Theme: Rural Land Consolidation

This cluster contains 10 articles. The authors focus on the intersection of land consolidation, spatial distribution, and poverty alleviation. Specifically, the authors discussed the land fragmentation problem (Zhang et al. [50]), land consolidation and rural revitalization (Zhou et al. [29]), spatial relationships among ecosystems (Lyu et al. [51]), land consolidation and spatial patterns (Li et al. [52]), household poverty alleviation (Cheng et al. [53]), and landscape pattern analysis (Wang and Zhang [54]).



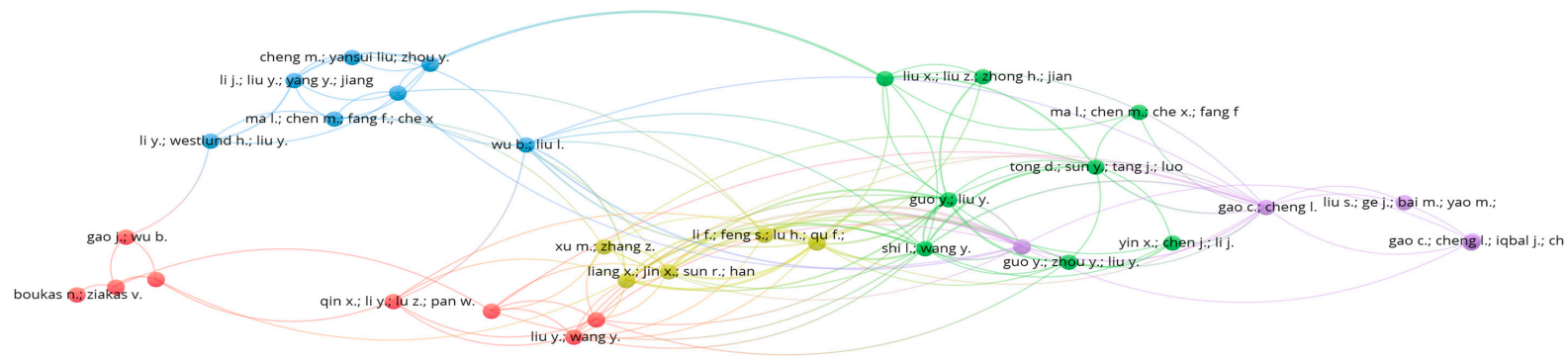


Figure 9. Bibliographic coupling (authors, min number of documents 1; min citation = 20; 50 out of 400 met the threshold).

Rural land consolidation is a process that involves reorganizing and optimizing the distribution of land in rural areas. The primary objective is to enhance agricultural land's productivity. The spatial distribution of land consolidation is often a complex and context-specific process that requires careful consideration of multiple factors. Local authorities, agricultural experts, and community stakeholders typically collaborate to develop and implement effective land consolidation strategies. The relationship between spatial distribution and land consolidation is multifaceted, encompassing agriculture, environment, infrastructure, community dynamics, and governance considerations. A well-planned land consolidation process considers these factors to create a spatial arrangement that maximizes agricultural land and minimizes negative outcomes.

4.9.3. Cluster 3 Theme: Rural Transformation

This cluster has nine articles. The authors focus on rural evolution and transformation. Li et al. [1] discussed rural livelihood diversification and strong social capital as necessities for rural transformation. Zhang [50] suggested rural agricultural modernization for rural transformation. Thus, rural revitalization is essential for better rural transformation in the new era [52]. Ma et al. [55] provided a clear understanding of the transformation and development of rural areas, identified variations in the mechanisms of rural development across different regions, and examined appropriate policies and measures that align with regional features.

Rural transformation refers to significant and often comprehensive changes in rural areas, impacting various aspects of life, such as social, economic, environmental, and cultural dimensions. This transformation can result from various factors, including technological advancements, economic development, agricultural practice changes, and social and demographic pattern shifts.

4.9.4. Cluster 4 Theme: Rural Tourism and Sustainable Development

This cluster contains eight articles. The authors focus on the intersection of rural tourism and sustainable development. Yang et al. [30] employed a variety of data sources to examine the physical and social changes in rural areas from the perspective of tourism development. The study by Boukas and Ziakas [56] examined the relationship between tourism policy and the well-being of residents in Cyprus. Gica et al. [57] employed a case-study methodology to illustrate unique, sustainable tourism practices by showcasing a sustainable rural tourism destination in Romania's northwestern development zone. In their study, Deng et al. [58] introduced a novel framework for rural destinations at various stages. They determined that the enhancement of path innovation may be achieved by catering to the demands of tourists and offering appropriate products.

