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Academic Research Paper

A Structured Review of the Blue Economy: Insights into Tourism and Food field

Federica Marroni
Department of Law and Economics of Productive Activities, University of Rome "La Sapienza", Via del Castro Laurenziano 9, Rome, Italy, federica.marroni@uniroma1.it. ORCID: 0009-0003-7925-546X

Abstract

The growing interest in the sustainability and responsible management of marine resources has catalysed attention on the emerging topic of the Blue Economy. However, the current literature still lacks an in-depth analysis of the connections between the different research areas that make up this field. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the evolution of Blue Economy research with a specific focus on tourism and food while providing useful indications to guide future academic developments. The methodology adopted is a structured review of the literature (Tranfield et al., 2003; Petticrew and Roberts, 2006; Massaro et al., 2016; Kraus et al., 2020; Lombardi and Secundo, 2021) which allows the author to study the investigated topic in depth. The literature review provides an up-to-date perspective on the Blue Economy, with particular reference to tourism and food, highlighting the evolution of research in recent years. The results indicate that studies mainly focus on marine resource management, policies and socio-economic impacts. Concerning tourism and food, the literature highlights the role of tourism as a strategic lever to foster a Blue Economy approach and the importance of sustainable practices in supporting the adoption of supply chain strategies. The results of this review provide theoretical insights for academics and practitioners by highlighting the potential of the Blue Economy in the context of tourism and food. This study contributes by offering a review of the Blue Economy with a focus on tourism and food, highlighting gaps in the literature, and identifying avenues for future research.

Keywords: *Blue Economy; Tourism; Food*

JEL Codes: Q22; L83; Q01; Q57; O13

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, environmental and corporate sustainability has become a global priority, leading most governments to integrate the concept of sustainability into their agendas (Kaczynski, 2011; Phelan et al., 2020). This commitment is reflected in the promotion of the Blue Economy, described by the World Bank as "the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, while preserving the health of ocean ecosystems" (World Bank, 2017).

This definition incorporates the three pillars of sustainability—environmental, economic, and social—highlighting the importance of an integrated approach that focuses not only on economic profit but also on environmental conservation and the well-being of coastal communities (Silver et al., 2015; Smith-Godfrey, 2016; Golden et al., 2017). The OECD identifies the ocean economy as a significant global phenomenon, underscored by the vast extent of oceans, which cover 70% of the Earth's surface, and the remarkable diversity of sectors comprising the Blue Economy. In 2010, the OECD estimated the value of the Blue Economy at $1.5 trillion, representing 2.5% of the global gross value added (GVA).

The Blue Economy represents an innovative perspective for sustainable economic development, encompassing a wide range of sectors and economic policies. It is based on the utilization and enhancement of marine and oceanic resources, as well as the activities and industries derived from them (United Nations, 2014; Voyer et al., 2018). This highlights a strong dependence on traditional maritime industries such as fishing, transport, and coastal tourism, alongside emerging economic sectors such as aquaculture, marine biotechnology, and offshore wind energy (Lee, 2020).

Despite growing scientific attention toward the Blue Economy, its application in the contexts of tourism and food remains in its infancy. Tourism, in particular, represents a fundamental component of the Blue Economy, not only as a user of oceanic resources but also as a promoter of sustainability and innovation (Cummings and Greenberg, 2022; Piken, 2023). Similarly, the food sector, through sustainable fishing and aquaculture, plays a crucial role in global food security, meeting the increasing needs of a continuously growing global population (Olatidoye, 2022; Alsaleh, 2023).

Research on the Blue Economy is extensive but fragmented, encompassing a variety of subordinate themes. Some authors, such as Silver et al. (2015), Carrà et al. (2017), Alharthi and Hanif (2020), Chen et al. (2020), Merkel et al. (2021), and Spillias et al. (2022), have explored the Blue Economy approach to ocean resource management. Others have focused on policy and governance (Kaczynski, 2011; Bennett et al., 2019; López-Bermúdez et al., 2020) and socioeconomic impacts (Chen et al., 2020; Garza-Gil et al., 2021), while additional studies have addressed sustainable finance (Bosmans and De Mariz, 2023; Thanh, 2024) and technological innovation within the Blue Economy framework (Foster and Rhoden, 2020; Islam and Shampa, 2022; Ha, 2024).

In the coastal tourism sector, activities include recreation and tourism in coastal areas, such as beach resorts, water sports (Shan et al., 2023), and ecotourism (Knapp and Vandegehuchte, 2024). Some studies (Jones and Navarro, 2018; Mach and Ponting, 2021; Booth et al., 2022) have emphasized the importance of marine-based recreational activities in enhancing the attractiveness of tourist destinations. In the food sector, some studies have documented the implementation of aquaculture techniques as innovative strategies to fully exploit the potential of the ocean economy. Knott and Mather (2021), for example, critically examine the transformation of marine spaces in defining the ocean as a "new frontier" through the case of salmon aquaculture in Canada. Other studies focus on seaweed cultivation for sustainable development (Spillias et al., 2022) and on the management of aquatic resources in fishing (Alharthi and Hanif, 2020; Garza-Gil et al., 2021).

Based on these premises, this article aims to provide an overview of the trends and challenges faced in the Blue Economy, with a focus on its links to tourism and food. Through a literature review, the objective is to identify the intersections between these two areas, contributing to the academic debate by mapping the state of the art and proposing avenues for future research. To this end, the author analyzes the extent to which previous studies have tracked the social and organizational evolution of this field and how research in this area has developed over time. To conduct this research, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology was adopted (Tranfield et al., 2003; Petticrew and Roberts, 2006; Massaro et al., 2016; Kraus et al., 2020; Lombardi and Secundo, 2021), utilizing the Scopus and Web of Science databases. The study was structured by setting up three queries, resulting in three samples. Sample 1 yielded a final sample of 74 documents, Sample 2 produced no results, and Sample 3 resulted in a final sample of 21 documents.

The findings indicate that existing literature primarily focuses on sustainable management of ocean resources, socioeconomic impacts, and policy adoption as key areas of interest, while technological innovation and sustainable finance tools represent the most emerging and least explored fields of research within the scientific community. These findings outline the state of the art in scientific literature and highlight the partial understanding of the observed phenomena.

This review explores the theoretical implications of the Blue Economy, addressing both scholars and practitioners, with a focus on the interrelationships between tourism and food. The study aims to identify research trends in this field, outlining key directions for future investigations. The originality of this work lies in the systematization of a substantial body of studies, offering an integrated perspective and providing a theoretical and practical foundation for new research pathways and strategic planning in these fields. To this end, the article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a literature background on the topic; Section 3 presents the methodological approach; Section 4 highlights the main findings; Section 5 discusses the results and outlines perspectives for future research; and Section 6 offers concluding remarks and limitations of the study.

2. Research background

The United Nations marked the origin of the concept of the Blue Economy (Smith-Godfrey, 2016). The UN defines the Blue Economy as an economy that promotes human well-being, social equity, and reduces environmental risks and ecological scarcities (United Nations, 2014). Indeed, the rationale behind the Blue Economy has been incorporated into the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 14, "Life Below Water." The overarching goal of SDG 14 is the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources to facilitate sustainable development. This goal is divided into seven sub-targets that address the impacts of human activities on oceans, seas, and marine resources, promoting sustainable economic and environmental utilization.

However, SDG 14 encompasses a variety of issues, including economic pressures on marine environments and the specific circumstances of coastal communities (Virto, 2018). Subsequently, the World Bank defined the Blue Economy as "the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, while preserving the health of ocean ecosystems" (World Bank, 2017). The concept emphasizes the need for conservation and sustainable management, highlighting how healthy ocean ecosystems can enhance productivity and serve as a critical foundation for creating sustainable economies (United Nations, 2014). Improving human well-being and social equity, in alignment with sustainable economic growth, positions the Blue Economy as a counterpart to the Green Economy development plan (Silver et al., 2015). The European Commission's Blue Economy strategy prioritizes

research and innovation to develop the sector sustainably, directing funding toward climate neutrality, the conservation of marine and coastal ecosystems, and ocean sustainability research (European Commission, 2021).

The Blue Economy's ability to encompass a multitude of sectors is a defining feature of this phenomenon. The ocean economy is inherently reliant on maritime industries and activities based on marine and ocean resources, including transport, fishing, maritime logistics, and coastal and recreational tourism (Lee, 2020). Furthermore, evolutionary trends have emerged in sectors such as offshore wind energy production, marine biotechnology, aquaculture, and blue biotechnology, alongside advanced technology-driven activities.

