

## Location-based concepts in tourism research: what do they mean?

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**Abstract:** This paper is motivated by the lack of clarity in frequently used terms and definitions in tourism research complicating comparative studies of cases. This paper proposes an objective method that may help researchers gain awareness of different definitions of concepts in tourism research, avoiding misunderstandings. The paper focuses on four main concepts: destination, attraction, accommodation and point of interest. A bibliometric analysis is carried out to quantify how often researchers employ different definitions for each of these terms. This allowed for the most frequently used definition to be ascertained. The results show that bibliometrics can help identify the most frequent definitions given to a certain concept. This study may help future researchers to better define concepts in tourism studies, as it can be used to clarify meanings among researchers and practitioners when conducting research or making reports on tourism and hospitality.

**Keywords:** Conceptualisation; Tourism terms; Bibliometrics; Definition; Location.

### Conceptos basados en la ubicación en la investigación turística: ¿qué significan?

**Resumen:** Este artículo está motivado por la falta de claridad sobre el significado de términos de uso frecuente en la investigación turística. Por lo tanto, los resultados de diferentes estudios que se refieren a diferentes temas utilizan el mismo concepto, lo que complica la comparación de los resultados. Este artículo propone un método objetivo que puede ayudar a los investigadores a tomar conciencia de las diferentes definiciones de conceptos en la investigación turística. El artículo se centra en cuatro conceptos principales: destino, atracción, alojamiento y punto de interés. Se lleva a cabo un análisis bibliométrico para cuantificar la frecuencia con la que los investigadores emplean diferentes definiciones dadas a cada término. Esto permitió identificar la definición dada con mayor frecuencia a cada concepto. Los resultados muestran que la bibliometría puede ayudar a identificar la definición más frecuente dada a un determinado concepto. Este estudio puede ayudar a futuros investigadores a definir mejor los conceptos en estudios de turismo, ya que puede ser utilizado para lograr una clarificación de definiciones entre investigadores y profesionales a la hora de realizar investigaciones o elaborar informes sobre turismo y hostelería.

**Palabras Clave:** Conceptualización; Términos turísticos; Bibliométrico; Definición; Ubicación.

### 1. Introduction

Conceptualizing elements and providing definitions of key terms is important for researchers because it helps readers understand what the studies are addressing (Blackstone, 2018). However, the existence of different definitions for the same term in multiple studies may complicate the interpretations by researchers and practitioners. Moreover, the use of different definitions may prevent valid comparisons

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**Cite:** Padrón Ávila, H. & Hernández Martín, R. (2023). Location-based concepts in tourism research: what do they mean? *PASOS. Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural*, 20 (2), 383-393. <https://doi.org/10.25145/j.pasos.2023.21.024>

of results, as the same term can be used with different meanings in different studies (Blackstone, 2018). Despite problems linked to the definition of concepts are common in social sciences (Blackstone, 2018), they are even more frequent in tourism and hospitality due to the interdisciplinarity and novelty of these areas of study (UNWTO, 2010a). Thereby, the definition of the most frequently used terms in tourism research has been one of the main challenges for researchers and organizations during recent decades, as there is a lack of clear definitions for them (UNWTO, 2010a). The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has been deeply involved in developing definitions (UNWTO, 2007, 2010a, 2010b) and is probably the most appropriate body to carry out this task of clarification. However, its own definitions have been widely criticized for being too generic and for only compiling a very limited set of terms (Ghanem, 2017; Jafari and Xiao, 2016). Consequently, diverse definitions have been developed by various authors depending on the needs of the research developed. Given the interdisciplinarity and complexity of tourism, the aim of this paper is not to unify definitions but to clarify the range of meanings and the frequency of their use.

Even the concept of *tourism destination*, being the most basic unit of analysis in tourism research (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011; UNWTO, 2007), has not been unequivocally defined. It seems that boundaries of destinations are perceived in a different manner by tourists, companies and public administrations (Benckendorff, 2016; UNWTO, 2007). Previous definitions of the concept have considered that destinations can be defined at any scale (UNWTO, 2004). However, this generates issues among researchers and destination managers, as they cannot establish where the boundaries of destinations are in order to propose policy actions aimed at improving their management or to carry out studies oriented to analysing particular issues affecting destinations.