Rural tourism and sustainable development are interconnected concepts that promote responsible tourism practices in rural areas to ensure long-term benefits for local communities and balance the needs of tourists, the environment, and the residents.

4.9.5. Cluster 5 Theme: Modeling Rural Sustainable Development

This cluster contains eight items. Most articles focus on methodologies for addressing rural sustainable development issues, especially using econometric modeling. Wang et al. [59] investigated the impact of urban proximity on the irrigation commons. They analyzed survey data collected from 1257 villages in 306 counties and 27 provinces in China. Qin et al. [60] combined econometric modeling and machine learning techniques to enhance the accuracy and comparability of their findings. In their 2019 study, Yurui et al. [32] introduced the ladder model to comprehensively analyze the effects of land consolidation on rural China's territorial human–environment system.

Modeling rural sustainable development involves creating frameworks and strategies that address the economic, social, and environmental aspects of development in rural areas. Modeling rural sustainable development requires an integrated and holistic approach considering the interconnectedness of the sustainability factors. It also involves active col-

laboration and participation from local communities to ensure that development initiatives are contextually relevant and sustainable in the long term.

4.9.6. Cluster 6 Theme: Rural Revitalization and Poverty Reduction

This cluster contains eight items. They primarily discuss rural revitalization and poverty reduction. Guo and Liu [61] examined the correlation between land and rural development and investigated the poverty alleviation mechanism. In their study, Guo et al. [34] examined poverty reduction in rural areas of China. The researchers focused on understanding the meaning of targeted poverty alleviation and analyzed the specific instance of Fuping in Hebei Province. In their 2019 publication, Yin et al. [18] introduced a rural innovation system that significantly contributes to rural studies, innovation systems, and public policy. Their work presents a fresh approach to achieving rural revitalization, poverty reduction, and global sustainable development, benefiting China and the international community. To effectively tackle rural regeneration and poverty reduction, it is necessary to use a comprehensive and inclusive approach that encompasses economic, social, and environmental aspects. Achieving success in these endeavors hinges on the active engagement and cooperation of diverse stakeholders, such as the government, commercial sector, civil society, and local communities.

4.9.7. Cluster 7 Theme: Rural Transition Development

This cluster contains five items. Specifically, Zhu et al. [62] evaluated the degrees of rural transition development and agricultural ecological environment (AEE) in Zhejiang Province, China. They examined the interdependent link between these two subsystems. In their study, Xu and Zhang [63] empirically analyzed the spatial differentiation characteristics and driving mechanism of the transition from rural to industrial land.

Rural transition development facilitates positive changes and advancements in rural areas as they transition from traditional, often agrarian-based economies to more diversified and modernized systems. This transition typically involves economic, social, and environmental shifts. Rural transition development requires a dynamic and adaptive approach considering each rural area's unique characteristics and challenges. Sustainable and inclusive development can be achieved by integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations and engaging local communities.

4.9.8. Cluster 8 Theme: Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development

This cluster contains four items relating to agriculture and rural development. In their study, Zhang et al. [64] assessed the agricultural sustainable development index (ASDI) across 31 provinces in China using metrics related to potential resources and environmental capability. Gao et al. [65] conducted a comparative analysis of the 50 villages the Ministry of Agriculture of China recognized as the most beautiful. The study demonstrated that integrating production, village, and scenery in the rural tourist development model leads to sustainable rural development.

Sustainable agricultural and rural development aims to create resilient, environmentally friendly, and economically viable rural communities. This involves integrating practices that promote food security, preserve natural resources, and improve the livelihoods of rural populations. Sustainable agricultural and rural development requires a holistic approach that addresses the interconnections between agriculture, natural resources, and rural livelihoods. Sustainable development can be achieved in rural areas by promoting environmentally friendly practices, enhancing community resilience, and fostering economic opportunities.

5. Discussion

The increase in scientific contributions to rural revitalization and sustainable development is significant. However, examining current bibliometric data in this context is still somewhat restricted. We searched by utilizing the Scopus database. We initially identified

a total of 669 articles on rural revival and sustainability within the stipulated timeframe. A more in-depth examination uncovered that 403 studies specifically concentrated on rural revitalization and the promotion of sustainable development, all falling under the defined inclusion criteria. The annual publications started to increase in 2020 and were the highest in 2022. Several factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic could account for this trend, especially in China, where researchers made significant contributions to rural revitalization for sustainable development research in 2020–2022.