The wide range of activities associated with the Blue Economy has prompted international organizations to propose various classifications. However, the primary reference classification is that proposed by the European Union, which includes seven sectors: "Marine Renewable Energy", "Shipbuilding and Repair", "Living Marine Resources", "Maritime Transport", "Non-Living Marine Resources", "Port Activities" and "Coastal Tourism" (Kabil et al., 2021). By implementing sustainable practices, the Blue Economy approach allows society to derive value from oceans and coastal regions, implying that human activities must be managed to ensure lasting sustainability. Since 2010, scientific production on the Blue Economy has grown significantly (Martínez-Vázquez et al., 2021). Several authors (Silver et al., 2015; Carrà et al., 2017; Voyer et al., 2018; Alharthi and Hanif, 2020; Chen et al., 2020) have examined the Blue Economy approach in the context of ocean resource management. This requires a deep reflection on the value of ocean resources and the need to manage them to mitigate socioeconomic impacts (Chen et al., 2020; Garza-Gil et al., 2021). Others have focused on policy analysis (Kaczynski, 2011; López-Bermúdez et al., 2020) concerning resource management (Bennett et al., 2019), conservation, and development (Edgar et al., 2014; Jentoft and Chuenpagdee, 2022).

Resource management, conservation, and development are key actions for preserving ocean resources in the long term. These actions are also relevant in the tourism and food sectors, where research has focused on tourism and recreational activities related to ocean resources (Jones and Navarro, 2018; Mach and Ponting, 2021; Shan et al., 2023; Knapp and Vandegehuchte, 2024) and on managing activities such as sustainable aquaculture and small-scale fishing (Alharthi and Hanif, 2020; Garza-Gil et al., 2021; Knott and Mather, 2021; Spillias et al., 2022). In this context, a study by Olatidoye (2022) highlights the crucial role of marine resources in ensuring global food security. In particular, the author underscores the importance of these resources in meeting the growing food needs of an expanding global population. For this reason, the author deems it essential to delve deeper into this topic to address the challenges related to sustainable food distribution. In this regard, human actions, such as food waste, can negatively influence the sustainable future of the food supply chain. The fishing sector is an integral part of this chain (Alsaleh, 2023) and significantly impacts the nutritional needs of billions of people.

In this context, fish, as a vital source of animal protein and micronutrients for billions, also serves as a viable alternative to traditional meats. The global trend toward preferring fish consumption over beef not only promotes healthier diets but also frees agricultural land for other forms of food production (Hirschmugl et al., 2021). This transition toward blue foods meets nutritional needs while simultaneously supporting more sustainable agricultural practices (Tidd et al., 2022). A study by Alsaleh (2023) emphasizes that, in European Union countries, fish production positively impacts food security. Supporting these findings, governance factors play a critical role in ensuring food security in both the short and long term (Leeuwis et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2022; Adelle and Dekeyser, 2022). Marine resource management is also relevant to tourism (Kabil et al., 2021; Knapp and Vandegehuchte, 2024). Studies have focused on tourism

and recreational activities using ocean resources (Jones and Navarro, 2018; Mach and Ponting, 2021; Shan et al., 2023; Knapp and Vandegehuchte, 2024). Furthermore, Piken (2023), in her study "Tourism and the Blue Economy", explores the link between the Blue Economy and tourism, emphasizing that all forms of marine, freshwater, and coastal tourism are integral to the Blue Economy. However, the author also highlights tourism's role not only as a user of resources but also as a promoter of sustainability and innovation.

In this regard, Cummings and Greenberg (2022) integrate the concept of sustainable tourism with that of the Blue Economy, emphasizing the need to adopt management strategies that account for the environmental impacts of activities such as tourism while also respecting local communities (Virto, 2018).

Although this section has highlighted the most relevant studies on the Blue Economy, particularly regarding tourism and food, the potential of these areas remains partially unexplored. The interconnections between tourism, food, and the Blue Economy appear fragmented, underscoring the need for a more systematic analysis. This section, therefore, provides a foundation for further exploration of these intersections and outlines new directions for future research.

3. Research Methods

To conduct this research, the Structured Literature Review methodology was adopted (Tranfield et al., 2003; Petticrew and Roberts, 2006; Massaro et al., 2016; Kraus et al., 2020; Lombardi and Secundo, 2021) which allows studying a body of scientific literature to develop insights, critical reflections, future research directions, and research questions (Massaro et al., 2016). According to Massaro et al. (2016), the first step in conducting a literature review is to define three research questions. In our study, the questions are as follows:

(RQ1) *How is research for inquiring Blue Economy?*
(RQ2) *What is the focus and critique of the Blue Economy literature?*
(RQ3) *What is the future of Blue Economy research?*

The first research question (How is research for inquiring Blue Economy?) provides insight into the "state of the art" of studies and publications in the context of the Blue Economy, with a particular interest in the tourism and food sectors. The second (What is the focus and critique of the Blue Economy literature?) highlights influences related to tourism and food within the Blue economy, and finally, the third research question (What is the future of Blue Economy research?) allows for suggestions for future research.

Once the research questions have been identified, the author identifies the sources of information, methods, and tools used to synthesize the studies (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006). Literature analysis was performed using Scopus (www.scopus.com) and Web of Science (www.webofscience.com), databases widely used in literature. The use of these two databases stems from established methodological choices in the literature and the use of the search protocols of these two databases combined (Sánchez et al.,2017; Macchi Silva et al., 2019). Therefore, the keywords set in the search queries are as follows:

Sample 1: "Blue Econom*"

Sample 2: "Blue Econom*" and (tourism* AND food*)
Sample 3: “Blue Econom*” and (tourism* OR food*)

The search for Query 1, Query 2, and Query 3 was set through the analysis of titles, abstracts, and keywords (Scopus) and topics (Web of Science) within the subject area "Business, Management and Accounting" (BMA) in the Scopus database and the search areas "Business Economics" in the Web of Science database. The type of documents considered for the search are only articles and the language is set to “English”. Finally, all queries were set without providing a limitation related to time horizon, for the sole purpose of determining the breadth of literature on the topic. Table 1 shows the criteria adopted to conduct this research and the results obtained for each search query.

Table 1. Criteria used to conduct the SLR.

Sample 1 **“Blue Econom*”**	**Filter: Articles, title, abstract, keywords.** **Subject Area: Business Management and Accounting.** **Document type: Articles.** **Language: English.**	**50**	**Scopus**
Sample 1 **“Blue Econom*”**	**Filter**: Topic. **Research Area**: Business Economics. **Document type**: Articles. **Language**: English.	39	Web of Science
Sample 2 **“Blue Econom*” and (“tourism*” AND “food*”)**	**Filter**: Articles, title, abstract, keywords. **Subject Area**: Business Management and Accounting. **Document type**: Articles. **Language**: English.	0	Scopus
Sample 2 **“Blue Econom*” and (tourism* AND food*)**	**Filter**: Topic. **Research Area**: Business Economics. **Document type**: Articles. **Language**: English.	0	Web of Science
Sample 3	**Filter**: Articles, title, abstract, keywords.	15	Scopus

"Blue Econom*" and ("tourism*" OR "food*")	**Subject Area**: Business Management and Accounting. **Document type**: Articles. **Language**: English.		
Sample 3 **"Blue Econom*" and (tourism* OR food*)**	**Filter**: Topic. **Research Area**: Business Economics. **Document type**: Articles. **Language**: English.	11	Web of Science

Source: Author elaboration

The initial total of articles in SAMPLE 1 was 89. After a thorough screening process, duplicates and articles not relevant to the subject of the research were removed, resulting in a final sample of 74 articles. In the setting of the keywords and filters, zero documents were obtained in query 2, which is why SAMPLE 2 has zero articles. The initial total of articles in SAMPLE 3 was 26. After a thorough screening process, duplicates and articles not relevant to the subject of the research were removed, resulting in a final sample of 21 articles.

This study focuses on identifying the following aspects (Lombardi and Secundo, 2021):
- Publication times: it will assess the trend in the number of articles published over time.
- Journals: analyzes the time distribution of the number of articles and citations received.
- Citations: examines the number of citations received by each article under analysis.
- Keywords: analyses the keywords most frequently used by authors.

After collecting a total of 74 articles for sample 1 and 21 articles for sample 3, the author conducted a comprehensive analysis, which consisted of two distinct methods: descriptive analysis and cluster analysis. The main objective of the descriptive analysis was to provide a broad view of the results obtained from the systematic literature review and to identify certain traits of the publications (Lombardi and Secundo, 2021). Cluster analysis, on the other hand, was used to determine the potential correlations that exist between articles.

4. Results

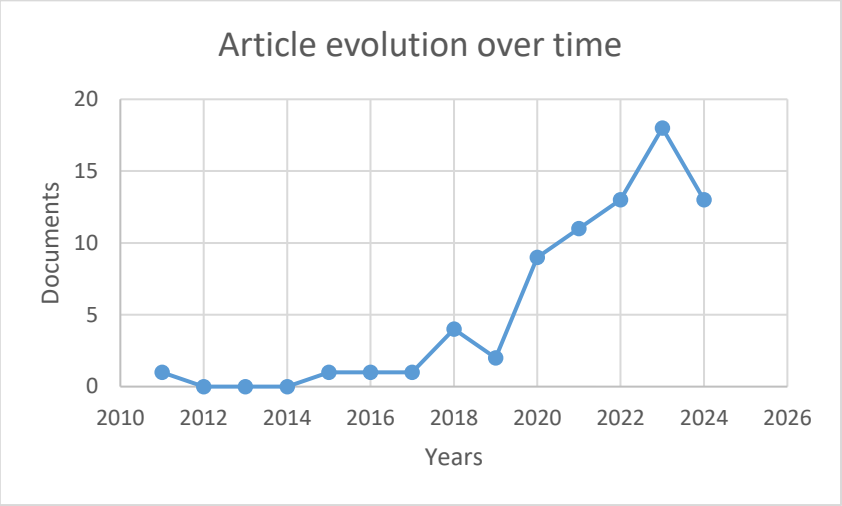
This section shows the evidence obtained from the SLR, to propose answers to the research questions that prompted this study.

