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Adaptive Reuse in Industrial Heritage: A Bibliometric Review (2004-2024)

* ¹ Aysegül Çeltelgil , ² Assoc. Prof. Dr. Feride Pınar Arabacıoğlu

¹ & ² Department of Architecture, Faculty Of Architecture, Yıldız Technical University, Istanbul, Türkiye

*E-mail ¹: aysegulceltelgil@gmail.com, E-mail ²: fpayan@yildiz.edu.tr

Abstract

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The reuse of post-industrial sites, frequently associated with contemporary themes, represents a subject of considerable interest and study at both the architectural and urban scales. The preservation and adaptive reuse of industrial heritage act as a conduit between the past and the future, while also contributing to urban sustainability. This study analyses the existing literature on repurposed industrial heritage sites, exploring relevant themes, general trends, and current directions. This study investigates approaches, concepts, keywords, authors, documents, organisations, and references within this context. English-language articles indexed in the Web of Science database were examined using the PRISMA protocol. The data obtained from the literature review were visualised through bibliometric mapping using VOSviewer software. Quantitative data were cross-analysed with qualitative and in-depth research findings. The study identifies themes, current trends, and research gaps concerning the reuse of industrial heritage sites.

Keywords: Industrial heritage; adaptive reuse; bibliometric analysis; bibliometric review.

1. Introduction

According to Nizhny Tagil Charter (2003), industrial heritage comprises the remnants of industrial culture that hold historical, technological, social, architectural, and scientific value. This heritage includes structures, machinery, production areas (such as workshops, factories, mines, and refineries), storage and retail spaces, sites related to energy generation, distribution and use, transportation infrastructure, and associated social facilities (TICCIH Website). Following the cessation of industrial production, these areas often lose their original functions and may either be repurposed temporarily or fall into disuse and abandonment. Many industrial complexes consist of vast buildings and extensive landscapes. Additionally, their surroundings are often characterized by unplanned urban neighborhoods where generations of workers who once worked these industries resided. The deindustrialization process typically results in fractures and disruptions within the social fabric of these communities. Therefore, adaptively reused industrial heritage sites possess not only cultural heritage value but also significant environmental, social, and economic impact values. Empirical studies on the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage—through economic, cultural, environmental, social, participatory, commercial, and creative industry-oriented approaches—show that these practices lead not only to the spatial transformation of industrial sites but also to significant environmental outcomes (Scaffidi, 2024; Sun & Chen 2023; Kozina, et al. 2021; He, 2019; Vardopoulos, 2019; Grodach et al. 2018; Plevoets & Sowinska-Heim, 2018; Bullen & Love, 2011).

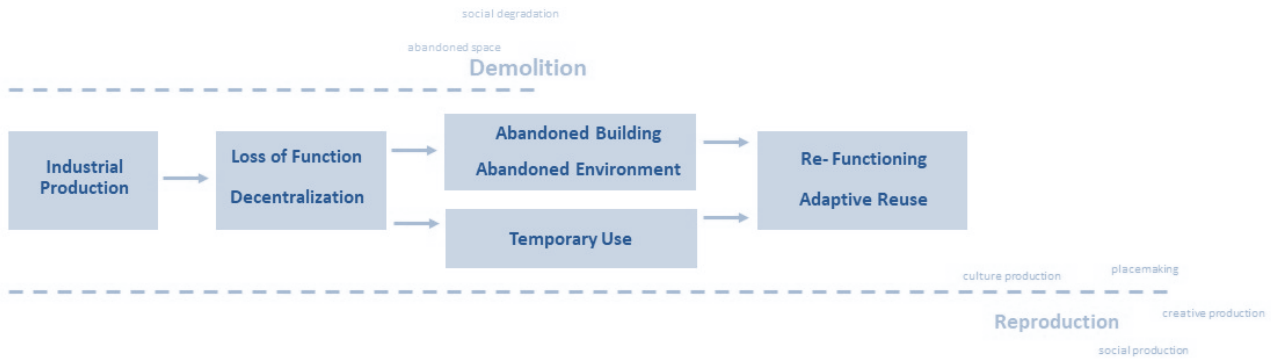


Figure 1. Stages of Adaptive Reuse in Industrial Heritage (Developed by Authors).

The reuse of post-industrial sites is a subject of study, often associated with contemporary urban and architectural themes. Currently, it is investigated across multiple spatial scales—micro (structure/building), meso (neighborhood), and macro (urban). At the micro scale, research focuses on the long-term, holistic preservation and sustainable future of industrial buildings and structural elements, including assessments based on building life cycle analysis (Bertolazzi et al., 2023; Pittau et al., 2020; Vehbi et al., 2016; Thiebat, 2016). Topics such as heritage value, design impact, and spatial experience are also frequently explored at this scale (Liu et al., 2024; Tsilika & Vardopoulos, 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Mesda & Kurt, 2021; Samadzadehyazdi et al., 2018). At the meso scale, studies examine the regional impacts of adaptive reuse projects through new functions and architectural interventions (Zhong et al., 2024; Scaffidi, 2024; Sun & Chen, 2021; Niu et al., 2018; Aydeniz & Taddonio, 2016). At the macro scale, research addresses the social, cultural, environmental, and/or economic impacts of repurposed industrial structures on the urban context (Oevermann et al., 2024; Della Lucia & Pashkevich, 2022; Sun & Chen, 2021; Yin et al., 2015). Decision-making processes regarding the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage are discussed across all three scales, and new methods and approaches are continuously being developed within this framework (Liu, 2024; Xiong et al., 2023; Nogués & Arroyo 2016).