Moreover, the concept of *tourism destination* is not an isolated case. Other location-related tourism terms have been problematic to define. Terms such as *attraction*, *accommodation* or *point of interest* may be confused by researchers and used without distinction. According to UNWTO (2004), tourists' perceptions of a destination are the main element used to establish which destination they are visiting. This report even indicated that a hotel can be the destination of tourists (UNWTO, 2004). However, if this were the case, then a destination could be the only hotel visited, the only attraction enjoyed, or a single point of interest visited by a certain tourist. Nevertheless, researchers and managers do not tend to use these terms with the same meaning. In fact, hotels are usually only considered as tourist accommodation, while attractions are mainly pull elements explaining tourist arrivals (Benckendorff, 2016) and points of interest tend to refer to places visited (Padrón-Ávila and Hernández-Martín, 2017). Although this might seem easy to explain, researchers continue debating about the meaning of these terms. For example, in the case of tourists sleeping in their cars or camping, can these elements be considered their accommodation? And do the concepts of *attraction* and *point of interest* have the same meaning?

As most used location-based concepts in tourism research appear not to be clearly defined by researchers or institutions, this paper aims to analyse how previous studies have defined the terms *destination*, *attraction*, *accommodation* and *point of interest* in tourism research. These terms have been chosen because the first three are the most relevant location-based concepts in the Encyclopedia of Tourism (Jafari and Xiao, 2016); while the concept of *point of interest* has experienced substantial growth in use during recent years because of the increasing number of papers using tracking techniques (McKercher et al., 2012). Moreover, all these terms refer to a location-based element of the tourism system. Despite other terms such as resource or product also being confusing in tourism research, they do not show such a high connection with the territory as the concepts chosen. In fact, the Encyclopedia of Tourism does not clearly link them to a locational element (Jafari and Xiao, 2016). Following Lewis (1970), in order to establish the meaning of terms, researchers need to look at the first mentions of these terms (when they were introduced). They also have to consider how their meaning has evolved and the main references using them. Thus, a bibliometric analysis of most cited papers indexed in Scopus has been carried out to establish how researchers have used the concepts mentioned. However, the purpose of this paper is not to provide a new definition for these terms, but to identify how tourism researchers have used them in their studies so a clarification on their meaning can be achieved. The study has also other objectives such as helping future tourism and hospitality researchers when deciding the term to use in their papers and making them conscious of the confusion created when using the same term to refer to different realities. Moreover, this study aims to help researchers, practitioners and international tourism organizations to shed light on the definitions of key location-based concepts they use to improve the understanding and comparability of the results of research and reports.

## 2. Current debate about the definition of terms in tourism research

UNWTO (2010a) simply defines destinations as the places where tourists spend most of their time during their trips. Based on this definition, it could be understood that hotel rooms are the main destinations of tourists' trips. However, this is not what tourism researchers refer to when using this concept. Hong-Bumm (1998) considers destinations as complex products composed of climate, infrastructure, superstructure, services, nature and culture. Similarly, Buhalis (2000) defines them as an amalgam of products, services and facilities of a place that meets the needs of tourists. Baggio and Cooper (2010) point out that a destination consists of a group of institutions and tourism companies that collaborate, generating a network of structures that make up the destination. Although these definitions consider the elements composing a destination and how they interrelate, there is a problem still not solved. It is the spatial dimension of a destination, as none of these studies establishes the territorial unit that forms and defines a destination. In fact, researchers have not agreed on the scale on which a territory should be considered as a destination (Lohmann and Duval, 2014; Lohmann and Netto, 2016). Sometimes, tourism studies consider the entire country as the destination (Ahas et al., 2007; Izquierdo Valverde et al., 2016; Roose, 2010). Sometimes, the region visited is identified as the tourism destination visited (Aquilino et al., 2018; Wu and Pearce, 2012). On other occasions, the city studied is considered the destination (e.g. Lew and McKercher, 2006; McKercher et al., 2012). Moreover, even a part of a city, an island or a tourist attraction can be considered as tourism destinations (Smallwood et al., 2012).