This section presents the results of Sample 1:

Articles published over time. The figure below shows the evolution in terms of publication of scientific articles over the period 2011-2024. However, 2024 has just begun and further change may occur eventually. The number of published articles has increased gradually since 2020. Previously, there were alternating periods with scarce publications (1 to 4 articles per year) on this topic. In

2012, 2013, and 2014, the number of articles is 0. As of 2020, the trend is increasing until 2023 with the publication of 18 articles as the peak. This research focus is current and should continue to be explored in the future.

Figure 1. Article evolution over time (Sample 1).



Source: Author elaboration

Journals. Focusing on articles published within a single journal can be useful for researchers and authors to understand the development of scientific dialogue within that journal (Guthrie and Parker, 2011; Dumay, 2014b). In a sample of 74 articles, it is possible to see that although the journals are varied and fragmented and most have only one published article, a few emerge where the number of publications is more than two (see Table 2). There are currently two generalist journals that have contributed to the scientific debate. The largest number of published scientific articles belongs to the Journal of Cleaner Production, an international and transdisciplinary journal focusing on research and practice in clean production, environment, and sustainability, and the journal Technological Forecasting and Social Change, which deals with emerging Technologies, sustainable environments, and public governance. Figure 2 illustrates the network of co-cited sources generated by VOSviewer, with a minimum threshold of 20 citations for selected sources, all published in recent years.

Table 2. Most relevant journals, number of papers per journal, and number of citations (Sample 1).

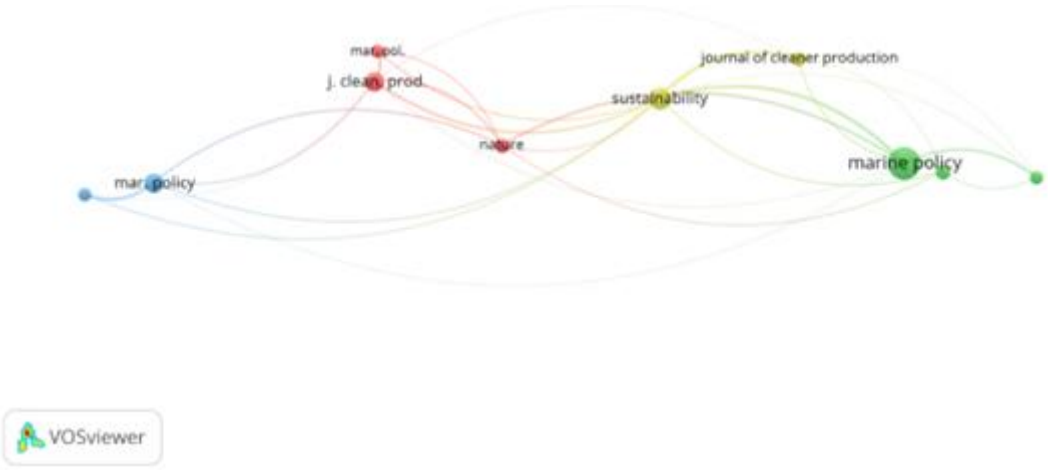
Source Title	***N° of papers***	***N° of citations***
Journal of Cleaner Production	10	130
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	5	51
Ecological Economics	3	63
Journal of World Investment and Trade	3	5
Journal of Agrarian Change	2	11
Marine Resource Economics	2	0
Maritime Business Review	2	28
Administration and Society	1	8
Agricultural and Resource Economics	1	0

Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights	1	24
Applied Geography	1	31
Asian-Pacific Economic Literature	1	24
Business Strategy and Development	1	0
Cogent Economics and Finance	1	0
Competition and Change	1	0
Corporate social responsibility and environmental management	1	23
Economy of Regions	1	7
Electronic Commerce Research	1	1
Entrepreneurship and sustainability issues	1	2
Finance Research Letters	1	6
Foundations of Management	1	14
Indian Journal of Economics and Development	1	0
Information Technology and Tourism	1	0
International Journal of Computing and Digital Systems	1	3
International Journal of Event and Festival Management	1	10
International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration	1	2
International journal of social economics	1	0
Journal of asian finance economics and business	1	1
Journal of Business Research	1	6
Journal of Cultural Economy	1	11
Journal of Economic Studies	1	0
Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development	1	0
Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship	1	69
Journal of International Studies (Malaysia)	1	2
Journal of Management and Organization	1	1
Journal of Risk and Financial Management	1	5
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	1	81
Journal of the Knowledge Economy	1	0
Local economy	1	4
Panoeconomicus	1	3
Problems and Perspectives in Management	1	12
Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America	1	4
Quality - Access to Success	1	1
Review of Accounting and Finance	1	0
Revista de gestao e secretariado-gesec	1	0
Revista Galega de Economia	1	1
Rivista di Studi sulla Sostenibilità	1	1
Southern African Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management	1	0
Studia europejskie-studies in european affairs	1	0
Tamkang journal of international affairs	1	1
Tourism Geographies	1	1
Tourism in Marine Environments	1	0
Tourism Review International	1	0

Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes	1	11

Source: Author elaboration

Figure 2. Network of co-cited sources (Sample 1).



Source: Author elaboration

Citations. The table below shows the trend in the number of articles and citations by year. As already indicated in the time analysis conducted in terms of articles published between 2011 and 2024, the years 2012, 2013, and 2014 do not have any articles related to this topic. A first observation concerns the number of citations, which is almost always higher than the number of published articles, with a peak in 2022, where the thirteen published articles were cited as many as 212 times. As of 2020, both the number of articles and citations are increasing, thus highlighting the recent impact of the strand of studies that includes the Blue Economy.

Table 3. Citations trend. Timeframe 2011-2024 (Sample 1).

Citations received by the papers each year															
Category	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	*Total*
Citations	8	0	0	0	0	24	31	24	29	87	34	212	144	65	658
Number of papers	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	2	9	11	13	18	13	74

Source: Author elaboration

Keywords. In this section, the focus is on observing the keywords used by the authors within the selected articles. The analysis of the keywords makes it possible to identify the salient themes addressed in the various articles (Lombardi and Secundo, 2021). Using the VOSviewer software, a keyword co-occurrence analysis was performed, using the entire set of keywords identified within the scientific articles. A minimum number of 2 occurrences was set to consider keywords in the analysis. Out of a total of 565 keywords, the software considered 64, generating 9 clusters. The results are presented in Table 4. The analysis reveals that the most frequent keyword is “Blue Economy” (48

times), followed by “Blue Economies” (10 times), “Sustainability” (10 times) and “Sustainable Development” (10 times). Figure 3 shows the links established between the various clusters identified. These results highlight that the Blue Economy significantly contributes to the achievement of sustainable development by balancing economic growth and environmental protection.

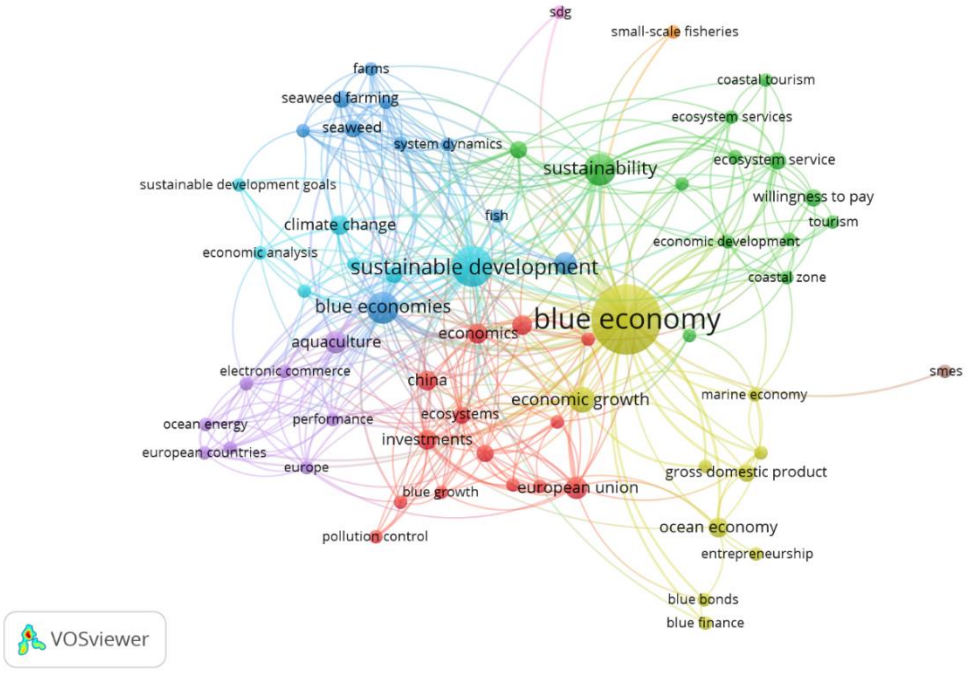
Table 4. Bibliographic clustering of keywords (Sample 1).