Firstly, there was a heightened emphasis on health and well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the significance of maintaining good health, especially in rural regions. Researchers might have shifted their focus towards rural development in order to ensure that these places possess sufficient resources, healthcare facilities, and sustainable practices, hence enhancing the overall well-being of the population.

Secondly, there was a pressing necessity for the development of community resilience. COVID-19 highlighted the significance of community resilience. Researchers investigated methods to fortify rural communities, guaranteeing their resilience in the face of crises through the implementation of sustainable practices, the diversification of revenue sources, and the improvement of local infrastructure.

Thirdly, there was a notable rise in supply chain interruptions. The disruptions in global supply chains, brought about by the pandemic, underscored the significance of robust and self-reliant local economies. Researchers investigated sustainable development options for rural areas in order to improve local output, decrease reliance on external sources, and guarantee food security.

Furthermore, there was a requirement for social fairness. The pandemic intensified pre-existing disparities, highlighting the imperative for social fairness. Researchers might have prioritized techniques that foster inclusive and equitable development in rural areas with the aim of ensuring that vulnerable communities are not marginalized.

Lastly, there was a heightened demand for digital transformation due to the implementation of lockdowns and travel restrictions, which led to a rapid advancement in digitalization. Scholars might have prioritized utilizing digital technologies, such as e-commerce, online education, and telemedicine, to promote sustainable practices and bridge the gap between urban and rural areas.

This study is a pioneering bibliometric analysis that explores the relationship between rural revitalization and sustainable development. It aims to identify the authors, reference sources, institutions, nations, and academic disciplines that have significantly contributed to this field. The results emphasize that a few authors contribute substantially to influential publications. As a result of the widespread availability of open-access articles, this field has experienced a large number of writers and a quick spread of contributions. Significantly, there has been an increase in the number of links, highlighting the current importance of the subject. The survey identified China, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia as the top countries in terms of scholarly output in this field. This result is consistent with Li and Song [22], who reported in a bibliometric study that China and the USA were the first and second countries, respectively, to publish the most papers regarding land consolidation and rural revitalization. This result of China making significant contributions can be explained from many perspectives.

Firstly, there is high government support. The Chinese government has raised the rural revitalization strategy to a momentous National Strategy to solve the problem of sustainable rural development. This commitment may have led to increased funding, resources, and support for research in this area. The national logic of the Rural Revitalization Strategy lies in its essential value implication and practical orientation for consolidating the party's ruling foundation in rural areas, consolidating the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and realizing the country's long-term stability [66]. So, implementing the rural revitalization strategy is necessary for the CPC to promote modernization, but it is also an inevitable choice for the CPC to hedge domestic and foreign risks and consolidate its ruling foundation. The rural revitalization strategy will continue from 2017 to 2050, giving

legitimacy and necessity to long-term implementation with a political cycle of more than 30 years. Thus, it has become not only the central task of the CPC today but also is closely bound up with the success of China's comprehensive realization of socialist modernization in 2050.

Secondly, Chinese researchers may see rural issues as urgent. With a large population still residing in rural areas, addressing rural challenges is crucial for overall national development. Researchers may feel a sense of urgency to contribute solutions to issues such as poverty, agricultural productivity, and environmental sustainability.

Thirdly, there is a high level of development in research institutions and universities. China has invested heavily in developing its research institutions and universities. These institutions may actively support research on rural revitalization, providing the necessary infrastructure, expertise, and encouragement for researchers to explore sustainable development solutions. For example, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law established a Research Center for Rural Revitalization in December 2017 that publishes high-level papers on theories, policies, and practical issues of rural revitalization in China.

Furthermore, it could be a result of high public awareness and engagement. Increased awareness among the Chinese public about the importance of rural development and sustainability may have generated interest and support for research in this field. Public engagement can stimulate research initiatives and garner additional resources.

Moreover, the most impactful document, titled "Why Some Rural Areas Decline While Some Others Not: An overview of rural evolution in the world", was authored by Li et al. [1] and published in the *Journal of Rural Studies*. This is possibly because it uniquely designs conditions for sustainable rural development in the knowledge economy, which is a very topical and interesting issue for sustainable development. Also, it could be that the *Journal of Rural Studies* has a good reputation.