In past reports, UNWTO (2007:1) defined the concept of a destination as "a physical space in which a visitor spends at least one overnight stay. It includes tourism products such as support services and attractions, and tourism resources within one day's return travel time. It has physical and administrative boundaries defining its management, and images and perceptions defining its market competitiveness. Local destinations incorporate various stakeholders often including a host community, and can nest and network to form larger destinations". The problem linked with this definition arises when considering that tourists may need more than a day to visit some places, such as certain natural areas. Moreover, UNWTO (2007) does not specify which administrative boundaries define destinations (municipality borders or country frontiers, among others). Thus, UNWTO (2015) later states that destinations are physical spaces with or without administrative or analytical limits in which visitors can stay overnight and also indicates that destinations can be grouped to conform larger destinations. This idea is supported by Fletcher et al. (2013) and Flores and Scott (2016), who consider that destinations can be included within another one depending on the scale at which they are analysed. Although this definition may solve the problems of the previous definition provided by UNWTO (2007), it allows a wide set of places to be considered as destinations, even hotels or resorts, as visitors can stay overnight and do several tourist activities within them.

Thus, taking as reference the definitions mentioned, a series of conclusions can be reached regarding the definition of the concept of *tourism destination*. Firstly, all authors agree that destinations are geographical spaces where visitors travel to (Buhalis, 2000; Baggio and Cooper, 2010; UNWTO, 2010a Lohmann and Netto, 2016). Secondly, they are formed by a set of interconnected elements that meet tourists' needs (e.g. Baggio and Cooper, 2010; Buhalis, 2000; Hong-Bumm, 1998). Finally, there is a huge problem to establish the geographical limits defining destinations (city, island, region, country...) (UNWTO, 2007). Therefore, it seems appropriate to consider that they can be grouped to form, in turn, other destinations (UNWTO, 2004, 2015). However, as definitions have not been able to indicate the lowest possible level at which a destination can be defined, it is not possible to establish when destinations are being grouped or not.

In the case of the term *attraction*, Benckendorff (2016) points out that, despite researchers usually considering attractions as physical spaces, this term comprises a wider set of elements. In fact, he defines tourist attractions as all those places, people, events and things that attract tourists to destinations. Other studies have also supported the idea of considering not only geographical spaces as tourist attractions, but also the culture, traditions, events and climate of destinations (Lohmann and Netto, 2016; Shoval and Raveh, 2004; Timothy, 1995). Thus, the conceptualization of tourist attractions seems to be designed from a demand perspective, as researchers agree that it refers to those elements attracting tourists to the destination. The problem with this definition arises when considering the extremely wide set of elements that can be considered as attractions. For some tourists, theme parks may be the reason for choosing a certain destination. However, for other tourists, a certain person (friend, relative or couple) could be the attraction motivating the visit to a place rather than other elements

linked to the destination. Moreover, the low price of flights or the characteristics of the accommodation establishment could also be considered an attraction of the destination following these definitions, as they might be the reasons attracting tourists.

Despite the definitions of *attraction* created by the aforementioned authors (Benckendorff, 2016; Lohmann and Netto, 2016; Shoval and Raveh, 2004; Timothy, 1995), researchers do not tend to use this term with this meaning. Actually, it seems that locations are usually the only elements considered as attractions (e.g. Baggio and Cooper, 2010; Padrón-Ávila and Hernández-Martín, 2019) and the willingness to enjoy certain features also seems to be relevant to establish whether it is an attraction or not (Richards, 2002). However, considering attractions as a place where tourists can enjoy certain elements leads to equalizing this term with the concept of destination, despite researchers clearly differentiating between them in their studies. In addition, points of interest are also locations attracting tourists, so this could mean that the terms *attraction* and *point of interest* are used indistinctly. Moreover, an accommodation establishment can be also considered as a place that tourists have chosen to enjoy their vacations and, thus, a tourist attraction.