Cluster	***Keywords***
Cluster 1- red line- (14 items)	Blue growth
	China
	Circular economy
	Corporate social responsibility
	Digitalization
	Economics
	Ecosystems
	European Union
	Industrial Economics
	Investments
	Pollution Control
	Shipping
	Stakeholder
	Strategic Approach
Cluster 2 - green line - (12 items)	Cluster Analysis
	Coastal Tourism
	Coastal Zone
	Decision Making
	Economic Development
	Ecosystem Service
	Ecosystem Services
	Environmental Economics
	Indonesia
	Surf Tourism
	Sustainability
	Tourism
Cluster 3 – blue line - (12 items)	Blue economies
	Carbon
	Commerce
	Economic Analysis
	Economic and social effects
	Farms
	Fish
	Fisheries
	Seaweed
	Seaweed farming
	Sustainable Development

	System dynamics
Cluster 4 – yellow line - (10 items)	Blue Bonds Blue Economy Blu Finance Economic Growth Entrepreneurship Fishing Production Gross Domestic Product Marine Economy Marine Resources Ocean Economy
Cluster 5 – violet line – (8 items)	Aquaculture Electronic Commerce Empirical analysis Europe Europe Countries Marine Living Resources Ocean Energy Performance
Cluster 6 – light blue line - (4 items)	Business Models Climate Change Innovation Investment
Cluster 7 – orange line - (2 items)	Sdg Sustainable Development
Cluster 8 – brown line - (1 items)	Smes
Cluster 9 – pink line - (1 items)	Small-scale fisheries

Source: Author elaboration

Figure 3. Keywords' cluster (author's keyword) VosViewer (Sample 1).



Source: Author elaboration

Cluster and content analysis. In this section, a clustering of the papers and consequently a content analysis was conducted to identify relevant research areas. The content analysis was initiated through the use of bibliographic matching (Kessler, 1963), based on the 74 articles included in the data sample, and the correlation between the various documents was assessed through the predominant sharing of references among the articles (Boyack and Klavans, 2010). This process led to the identification of four clusters (see Table 5) to avoid fragmentation of results. Bibliographic clustering of the articles was performed to group the papers to display the most densely related clusters of articles. To conclude, a detailed analysis of all article contents was conducted to identify three research areas:

- *Research Area 1*: Blue Economy as a factor in achieving sustainable management and innovation.
- *Research Area 2*: Blue Economy as a tool for promoting governance policies and sustainable finance.
- *Research Area 3*: Blue Economy as a factor for community development to control socioeconomic impacts.

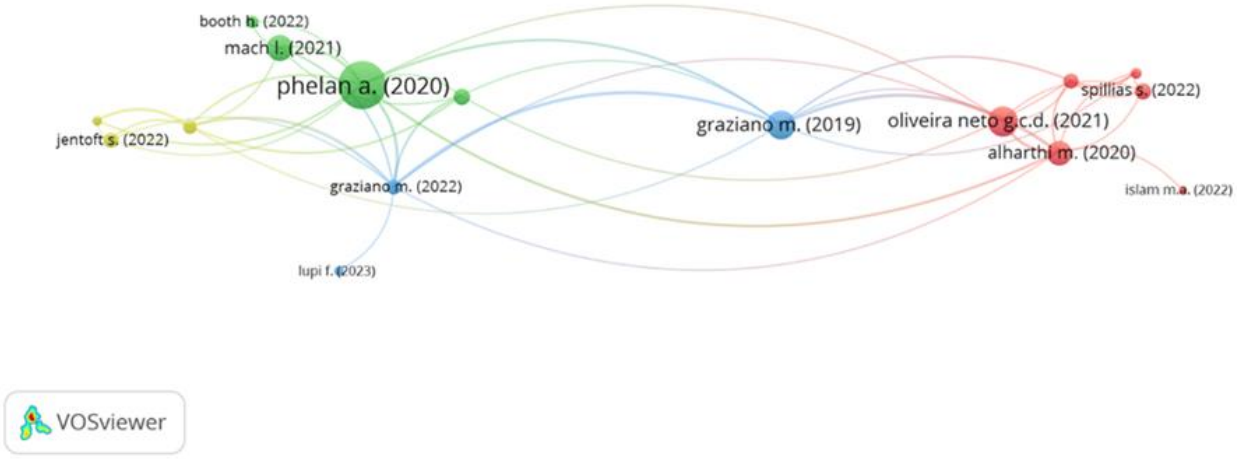
Table 5. Bibliographic clustering of authors (Sample 1).

Cluster	***Authors***
Cluster 1- red line - (6 items)	Alharthi and Hanif (2020) Islam and Shampa (2022) Oliveira Neto et al. (2021) Spaniol and Hansen (2021) Spaniol and Rowland (2022) Spillias et al. (2022)

Cluster 2 - green line - (4 items)	Booth et al. (2022) Mach and Ponting (2021) Phelan et al. (2020) Reinertsen and Asdal (2019)
Cluster 3 – blue line - (3 items)	Graziano et al. (2019) Graziano et al. (2022) Lupi et al. (2023)
Cluster 4 – yellow line - (3 items)	Ayelazuno and Ovadia (2022) Jentoft and Chuenpagdee (2022) Knott and Mather (2021)

Source: Author elaboration

Figure 4. Bibliographic clustering of documents (Sample 1).



Source: Author elaboration

The bibliographic matching process initially divided the documents into categories based on relevant subject areas. Then, to ensure more complete search areas, all those documents that the software had not initially considered were included.

Research area 1: Blue Economy as a factor in achieving sustainable management and innovation.

The first area of research concerns the connection between the Blue Economy and the achievement of sustainability specifically by referring to the Sustainable Development Goals. Undoubtedly connected with sustainability and the Blue Economy is Goal No. 14: "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development". Alharthi and Hanif (2020) in their article highlight how the proper management and use of water resources can foster economic growth in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries, essentially creating an alliance among nation-states and addressing challenges such as food insecurity in seafood consumption.

The food issue is undoubtedly a key element and closely related to the Blue Economy. Other authors have studied the potential value that a marine resource, and thus its management, can have on

consumer engagement. In a study by Merkel et al. (2021), it was found that a seaweed sector has emerged in European countries that appear to carry out a range of activities related to this marine resource, from upscale restaurants that prioritize local, seasonal, and sustainable ingredients, to entrepreneurs who organize tours called "harvest your own seaweed", which aim to immerse the consumer in the totality of their experience regardless of their use: domestic, as food, tourist, or personal pleasure.

In the study just presented, seaweed is examined as a factor that can contribute to food security, while Spillias et al. (2022) analyze the implementation of seaweed cultivation as a tool to overcome global challenges such as climate change, food security, and ecosystem degradation. Other studies in this research area have highlighted the adoption of "cleaner" production practices that aim at the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and seas. One such study is by Oliveira Neto et al. (2021), which evaluates the eco-efficiency of a textile industry that adopted cleaner production practices.

This industry focused on water reuse and reducing material use, aligning with the principles of the blue economy. Water reuse produced a substantial economic benefit, despite the costly initial investment in cleaner technologies. When we talk about sustainability, we also refer to innovations within technology for the mitigation of environmental, economic, and social impacts. In a paper by Foster and Rhoden (2020), the authors incite the use of artificial intelligence and automation to optimize processes within logistics to mitigate adaptation to climate change and other disasters and the achievement of greater efficiency and attainment of positive economic outcomes.

Digital transformation in the public and private sectors within marine resources has been studied by Ha (2024). In this study, the author assesses the sustainable performance of European countries in the blue economy and studies the impact of digitization in improving sustainability in the area of marine resource management (fisheries and aquaculture), stating that the digital economy should be implemented in the European Union to activate a pathway to sustainable living marine resources.

Research area 2: Blue Economy as a tool for promoting governance policies and sustainable finance.

This second identified area includes all those documents that highlight governance policies and strategies, including the impact that sustainable finance practices have on economic growth and beyond.

In the policy area, a study by López-Bermúdez et al. (2020) identifies the obstacles a state faces in activating and implementing an Integrated Maritime Policy, through which an approach involving all subordinate actors is proposed to promote effective governance of marine resources. Jentoft and Chuenpagdee (2022), investigate stakeholder involvement and interactions between actors in fisheries, in which governments are also included to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals.