Furthermore, *Sustainability*, *Land*, and *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* have emerged as the three most cited journals. The comprehensiveness of these publications is crucial in efficiently communicating information to all parties. This finding is also consistent with the aim of *Sustainability* as an international journal, which provides a forum for research related to sustainability and sustainable development.

This study utilizes scientific cartography to delineate patterns and discoveries in revitalizing rural areas and promoting sustainable growth. The maps employ conceptual frameworks to classify fundamental themes, subjects, and cognitive structures that impact an author's study. This methodology assists academics in refining their research focus to specific topics and finding influential articles within each thematic cluster. The analysis demonstrates that "rural revitalization and sustainable development" is a prominent focus in the core literature field, whereas "China" is more narrowly focused and specialized.

The keyword occurrence overlay showed that issues such as rural planning and socioeconomics have been discussed. The exciting issues discussed include China, sustainable development goals, the conservation of natural resources, ecosystem cities, and rural revitalization strategies. These are unsurprising because China is at the forefront of rural revitalization and sustainable development. For instance, successful rural revitalization projects in China have been completed in the suburban zone of Chengdu for a model municipality in rural-urban integration (Wu et al. [67]) and in the area of the Yuanjia rural revitalization (Gao and Wu [27]), among others. The Rural Revitalization Strategy in China aims to establish an idealized sustainable development model for China's rural areas which can not only avoid the modern crisis of Western capitalist rural areas but also give full play to the institutional advantages of socialism with Chinese characteristics and get rid of the survival dilemma of China's traditional small-scale peasant economy. The Rural Revitalization Strategy will continue from 2017 to 2050, giving legitimacy and necessity to long-term implementation with a political cycle of more than 30 years. Thus, it has become not only the central task of the CPC today but also is closely bound up with the success of China's comprehensive realization of socialist modernization in 2050.

The concept of sustainable development goals (SDGs) offered a sustainable rural regeneration strategy incorporating social involvement. The SDG Pilot Village project in China is a pioneering endeavor that showcases the practical implementation of the SDGs at the local level, specifically in villages. More information about this project can be found at www.undp.org/China/projects/sdg-pilot-village accessed on 23 December 2023. The main objective is to develop the ability to integrate gender perspectives within the local government and the community. Additionally, its objective is to enable villagers, particularly the women belonging to the Yi Ethnic group, to effectively utilize development prospects offered by rural ecotourism, diminish poverty, and achieve sustainable rural revitalization.

6. Conclusions, Implications, Future Research Directions, and Limitations

This paper adopted various bibliometric indicators to measure the productivity and influence of authors and articles on rural revitalization and sustainable development. Various indicators were discussed in detail, including the most productive journals, countries, co-authorship analysis, the most cited papers, and research topics. The results indicate that the most impactful author is Liu, Y. and “Why some rural areas decline while some others not: An overview of rural evolution in the world” is the most cited document. The *Sustainability* journal is the most cited source. In terms of countries, authors in China have published the most articles.

The results provide significant advantages for professionals and scholars in rural regeneration and sustainable development. For example, the findings can assist novice researchers in determining the ideas, techniques, and methodologies employed in rural revitalization and sustainable development. They can also extract valuable information from these articles to enhance the quality of their studies. The results can also assist academics in identifying the most productive authors or countries in rural revitalization and sustainable development. This information will be invaluable for pursuing academic partnerships. Ultimately, the results of this study can assist researchers in identifying the most pertinent subjects and future avenues for research in rural revitalization and sustainable development, enabling them to pursue additional investigations or expand their research interests.

Based on the key overlay map, future research can investigate the intersection between rural revitalization and sustainable development goals, ecosystem cities, social capital, rural revitalization strategies, and rural, regional system industrial developments.

While the meticulousness in gathering, organizing, examining, and understanding the data enhances the credibility of the research, the research design is subject to four significant constraints. Initially, data sampling exclusively relied on the Scopus database. Therefore, the analysis probably omits several influential contributions. Furthermore, the sampling process exclusively includes journal publications, while conference papers and book chapters are deliberately excluded. Furthermore, items not written in English are not included.

Furthermore, the analysis did not utilize bibliographic coupling. Therefore, future research should consider these constraints to understand this industry better. Future research can consider other databases such as Web of Science, the Cochrane Library, and PubMed.

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