The term *accommodation* has not been widely defined in tourism research. In fact, the only direct definition found of this term was included in the Encyclopedia of Tourism (Jafari and Xiao, 2016). Nevertheless, *accommodation* is simply defined as the *home away from home* where tourists stay during the night (O'Halloran, 2016). Taking this definition as it is, no boundaries have been set to delimit this concept. Thus, the room where tourists stay can be the accommodation, or the whole building in which they are sleeping or even the city if they consider it their "home away from home". To be more specific about this concept, O'Halloran (2016) later states that people usually consider as accommodation "hotels, inns, or lodges". Despite this clarification helping to specify what places can be considered as accommodation, it seems to highlight that this term necessarily refers to hospitality enterprises or, at least, places providing service facilities, as Gunn (1979) mentions. However, tourists do not always stay in hotels or similar enterprises, as they can also camp, sleep in caravans or stay with relatives, for example.

The concept *point of interest* also shows a lack of references about its definition. Even though it is not even included in the Encyclopedia of Tourism (Jafari and Xiao, 2016), it has recently begun to be used in research and reports (e.g. Signorelli et al., 2016; INRouTe, 2017; Padrón-Ávila and Hernández-Martín, 2017;). However, most of them have not created a definition to explain what this concept refers to, which could lead to confusing it with other similar terms. The first reference found in tourism research to this concept was elaborated by Wall (1997), who uses this term from a geographical and spatial perspective stating that points of interest are specific locations that concentrate a large number of visitors. In his study, Wall (1997) also indicates that points of interest differ from attractions in terms of size. While attractions tend to be sited in large areas with specific attractiveness to tourists, points of interest are smaller locations within these areas where tourists usually concentrate (Wall, 1997). From this definition, some research-related issues may arise as certain attractions do not show a particularly high concentration of tourists in specific spots, such as natural areas. Moreover, tourism-related places (such as airports, tourism information offices and accommodation establishments, among others) usually present a huge concentration of tourists, but not all of them generate interest in tourists, so they should not be defined as *points of interest*. In addition, Wall (1997) does not establish criteria to determine the maximum size of a place or the minimum number of visitors that it must receive to be considered a point of interest. Thus, the place to consider could be a beach, city, region or country, which could derive in equalizing points of interest to other terms previously discussed.

Padrón-Ávila and Hernández-Martín (2017:985) define points of interest as specific places, within a tourist destination, in which one or several tourism resources are located and tourist activities are carried out. Despite this study is trying to solve the issues derived from the definition of point of interest provided by Wall (1997), it also presents some issues. A specific place can be understood as a building, park, the exact coordinates where tourists are or even a whole city. Moreover, authors state that this place has to be within tourism destinations (Padrón-Ávila and Hernández-Martín, 2017), although this term has not been defined either by tourism researchers. In addition, the definitions of tourism resource, tourism product and tourist activity can also generate problems as other tourism-related terms (UNWTO, 2010a). Thus, further discussion about all these terms is required to improve the accuracy and clarity of research.

### 3. Methodology

In this study, a bibliometric analysis has been carried out. The use of bibliometric techniques in tourism research has become a useful tool (Strandberg et al., 2018; Wu and Pearce, 2012). Ginieis, Sánchez-Rebull and Campa-Planas (2012) point out that bibliometric analysis has gained importance in recent years in certain fields of economic sciences, particularly in marketing, tourism and strategic innovation. To do this analysis, the most cited studies indexed in the Scopus database have been used. Although there are different databases with which the analysis could have been performed, Scopus has been chosen mainly because it is the largest bibliographic database in the world that indexes more than 21,000 titles of international scientific publishers (Vieira and Gomes, 2009). In addition, other bibliometric studies conducted in the field of tourism research have also supported its use (Boselie et al., 2005; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Jiménez-Caballero and Polo Molina, 2017). Rudchenko et al. (2017) also indicate that another of the advantages of Scopus is the possibility of searching for keywords included in the article title, summary and keywords, and it provides links to the publishers' websites and to the full text of the articles. Although bibliometric analysis techniques are mainly used to determine the methods used by researchers to study a given phenomenon or the journals most likely to publish studies on a certain topic (Barrios et al., 2008), some researchers have successfully applied them to analyse how certain terms are used in order to establish their definition. Among others, this type of study has been used to define the concepts of international competitiveness (Olczyk, 2016), green innovation (Albort-Morant et al., 2017), reverse salient (Dedehayir, 2009) and resilience (Exterckoter et al., 2016). Moreover, bibliometrics has also been used in previous studies to analyse the state of certain topics in tourism research or to criticise research published on a certain topic (e.g. Yankholmes, 2014).