Among the policies adopted, governments, in the context of the Blue Economy, promote sustainable investments, which include all those initiatives related to sustainable finance. Sustainable finance instruments allow investors to encourage projects within the Blue Economy. Bosmans and De Mariz (2023) investigate the state-of-the-art of academic research on blue bonds, bonds that raise funds to support related sustainable projects and activities. The importance of technology in financial transactions is also related to blue finance. Indeed, in a recent study, Thanh (2024) emphasizes the importance of fintech in fostering the blue economy, arguing that technological innovation related to sustainable finance can improve the effectiveness of blue bonds. Thus, sustainable finance, including

blue bonds and fintech are useful means to support activities related to the blue economy.

Research area 3: Blue Economy as a factor for community development to control socioeconomic impacts.

This research area aims to investigate aspects related to the Blue Economy in the socio-economic sphere, in particular, offering development opportunities for local communities where the BE approach is implemented. Garza-Gil et al. (2021) investigate fishermen's perceptions and the opportunities that blue growth could offer to small-scale fisheries. While the authors highlight the positive contribution of blue growth to socio-economic development, they also find that small-scale fishing activities have a negative impact on the environment.

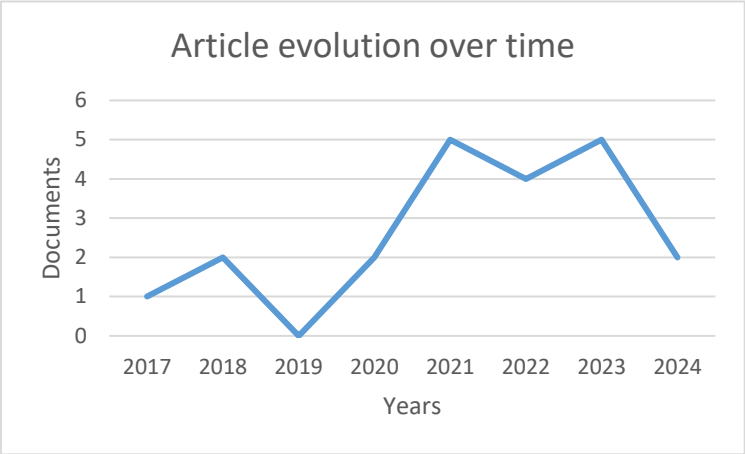
The scientific contribution of Booth et al. (2022) emphasizes the need to balance the conservation-environmental aspect with socio-economic development and thus the impacts that activities generate on coastal communities. According to the authors, the mitigation of socio-economic impacts resulting from the exploitation of marine resources for tourism purposes can be overcome by adopting taxing measures for marine tourism, in order to support the conservation costs that the local community has to pay, and to incentivize sustainable practices in fishing, tourism and all those activities related to the sea resource.

In the context of tourism, authors Jones and Navarro (2018), offer a practical perspective on the implementation of sustainable practices through a sailing tourism event. Through the practical implementation, the authors provide a concrete example of what Garza-Gil et al. (2021) and Booth et al. (2022) previously expounded, contributing to how such initiatives can contribute to the achievement of socioeconomic impacts on coastal communities. Finally, Mach and Ponting (2021), in an empirical study provide economic estimates of the value of surf tourism and the willingness of surfers to pay more for sustainable tourism products. This study not only offers a practical perspective from the perspective of tourists' preferences but also confirms the ability of tourism, particularly surf tourism, to contribute to the promotion and economic development of coastal communities.

In the research setting, sample 2 obtained zero results, so after sample 1, the results of sample 3 will be presented.

Articles published over time. Figure 5 shows the development in terms of the publication of scientific articles over the period 2017-2024. However, 2024 has just begun and further changes may occur. The number of articles published fluctuates between 2 and 5 papers per year, whereas 2021 and 2023 are the years in which 5 articles were published. In 2019, the number of published articles was 0. The trend shows that the research field is emerging and therefore needs attention from the scientific research side.

Figure 5. Article evolution over time (Sample 3).



Source: Author elaboration

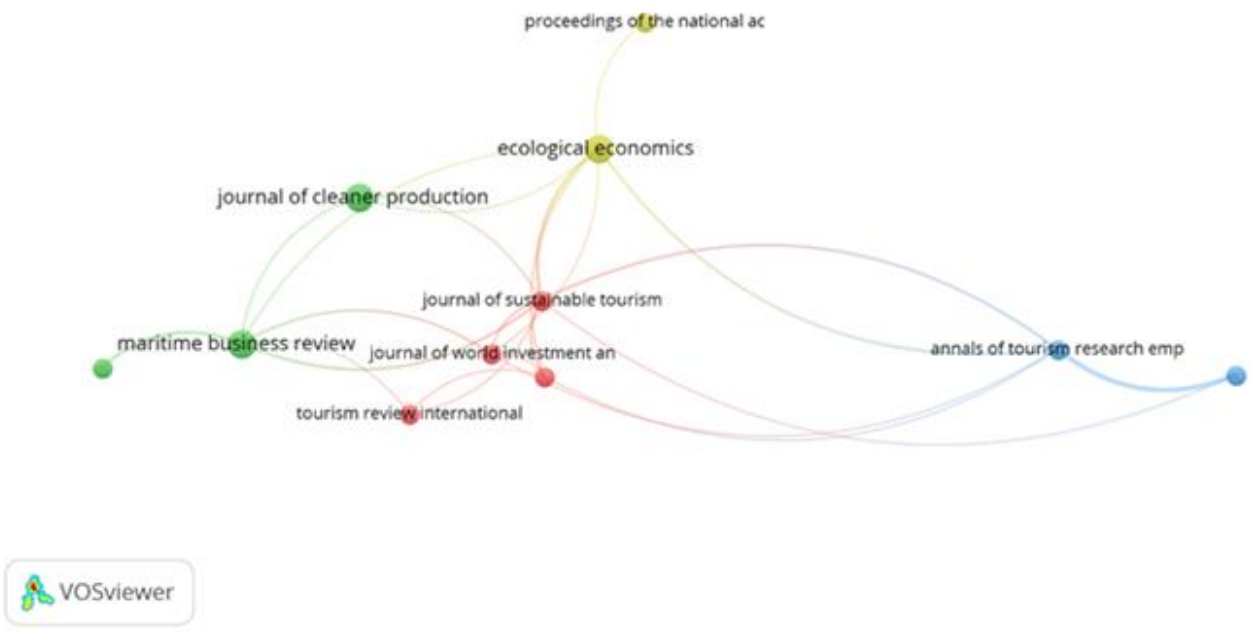
Journals. In the sample of 21 articles, it can be seen that although the journals are varied and fragmented, most have only one published article, except for a few cases where two articles were published (see Table 6). The only journals in which two articles have been published are "Ecological Economics", "Journal of Cleaner Production" and "Maritime Business Review", however, the most cited article belongs to the "Journal of Sustainable Tourism". Figure 6 illustrates the network of co-cited sources generated by VOSviewer.

Table 6. Most relevant journals, number of papers per journal, and number of citations (Sample 3).

Source Title	***N° of papers***	***N° of citations***
Ecological Economics	2	14
Journal of Cleaner Production	2	11
Maritime Business Review	2	28
Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights	1	24
Entrepreneurship and sustainability issues	1	2
Indian Journal of Economics and Development	1	0
International Journal of Event and Festival Management	1	10
International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration	1	2
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	1	82
Journal of World Investment and Trade	1	1
Panoeconomicus	1	3
Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America	1	4
Quality - Access to Success	1	1
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	1	29
Tourism Geographies	1	1
Tourism in Marine Environments	1	0
Tourism Review International	1	0
World Development	1	7

Source: Author elaboration

Figure 6. Network of co-cited sources (Sample 3).



Source: Author elaboration

Citations. Table 7 shows the trend in the number of articles and citations per year. In the time analysis conducted in terms of articles published between 2017 and 2024, the year 2019 has no articles in this area. The first observation concerns the number of citations, which is almost always higher than the number of published articles, with a peak in 2020, where the 2 published articles were cited 105 times. From 2020 onwards, both the number of articles and citations are increasing, considering that the year 2024 presents partial results.

Table 7. Citations trend. Timeframe 2017-2024 (Sample 3).

Citations received by the papers each year									
Category	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	*Total*
Citations	1	15	0	105	36	26	34	0	217
Number of papers	1	2	0	2	5	4	5	2	21

Source: Author elaboration

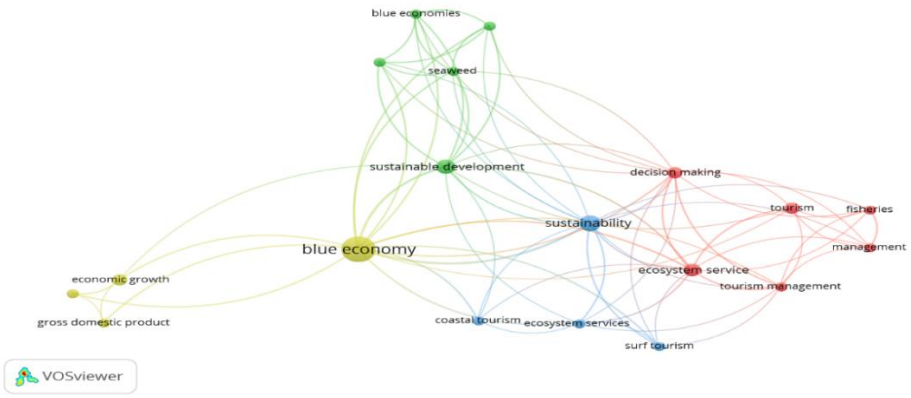
Keywords. In this section, the focus is on observing the keywords used by the author within the selected articles. To visualize the keywords, the VOSviewer software was used, in which a keyword co-occurrence analysis was performed, using the entire set of keywords identified within the scientific articles, with a minimum number of occurrences of 2. Out of a total of 188 keywords, the software considered 19, generating 4 clusters. The results are presented in Table 8. The analysis reveals that the most frequent keyword is “Blue Economy” (15 times), followed by “Sustainability” (6 times) and “Sustainable Development” (4 times). Figure 7 shows the links established between the various clusters identified. These results confirm what was highlighted in Sample 1, highlighting the link between the Blue Economy and sustainability.

Table 8. Bibliographic clustering of keywords (Sample 3).

Cluster	*Keywords*
Cluster 1 - red line - (6 items)	Decision Making Ecosystem Service Fisheries Management Tourism Tourism Management
Cluster 2 - green line - (5 items)	Blue economies Economic and social effects Seaweed Seaweed farming Sustainable development
Cluster 3 – blue line - (4 items)	Coastal Tourism Ecosystem Services Surf Tourism Sustainability
Cluster 4 – yellow line - (4 items)	Blue Economy Economic Growth Fishing Production Gross Domestic Product

Source: Author elaboration

Figure 7. Keywords' cluster (author's keyword) VosViewer (Sample 3).



Source: Author elaboration

Cluster and content analysis. In this part, a clustering of the documents was performed followed by a content analysis to identify relevant research areas. The content analysis was initiated through the use of bibliographic matching (Kessler, 1963), based on the 21 articles included in the data sample, while the correlation between the various documents was assessed through the predominant sharing of references between articles (Boyack and Klavans, 2010). This process led to the identification of 4 clusters (See Table 9) to avoid fragmentation of results. Bibliographic clustering of the articles was

performed to group the papers to identify the most densely related clusters of articles. Finally, a detailed analysis of all article contents was conducted to identify two research areas:

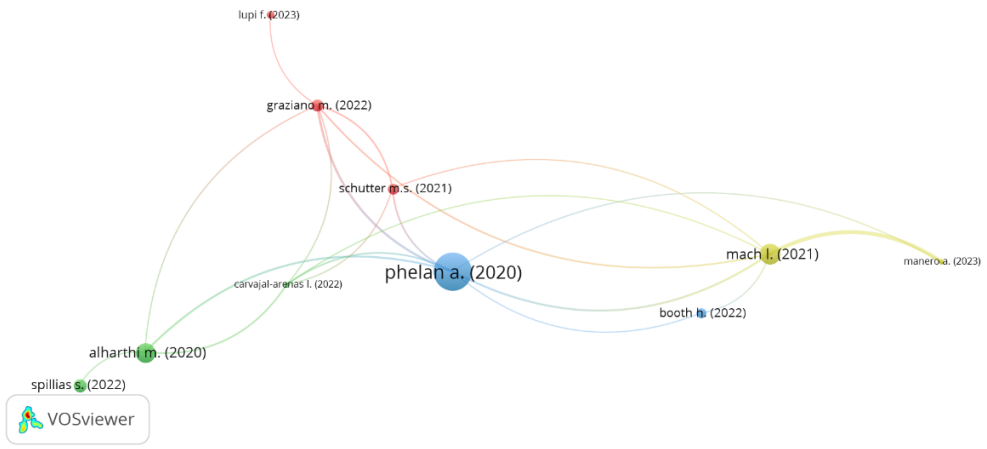
- *Research area 1*: Blue Economy as a strategic lever to support the food supply chain.
- *Research area 2*: Blue Economy as a strategic lever to promote tourism.

Table 9. Bibliographic clustering of authors (Sample 3).

Cluster	***Authors***
Cluster 1- red line- (3 items)	Graziano et al. (2022) Lupi et al. (2023) Shutter et al. (2021)
Cluster 2- green line- (3 items)	Alharthi and Hanif (2020) Carvajal – Arenas (2022) Spillias et al. (2022)
Cluster 3 – blue line -(2 items)	Booth et al. (2022) Phelan et al. (2020)
Cluster 4 – yellow line -(2 items)	Mach and Ponting (2021) Manero and Mach (2023)

Source: Author elaboration

Figure 8. Bibliographic clustering of documents (Sample 3).



Source: Author elaboration

Research area 1: Blue Economy as a strategic lever to support the food supply chain.

The initial area of research encompasses those activities that are closely linked to the food chain and thus the processing, distribution, and consumption of products derived from the sea. The organization of these activities is based on the utilization of sustainable, innovative, and responsible practices to minimize the impact of the food industry in alignment with the objectives of the Blue

Economy. Authors Spillias et al. (2024) discuss the role of seaweed aquaculture in providing food, sustaining local livelihoods, and enhancing biodiversity, proving feasible in many scenarios.

In a previous research paper, authors Spillias et al. (2022) had already theorized the role of aquaculture as a solution to contemporary challenges potentially contributing to sustainable development and identifying positive results in this practice. In the context of sustainable development and the Blue Economy, fisheries play a crucial role in the management of fish and marine resources. Unsustainable management of these resources could threaten the survival of small-scale fishing communities. A study conducted by Garza-Gil et al. (2021), analyses Spanish fishermen's perceptions of the links between Blue Growth and small-scale fishing. Another contribution, on the other hand, analyses legislation concerning property rights on fishing inlets and the feasibility and acceptance of this by small-scale fishermen.

Research area 2: Blue Economy as a strategic lever to promote tourism.

This research area focuses on the potential that a blue economy approach can have in tourism development both in fostering practices in line with sustainability and authentic tourism experiences. Good practices in line with sustainability include the role of community-based ecotourism in the blue economy (Phelan et al., 2020), promoting a model that integrates community, local economy, and coastal ecosystems, as presented in the study by Phelan et al. (2020).

The challenges of communities also include balancing social and economic opportunities in tourism destination development. In particular, the study conducted by Holland (2023), highlights the challenges that port communities have in developing a cruise destination, highlighting the difficulties the local community faces in dealing with the relationship between ports, host communities, and cruise lines.

The Blue Economy approach can also contribute to the diversification of the tourism offer by generating the emergence of niche forms of tourism. Jones and Navarro (2018), consider the overall impact that a sailing event has on the tourism economy of the Maltese territory by assessing the benefits and obstacles in developing maritime events as an alternative tourism option. Another contribution belonging to this research area explores the development of marketing strategies for SMEs operating within the blue economy including those related to tourism. Within this perspective, the link between the diversification of tourism supply and the development of marketing strategies could foster growth opportunities for local businesses.

5. Discussion and future research agenda

This section is designed to address the research questions that were initially formulated at the outset of this study and to discuss the findings in terms of their theoretical and practical implications. To answer the research questions, this section will be divided into subsections, each of which will focus on a specific aspect of the study.

5.1 Sample 1

RQ1) *How is research for inquiring Blue Economy?*

The Blue Economy has gained increasing relevance and has become the subject of political debates in recent years. The principle on which it is based goes beyond mere conservation, as it focuses on ecosystem regeneration to take advantage of the abundance of nature. The structured analysis of the literature allows us to understand the declinations that have been given to the Blue Economy, despite it being an emerging field of study, and what fields have been investigated by the academic community.

Looking at the developmental trend of scientific articles in this field, it is immediately noticeable that the trend has increased in the last five years, recording 9 articles in 2020, 11 articles in 2021, 13 articles in 2022, 18 articles in 2023, and 13 articles in 2024, however, the number of articles in 2024 is referable to the first months of the year so further changes may be recorded.

The trends recorded in previous years are between 1 and 4 articles in the 2015–2019 time frame, while in the first 4 years (2011-2014) only one article was published in 2011, with no publication in the years 2012, 2013, and 2014. The low number of articles testifies to the novelty and originality of the field of study.

The largest number of articles, specifically 10 articles out of a sample of 74, was published in the "Journal of Cleaner Production", a leading international and interdisciplinary journal. In terms of citations and total number of articles, the "Journal of Cleaner Production" also ranks high. However, the most cited article overall was published in the "Journal of Sustainable Tourism". The most cited authors are Phelan, Ruhanen, and Mair from the University of Queensland in Brisbane (Australia) and Blomsma from Imperial College London (UK). Phelan et al. (2020) examined the role of community-based ecotourism in the blue economy, showing that this type of ecotourism promotes the sustainable utilization of marine resources and provides economic opportunities for coastal communities.

Three key areas where communities need support were identified: waste management, hospitality skills, and access to markets. Waste management and resource management frameworks were also addressed by Blomsma (2018). Indeed, the author clarified the role of these issues in the social debate, including analyzing the structure and conceptualization of the words "waste" and "resource". The analysis of these two articles and all the others included in this study makes it possible to provide several recommendations relevant to the Blue Economy.