To carry out the bibliometric analysis, the terms "*tourism destination*", "*tourist attraction*", "*tourist accommodation*" and "*points of interest*" *tourism* were searched in Scopus. These terms were chosen because *destination*, *attraction* and *accommodation* are relevant and frequently used in tourism research, while *point of interest* is a relatively new concept that has increased its use in recent years, boosted by tracking techniques (Domènech et al., 2020). Moreover, all concepts chosen are linked to tourism locations, so their meaning could be confused by researchers. All types of contributions indexed in Scopus containing these terms in their title, summary or keywords were collected. Thus, we collected data from journal papers, books, book chapters and conference proceedings. This search was carried out on 16 July 2019. Once the search was done, only the 50 most cited papers (of each term) available in the Scopus database were considered for analysis. After collecting the papers, we read them to collect data about definitions of the concepts or, if definitions were missing, to identify the use authors gave to the concepts in the papers collected. Blackstone (2018) accepts using meanings instead of direct definitions as defining does not always imply providing a direct definition to a concept but specifying the use researchers give to a certain term. In order to decide if linking the words *tourism* or *tourist* to the terms of destination, attraction and accommodation, authors decided to use the combination that showed more results in Google Scholar. In the case of the concept of point of interest, the word *tourism* was added in the search engine because this term is also highly used in non-tourism related areas.

In the search of publications addressing *tourism destination*, the 50 most cited papers had received between 322 and 1,478 citations and were published from 1978 to 2015. Regarding the concept of *tourist attraction*, the selected contributions had been published between 1987 and 2016 and had between 200 and 631 citations. In the case of *tourist accommodation*, studies had been cited between 81 and 322 times, and they had been published from 1978 to 2016. Finally, for the concept of *point of interest*, the contributions analysed had been published between 2001 and 2019 and had between 5 and 205 citations. Once papers were found, they were completely read to find definitions of their respective authors stating what they considered as destination, attraction, accommodation or point of interest. If no definition was provided, we considered the use given to the term to establish it. For example, if a paper focuses on analysing a certain country and identified the country as the destination studied, we considered that the authors of the paper were defining destinations as the country visited by tourists. Although this means that not all data relate to papers using definitions to the terms studied, the use given to concepts by researchers is also considered a way of defining them in social sciences (Blackstone, 2018; Lewis, 1970). The reason for this is that establishing what researchers mean when carrying out a study is necessary so that readers understand the assumptions made by the researchers. Thus, papers have to define the terms they use, even if they do it in an indirect manner (Blackstone, 2018).

In order to get quantitative data from the review of the papers, definitions of terms were categorized. Categories were created based on the definitions found during the search. Different categories were