RQ2) *What is the focus and critique of the Blue Economy literature?*

The discussion involves a variety of experts, including accountants, geographers, engineers, tourism specialists, and natural resource managers. The "Journal of Cleaner Production" is the most widely used publication venue, with ten articles published, followed by "Technological Forecasting and Social Change", with five articles published.

Although these two journals are the preferred options for researchers to present their studies, it is important to note that due to the interdisciplinary nature of this topic, which spans several fields, there is a variety and breadth of journals in which studies on this topic can be published. Research in the field of the Blue Economy has been divided into three main areas: Research Area 1: Blue Economy as a factor in achieving sustainable management and innovation. Research Area 2: Blue Economy as a tool for promoting governance policies and sustainable finance. Research Area 3: Blue Economy as a factor for community development to control socioeconomic impacts.

Although three research areas have been identified, they are closely interconnected, as all activities related to the Blue Economy focus on ocean services and ocean-related activities as their

primary "object" (Smith-Godfrey, 2016). The authors listed in Table 5, representing the main thematic clusters, have been integrated into the discussion to provide a deeper understanding of the various aspects of the Blue Economy, highlighting the connections between resource management, governance, sustainability, and socio-economic development.

Evidence suggests that the Blue Economy holds significant potential for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 14, closely tied to the 2030 Agenda, focuses on ocean conservation and emphasizes actions such as water resource management, coastal protection, the adoption of cleaner production practices, small-scale fisheries management, and the promotion of sustainable tourism.

These activities, recognized by the United Nations, are increasingly drawing attention from the academic community. However, authors like Graziano et al. (2022) highlight the presence of divergent definitions of the Blue Economy, which significantly affect the role and implications of governance and regional development policies. Alharthi and Hanif (2020) emphasize that effective water resource management can stimulate economic growth in SAARC countries, addressing critical challenges such as food insecurity related to seafood consumption. Similarly, Alsaleh (2023) notes that, in some European Union countries, fish production positively impacts food security, highlighting the importance of sustainable practices in this sector. Merkel et al. (2021) examined the seaweed sector, emphasizing its contribution to food security, while Spillias et al. (2022) identify seaweed cultivation as a key strategy to tackle global challenges such as climate change and ecosystem degradation. These issues are also addressed in the study by Jentoft and Chuenpagdee (2022), which focuses on ensuring social justice for small-scale fishers.

The authors propose concrete actions, including the active involvement of fishers in decision-making processes and institutional reform to promote inclusion and ensure greater social equity. Knott and Mather (2021) also explore resource management, examining the marine frontier as a space for sustainable economic development. The authors emphasize the necessity of balancing economic growth with sustainability, taking into account resource extraction practices that often generate inequalities. Another critical aspect concerns governance and sustainable finance. Shan et al. (2023), in their study, analyze the relationship between blue loans to businesses and sustainable development. They highlight a positive correlation between blue loans, sustainable credit, and bank profitability, emphasizing how these tools can enhance operational efficiency. Additionally, the study underscores the role of digital integration in improving the performance of EU banks, further contributing to sustainable financial management.

In addressing these challenges, several obstacles to the implementation of integrated maritime policies have been identified (López-Bermúdez et al., 2020). Nevertheless, several authors emphasize the potential of the Blue Economy to provide socio-economic development opportunities for local communities (Phelan et al., 2020; Garza-Gil et al., 2021; Booth et al., 2022). Specifically, Phelan et al. (2020) advocate for alternative and sustainable livelihood pathways based on local communities, demonstrating how these approaches can support sustainable development while preserving natural and cultural heritage. However, the authors stress that the success of such governance initiatives heavily depends on the active support of governments, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations.

In this regard, Jentoft and Chuenpagdee (2022) underline the necessity of a concrete and interactive application of governance principles, accompanied by continuous learning pathways and enhanced dialogue between governments and civil society, to ensure an inclusive and effective

approach. The Blue Economy can significantly contribute to economic growth, provided that a country's marine resources are accurately mapped and integrated into a robust institutional framework supported by concrete policies and thorough research (Alharthi and Hanif, 2020). Indeed, discussions on the Blue Economy clearly demonstrate that state-implemented policies can significantly influence the success of the Blue Economy approach within a specific economic and geographical context.

Undoubtedly, the proposal of political and management strategies promotes inclusive governance and the sustainable use of resources (Garza-Gil et al., 2021).

RQ3) *What is the future of Blue Economy research?*

From the analysis of the results presented, relevant insights were identified for future research areas within the Blue Economy. From the sample of articles examined, three areas for future research can be identified.

Research Area 1: Blue Economy as a factor in achieving sustainable management and innovation.

From the analysis shown above, it appears that the blue economy is closely related to the sustainable management of marine resources (Blomsma, 2018; Alharthi and Hanif, 2020; Merkel et al., 2021; Ha et al., 2024), which is often supported by the use of digital technologies (Foster and Rhoden, 2020; Islam and Shampa, 2022; Ha, 2024). This is a promising branch of research that allows the following research questions to be identified:

RQ1.1 What are the sustainable management practices related to the Blue Economy?

RQ1.2 What digital tools are used to support marine resource management and how do they contribute to achieving sustainable objectives?

Research Area 2: Blue Economy as a tool for promoting governance policies and sustainable finance.

The second area of research emphasizes the connection between the Blue Economy and governance policies, in particular by configuring the Blue Economy as a tool to promote sustainable finance and policy initiatives. In the studies analyzed, the obstacles that a state encounters in fostering marine resource management policies are identified (López-Bermúdez et al.,2020; Jentoft and Chuenpagdee, 2022), with a focus on sustainable investments to overcome barriers such as lack of financial resources and limited access to markets (Bosmans and De Mariz, 2023). The second set of research questions concerns:

RQ2.1 What are the problems and barriers that governments face in implementing policies to support the Blue Economy?

RQ2.2 How can the effectiveness of sustainable finance in supporting Blue Economy-related projects and/or activities be improved?

Research Area 3: Blue Economy as a factor for community development to control socioeconomic impacts.

The analysis shows that a third area of research links the blue economy to community development in order to control socioeconomic impacts. Garza-Gil et al. (2021) highlight how blue growth in fisheries influences socioeconomic development, while Booth et al. (2022) address the conservation aspect. Jones and Navarro (2018) highlight sustainable practices, including surf tourism, and finally, Mach and Ponting (2021), in addition to highlighting sustainable surf tourism practices, quantify their economic value stating that this type of tourism deserves a significant place in funding initiatives for sustainable actions for communities (Phelan et al., 2020). This branch of research allows the following research questions to be identified:

RQ3.1 What strategies can be implemented to control socio-economic impacts?
RQ3.2 How can sustainable activities and practices promote sustainability and economic development of communities?

The analysis of the papers included in this area provided insight into the state of the art of research in this area, emphasizing the potential of the Blue Economy in supporting sustainable governmental approaches. Furthermore, the temporal analysis of the papers by research area allowed for the development of insights for future research.

5.2 Sample 2

In the research setting, sample 2 yielded no results. Consequently, following the discussion of sample 1, the results obtained by sample 3 will be discussed.

5.3 Sample 3

RQ1) *How is research for inquiring Blue Economy?*

A structured analysis of the literature allows us to understand the various ways in which the term "Blue Economy" has been interpreted in the context of food and tourism. This emerging field of study is still in its infancy, with a limited number of academic articles published on the subject. The literature review reveals that the largest number of articles on this topic was published in 2023, with a total of five articles. Interestingly, 2019 is listed as the year with the lowest number of academic articles published on this topic. The low number of published articles reflects the relative newness of this field of study. The maximum number of published articles per journal is two, with "Ecological Economics", "Journal of Cleaner Production" and "Maritime Business Review" being the most frequent journals. The most cited authors include Phelan, Ruhanen, and Mair from the University of Queensland, Brisbane (Australia) and Waheed, Sarwar, and Alsaggaf from the University of Jeddah, (Saudi Arabia).

Phelan et al. (2020) examined the role of community-based ecotourism in the blue economy, demonstrating that this type of ecotourism promotes the sustainable use of marine resources and provides economic opportunities for coastal communities, emphasizing good practices in sustainable tourism. This issue was also addressed cross-culturally by authors Waheed et al. (2023), who emphasize the possibility of embarking on a path of economic and sustainable growth by primarily enhancing maritime trade and tourism, factors that contribute to the blue economy. The analysis of these two articles and all the others included in this study provides some recommendations relevant to

the blue economy and the food and tourism fields.

RQ2) *What is the focus and critique of the Blue Economy literature?*

The multisectoral nature of the various contributions to the scientific debate appears to confirm the transversal and diverse range of topics related to this area of research. The most frequently used publication venues in this field include prominent international journals such as "Ecological Economics", the "Journal of Cleaner Production", and the "Maritime Business Review". This research has highlighted two main areas, both grounded in the concept of sustainable development, as extensively discussed in Sample 1. Sustainability, in one case, finds its basis in the food supply chain and encompasses all sustainable practices related to fishing and aquaculture; in the other, in tourism and the role it can play within host communities. The authors listed in Table 9, representing the primary thematic clusters, have been incorporated into the discussion to deepen the analysis of different aspects of the Blue Economy, highlighting the connections between the research sectors of tourism and food.