created for each term based on the data found and the literature review carried out (Krippendorff, 2004). This also establishes clear differences between the concepts. In the case of *tourism destination*, definitions were classified as “Country”, “Region”, “City”, “Small island” or “Not specified”. The category “Region” also includes papers that considered that destinations are counties or provinces. The category “City” not only includes cities but also towns and villages. In the case of the category “Not specified”, it refers to papers that were tagged with the keyword *tourism destination* by Scopus (so they appeared while searching) despite not containing this term nor mentioning the place where authors apply the study. In the case of the concept of *tourist attraction*, definitions were categorized as “Places, traditions and others”, “Large spaces with minor attraction spots”, “Generic locations” or “Not specified”. Again “Not specified” was assigned to papers not dealing with attractions and “Large spaces with minor attraction spots” refers to definitions directly stating that the attraction studied was composed of smaller places where tourists tended to concentrate. In the case of *accommodation*, the categories created were “Apartment”, “Bed & breakfast”, “Campground”, “Cruise”, “Farm or rural house”, “Holiday home”, “Hostel”, “Hotel”, “Motel”, “Resort”, “Shared accommodation”, “Staying with friends or relatives” and “Not specified”. In the case of this latter term, some studies dealt with several accommodation types as many of them were comparing customer satisfaction, incomes, reputation or other performance-related topics between customers of different types of accommodation. Lastly, for the term *point of interest*, definitions were classified by “Generic locations”, “Particular spots” and “Not specified”. The category “Generic locations” refers to the same elements as the category created for attraction points. However, elements categorized as “Particular spots” refer to studies addressing specific coordinates (latitude and longitude) where tourists have been while travelling.

To categorize the definitions, both authors read and categorized all papers found independently as Krippendorff (2004) recommends, so the code chosen to categorize an article by an author could not influence the decision of the other author. As Krippendorff (2004) recommends, authors agreed on the codes to be used before starting the coding process. This allowed calculating the reliability of the results obtained. Authors coincided on the codes given to 87% of the papers found. After obtaining this reliability index, the authors discussed the codes used to categorize 13% of papers in which they had not agreed. Doing so, we could agree on the codes to be used on those papers to present the results provided in this study.

After categorizing the definitions found, data were analysed as to the frequency of use of each of the categories created. Thus, several tables were produced showing the different definitions given by researchers to the terms studied. These tables identify which definitions are more popular among researchers, establishing differences between the concepts. These tables contain information about the number of studies found dealing with each definition and the relative weight of each category. Moreover, data about the first and last year when each definition of the concept was employed is also presented. In addition, the mean year of publication of papers using the different types of definitions is also shown.

#### 4. Results and discussion

As can be seen in Table 1, researchers usually understand tourism destinations as the cities visited by tourists. The second most frequent definition for this concept is considering the whole country as a tourist destination. Curiously, the most specific definition of this term is the most used one, while the most generic one is the second most used definition. Moreover, some studies have also considered the region visited as the destination of tourists’ trips. Results of the bibliometric analysis also seem to indicate that, when studying small island destinations, researchers usually consider the whole island as the tourist destination, instead of considering one of the cities of the island, as happens in non-insular territories. As the use of the term *tourism destination* is frequent in tourism research, almost a third of the studies found contained this term in their title, abstract or keywords, even if they did not actually study a particular destination. Therefore, several studies were categorized as “Not specified”.

**Table 1: Results for each definition of *tourism destination* and evolution of the term.**

Definition	Number of studies	Percentage	First mention	Last mention	Mean year
Country	10	20%	1982	2006	1997.9
Region	4	8%	1979	2009	2000.6
City	17	34%	1978	2015	2003.3
Small island	3	6%	2000	2004	2002.0
Not specified	16	32%	1990	2011	2002.1

In this study, we also wanted to analyse if the definitions of the terms chosen have evolved over the years. Thus, Table 1 also shows the evolution of the definition of *tourism destination*. Results indicate that the first studies (late 1970s) considered cities as destinations but researchers started to consider countries as destinations in early 1980s. Even though the study of tourism on the local scale can bring more interesting results, it was easier for first tourism researchers to start analysing the activity on a more generic scale. In fact, the mean year of publication of the studies found shows that defining *tourism destination* as the country visited by tourists was most frequent in past research. Currently, researchers tend to use the city (which represents a more specific scale of analysis) as the destination to be studied. Moreover, results also indicate that more recent studies are also considering islands as tourist destinations. The results displayed in the table show that researchers do not use this word to refer to hotels or similar places where tourists stay (accommodation), or to refer to the location and resources explaining tourist arrivals at the destination (attractions or points of interest).