Some of the documents included in this sample also appear in Sample 1, as they address topics that cut across the Blue Economy field. The presence of numerous economic activities within the Blue Economy underscores how some of them can act as strategic levers to promote its development. Within the food supply chain, particular attention is given to emerging economic activities such as aquaculture.

Authors like Spillias et al. (2024) discuss the role of this sustainable practice in supporting livelihoods in various geographic contexts, emphasizing how unsustainable management can jeopardize the survival of local communities and fishers (Garza-Gil et al., 2021) and offering solutions to contemporary challenges (Spillias et al., 2022). Fishing activities, as part of the food supply chain and, more broadly, within the Blue Economy, as highlighted in Sample 1, also form a significant area of focus. Various studies have been conducted in this context, exploring different facets of the topic.

Carvajal-Arenas (2022) examines land tenure rights in coastal territories and their governance, evaluating their compliance with the FAO legal framework, identified as an instrument to integrate the Blue Economy with small-scale fishing practices. Garza-Gil et al. (2021), on the other hand, analyze fishing activities from the perspective of environmental concerns, such as the destruction of marine habitats and the depletion of fishery resources. To address the challenges and concerns associated with these issues, the authors propose strengthening strategic policies and management practices aimed at the sustainable use of resources. A similar approach is discussed in the tourism sector, where adopting sustainable practices as a strategic lever to develop environmentally respectful tourism that benefits local communities is a shared goal among institutions and governments.

Mach and Ponting's (2021) study explores the economic significance of surf-related tourism, analyzing both expenditures and behavioral patterns of surfers. In line with these observations, Manero and Mach (2023) broaden the perspective by proposing a framework to characterize and evaluate the overall value of surf ecosystems. Both studies emphasize the need for effective policies and targeted strategies for sustainable resource management, which are essential to preserving the benefits provided by these ecosystems.

This, as some studies suggest, can occur with the adoption of strategies that aim at the promotion of sustainable tourism (Jones and Navarro, 2018; Phelan et al., 2020). It therefore appears necessary to aim at promoting a model that can integrate communities, local economy, and coastal systems (Phelan et al., 2020).

RQ3) *What is the future of Blue Economy research?*

The presented analysis, based on the identification of thematic clusters and content analysis, produced useful results for outlining future research areas within the tourism and food fields within the Blue Economy approach. The low number of studies makes it possible to identify two promising areas for research.

Research area 1: Blue Economy as a strategic lever to support the food supply chain.

The analysis shows that activities related to the food supply chain are included in this research area and that in particular, they show a focus on sustainable practices (Carvajal-Arenas, 2022; Spillias et al., 2024) these include seaweed cultivation for sustainable development (Spillias et al.,2022), resource management within small-scale fisheries (Alharthi and Hanif, 2020; Garza-Gil et al.,2021).
The future agenda of this promising sector includes the following research questions:

RQ1.1 What methods are used for resource management to ensure sustained sustainability?
RQ1.2 How can technologies be integrated into sustainable resource management processes?

Research area 2: Blue Economy as a strategic lever to promote tourism.

In the analysis of the results, tourism represents a strategic lever as well as an activity closely related to the Blue Economy approach. The implementation of good practices from a sustainable perspective encompasses all those activities that include the promotion of responsible tourism and the conservation of biodiversity (Phelan et al., 2020; Mach and Ponting, 2021; Manero and Mach, 2023; Wilks, 2023; Knapp and Vandegehuchte, 2024) and economic and social sustainability (Huyen et al., 2021; Waheed et al., 2023).
Based on this, the following research questions are developed:

RQ2.1 What conservation strategies could be integrated into tourism activities to minimize impacts?
RQ2.2 How can local communities influence the promotion of sustainable tourism?

Also in this sample, the presentation of the documents analyzed and the time analysis shows the state of the art of Blue Economy research concerning tourism and food, emphasizing their potential and proposing ideas for future research.

6. Conclusions and limitations

In conclusion, it is essential to reiterate the study's objective. This research presents an up-to-date overview of academic literature on the Blue Economy, with a specific focus on the food and tourism fields. It examines the state of the art in this field. To achieve this, descriptive and content analyses were conducted on a sample of 74 articles for the first sample and 21 articles for the third sample.

These analyses were instrumental in understanding the main themes on which the academic research focused. The evidence has shown that research, although in its infancy due to its novelty, is

broad but fragmented; since it is a cross-cutting issue across many sectors, scientific production has consequently been interested on several fronts.

In a broader sense, research has dealt with resource management (Silver et al., 2015; Carrà et al., 2017; Alharthi and Hanif, 2020; Chen et al., 2020, Merkel et al.,2021; Spillias et al., 2022), policy and governance (Kaczynski, 2011; Bennett et al., 2019; López-Bermúdez et al., 2020), innovation (Foster and Rhoden, 2020), sustainable finance (Bosmans and De Mariz, 2023; Thanh, 2024) and socioeconomic impacts (Chen et al., 2020; Garza-Gil et al., 2021). Studies in the tourism field have focused on coastal conservation by promoting tourism and related recreational activities (Jones and Navarro, 2018; Mach and Ponting, 2021; Booth et al., 2022; Shan et al., 2023; Knapp and Vandegehuchte, 2024). The benefits of these efforts are diverse, offering new business opportunities and supporting local communities (Jones and Navarro, 2018). Additionally, food-related research (Alharthi and Hanif, 2020; Garza-Gil et al., 2021) has emphasized the use of sustainable practices to address global challenges such as food security.

The research identified three main thematic clusters as primary areas of specialization in the scientific debate on the Blue Economy (sample 1): Research Area 1: Blue Economy as a factor in achieving sustainable management and innovation; Research Area 2: Blue Economy as a tool for promoting governance policies and sustainable finance; Research Area 3: Blue Economy as a factor for community development to control socioeconomic impacts. Two main thematic clusters were identified as the primary areas of specialization for scientific debate in the areas of tourism and food (sample 3): Research area 1: Blue Economy as a strategic lever to support the food supply chain; Research area 2: Blue Economy as a strategic lever to promote tourism. Exploring these topics aims to overcome the limitations characterizing the scientific debate on the Blue Economy, particularly in the tourism and food fields, and to consolidate scholarly discourse among academics and researchers.

The theoretical implications of this research are valuable for academics to advance research within academic settings and for policymakers to strengthen policy regulations to address the challenges posed by the Blue Economy. The study of these subjects seeks to address the gaps in current scientific discussions about the Blue Economy, with the goal of fostering further academic and research-driven dialogue. Among the practical implications highlighted by this study is the need to manage resources equitably and sustainably, a theme widely emphasized in the research findings.

A significant number of analyzed studies underline the importance of adopting sustainable approaches to ensure responsible use of marine resources and to promote the well-being of the communities involved. From a practical perspective, this entails adopting operational strategies capable of ensuring the efficient use of resources. From a managerial viewpoint, the Blue Economy, with its innovation-oriented approach, offers opportunities to tackle global challenges such as food security in the supply chain (Olatidoye, 2022; Tidd et al., 2022; Alsaleh, 2023). This includes the adoption of advanced technologies (Foster and Rhoden, 2020; Islam and Shampa, 2022; Ha, 2024) and practices like sustainable aquaculture (Spillias et al., 2022; Spillias et al., 2024) to conserve and protect biodiversity. Simultaneously, in the tourism field, the Blue Economy can provide solutions for sustainability challenges faced by destinations (Chen et al., 2020; Holland, 2023), promoting the protection of marine environments and local communities (Phelan et al., 2020; Booth et al., 2022), integrated with responsible policies and sustainable tourism activities (Cummings and Greenberg, 2022; Picken, 2023).

From a political perspective, policymakers could use these findings to strengthen governance frameworks (Silver et al., 2015) regulating this domain and promoting awareness of sustainable

practices to protect marine ecosystems. This approach aligns with the World Bank's definition of the Blue Economy, which emphasizes the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, social welfare, and ecosystem preservation.

6.1 *Limitations*

The limitations of this research may be several. Firstly, although two databases such as Scopus and Web of Science have been used to support scientific research, it might be appropriate to also consult EBSCO, to increase the sample of articles on this topic. Secondly, although the methodological choice adopted presents the state of the art, creating order and availability of previous studies and thus providing the ground on which researchers build new studies (Massaro et al., 2016), the literature review presents questionable results due to the lack of methodological rigor, subjectivity, and potential biases of researchers (Petticrew and Roberts, 2008). Thirdly, another limitation is the choice of keywords, which, by not including synonyms, could present a bias in the results. Despite the highlighted limitations, it is hoped that this work will contribute to filling the gaps in the debate on the Blue Economy, a very timely topic that offers promising future research perspectives.

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Conflict of interest

All authors declare no conflicts of interest in this paper.

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