Similar to the previous table, Table 2 shows how researchers use the term *tourist attraction*. Results point out that the most frequent definition of this term relates to the one given by Benckendorff (2016), considering that attractions are not only places but also traditions and weather, among others. However, it seems that researchers studying attractions usually focus on location-based attractions instead of intangible ones. Curiously, some studies define attractions as large spaces containing several places where tourists tend to concentrate, as pointed out by Wall (1997). Results also indicate that considering only locations as attractions was more frequent in past research than in current studies. Nowadays, an extended vision of this concept is more frequent among researchers. Moreover, when studying location-based attractions, results indicate that some researchers consider them as large areas comprising several spots that are visited by tourists. Comparing Table 1 and Table 2, it can be noted that cities, regions or countries are not attractions, while other spaces are, such as national parks, museums or old towns. Moreover, the latter places mentioned are never considered as destinations by researchers, despite UNWTO supporting this claim (UNWTO, 2007). In addition, attractions do not necessarily have to be related to a geographical space (they can also be traditions, festivals, among others), while destinations are always a geographical space.

**Table 2: Results for each definition of tourist attraction and evolution of the term.**

Definition	Number of studies	Percentage	First mention	Last mention	Mean year
Places, traditions and others	21	42%	1992	2014	2003.2
Large spaces with minor attracting spots	4	8%	2000	2010	2004.5
Generic locations	14	28%	1990	2009	2001.9
Not specified	11	22%	1987	2016	2005.7

Regarding the concept of *accommodation*, results are displayed in Table 3. Information in the table points out that hotels have been the most studied accommodation in tourism and hospitality research. Moreover, hotels were the most studied type of accommodation in past research, and they continue being so according to more recent studies. Despite this, results indicate that recent research is also focusing on holiday homes, probably due to the rapid rise of this type of accommodation during recent years. Other frequent types of accommodation studied are Bed & Breakfast, motels and tourists staying with friends

or relatives. Results seem to indicate that analysing tourist accommodation usually implies studying hospitality enterprises. The only exceptions found are those studies focusing on tourists staying with friends and relatives. However, other non-commercial accommodation is not frequently studied, such as staying in caravans, free camping or owning second homes. As previously mentioned, some studies using the term *accommodation* deal with several types of accommodation. Therefore, even if only the 50 more cited studies were considered for the analysis, the sum of the number of studies in Table 3 referring to each of the definitions identified exceeds this number.

**Table 3: Number of results for each definition of *accommodation* and evolution of the term.**

Definition	Number of studies	Percentage	First mention	Last mention	Mean year
Apartment	1	2%	2012	2010	2012.0
Bed & breakfast	9	18%	1996	2009	2003.9
Campground	5	10%	1996	2009	2002.8
Cruise	1	2%	1996	1996	1996.0
Farm or rural house	4	8%	1996	2007	2001.0
Holiday home	4	8%	2007	2016	2012.5
Hostel	3	6%	1996	2003	2000.0
Hotel	32	64%	1991	2012	2004.9
Motel	6	12%	1996	2006	2001.2
Resort	2	4%	2005	2005	2005.0
Shared accommodation	1	2%	2003	2003	2003.0
Staying with friends or relatives	6	12%	1996	2012	2005.7
Not specified	7	14%	1978	2009	1996.7

When comparing Table 3 with previous tables, some observations can be made. Accommodation always relates to a location, like destinations yet contrary to attractions. However, in contrast to destinations, cities or other urban nuclei are not considered tourist accommodation. Instead, researchers only consider as accommodation certain buildings or infrastructures (in the case of cruises and campgrounds) where tourists stay overnight, while these places are not considered tourist destinations by researchers, despite UNWTO pointing to this possibility (UNWTO, 2007). In addition, studies tend to relate the term *accommodation* with places related to the hospitality industry, while these locations are not considered as attractions by researchers.

Results about the definition of *point of interest* in tourism research can be seen in Table 4. Data show that this term is the one that has started to be most recently used in tourism research. Moreover, data also indicate that researchers tend to use this term to refer to generic locations, such as squares, museums, buildings, among others. In addition, some studies have also used the term to refer to all those places where tourists stop, particularly in studies using tourist tracking techniques (Domènech et al., 2020). In this regard, when researchers use this definition (particular spots) to refer to *points of interest*, they do not mean the facilities visited (such as museums or natural areas) but the specific coordinates where tourists have been.

**Table 4: Number of results for each definition of *point of interest* and evolution of the term.**

Definition	Number of studies	Percentage	First mention	Last mention	Mean year
Generic locations	39	78%	2001	2019	2013.2
Particular spots	8	16%	2002	2015	2011.1
Not specified	3	6%	2006	2016	2011.7



Comparing Table 4 with the other three previous tables, several differences between the terms studied can be identified. First, points of interest are more specific places than destinations as supported by Padrón-Ávila and Hernández-Martín (2017). Moreover, points of interest always refer to a location, not like the term *attraction*, despite both terms having been used indistinctly in some studies. Nevertheless, this consideration of attractions as specific locations was more frequent in the past, while current studies usually define them not only as places but also as other elements such as events, traditions, among others. In addition, some studies consider that location-based attractions can be large areas comprising minor spots and these spots could be understood as points of interest, as suggested by Wall (1997). Regarding the concept of *accommodation*, none of the studies found considered that points of interest could be defined as hotels, apartments, resorts, among other types of accommodation establishments.

## 5. Conclusion

This research proposes a methodology to help clarify the meaning of some of the most commonly used location-based concepts in tourism research. Despite the importance for researchers to understand the meaning of such terms (Blackstone, 2018) and the efforts made by UNWTO (2004, 2007, 2010a, 2015), conceptualizing in tourism continues to be a pending task (UNWTO, 2010a). A bibliometric analysis was performed using titles, summaries and keywords in the Scopus database that contains more than 21,000 titles. The 50 most cited papers containing the concepts tourism destination, tourist attraction, tourism accommodation and point of interest were then selected. The literature review carried out during this study shows the variety of meanings of frequently used tourism concepts given by researchers and the issues that each of the existing definitions presents. This low level of agreement has also been confirmed through a bibliometric analysis carried out in this study. The results show the main definitions used by researchers for the terms studied. In this regard, destinations usually refer to the cities visited by tourists, attractions tend to be any kind of element (not necessarily locations) motivating tourists to visit the destination, accommodation is used to refer to tourism companies hosting tourists and points of interest are those specific locations visited by tourists during their trips. It is worth noting that most papers do not provide explicit definitions of these key location-based concepts and, therefore, the actual meaning has been frequently obtained through the use given by researchers to the concepts.

This paper may help clarify the definition of the four terms analysed, so researchers can properly use them in their studies, avoiding misunderstandings. This could lead to a clearer use of these terms in future studies, leading to research analysing the same elements and thus results of different studies being more comparable. Moreover, this study can also help future researchers aiming to analyse the definition of other concepts used in tourism research or other fields.

Despite the implications of this study, it has some limitations. First, definitions of only the 50 most cited studies using each term have been used to collect the data required to carry out this research, so considering a larger number of studies or even all of them could modify the results to a certain extent. Second, Scopus has been the only database used to gather data, despite there being others, such as Web of Science or Google Scholar, that can be used to compare the results obtained. Third, only definitions provided by researchers were considered to carry out this analysis, despite practitioners, destination managers, tourism organizations and the media using these same terms with different meanings. Despite these limitations, this study can be used by future researchers and international organizations to clarify the definitions and terminology to be used in tourism literature. Moreover, as these problems are common in other social sciences (Blackstone, 2018), this study may also serve as a point of reference for researchers of other areas of study.

## 6. Funding

This work was supported by the Government of Canary Islands and the European Social Fund.

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*Recibido:* 20/09/2021  
*Reenviado:* 29/03/2022  
*Aceptado:* 05/05/2022  
 Sometido a evaluación por pares anónimos