A review of the literature reveals a growing number of studies in recent years on the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage sites (WoS, Scopus, Taylor & Francis, 2024). These studies predominantly rely on case analyses and methodological explorations. However, there is still a significant gap in the literature: a comprehensive and systematically selected review that clearly reflects the current state of research on the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage is lacking.

This study aims to analyze the existing literature on reused industrial heritage sites by identifying key themes, prevailing trends, current research directions, and gaps in the field. In this context, a bibliometric analysis was conducted focusing on concepts, keywords, authors, documents, institutions, and references. Bibliometric analyses can offer a solid foundation for advancing a field in new and meaningful ways by identifying knowledge gaps, generating novel research ideas, and positioning intended contributions through a broad, consolidated overview (Donthu et al., 2022). The findings of this bibliometric study provide valuable insights into potential research avenues related to adaptive reuse in post-industrial contexts, benefiting researchers, designers, decision-makers, and practitioners alike.

2. Material and Methods

The analysis methodology is based on identifying studies on the reuse of industrial heritage and conducting a bibliometric analysis. Descriptive analyses provide an overall view of the included publications. Bibliometric analyses focus on keyword co-occurrence, source, citation, and country-based data analysis.

English-language articles indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) database were examined using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol. The data obtained from the literature review were visualised through bibliometric mapping using VOSviewer software. Quantitative data were cross-analysed with qualitative research findings.

Table 1. Publications retrieval process based on meta-analysis: PRISMA (Developed by Authors).

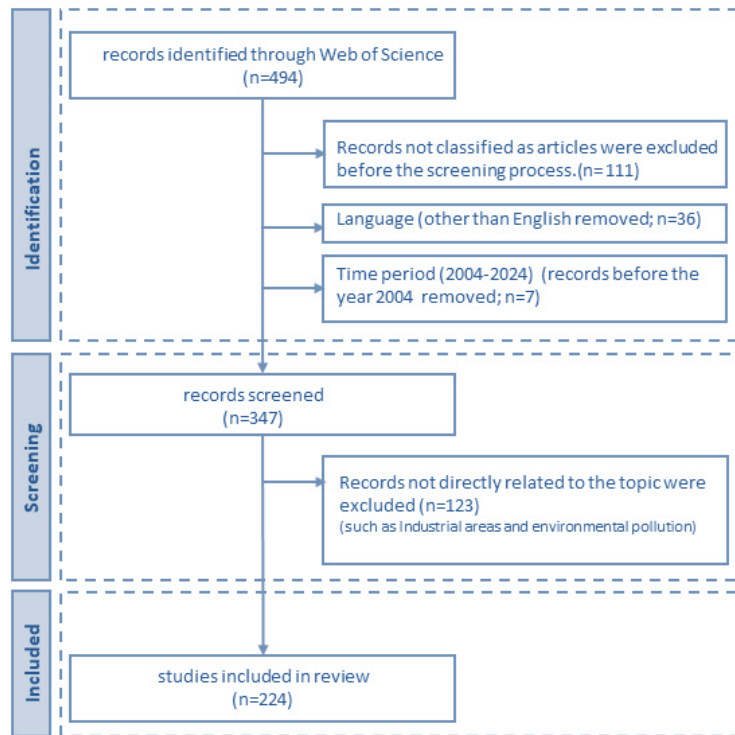


Table 1 explains the data collection process through the PRISMA approach. Since this study focused on “**Adaptive Reuse in Industrial Heritage**”, the rule formulated in the topic field which applies the search in the All Fields of a publication as follows; **TOPIC** ("industrial heritage" OR "industrial site" OR "industrial sites" OR "industrial building" OR "industrial buildings" OR "post industrial" (All Fields)) **AND** ("reuse" (All Fields)) and **Article** (Document Types) and **English** (Languages) and (Web of Science Categories) and Search in "Web of Science Core Collection".

In the initial search conducted on WoS, 494 publications were identified. Publications that were not in English, were not articles, or were published outside the 2004–2024 timeframe were excluded. Abstracts of 347 articles were screened. At this stage, studies related to environmental pollution caused by industrial sectors and industrial areas, which were not directly relevant to the research topic, were also excluded. As a result, a bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software and Microsoft Excel on 224 English-language articles directly related to the research topic (Table 1). The bibliometric findings were then cross-analyzed with qualitative and in-depth research results. The data used in this research was obtained from the Web of Science database in April 2025.

3. Results

Results of descriptive and bibliometric analyses of a total of 224 publications were extracted from Web of Science database are presented respectively.

3.1. Number of publications per year between the years 2004-2024

The analysis of studies over the years reveals a significant increase since 2004, as illustrated in Figure 2. In fact, the number of publications began to increase markedly starting from 2015. It was increased by 4 times in the year 2024 comparing to 2015. This strengthens the expectation of an increasing trend in the coming years.

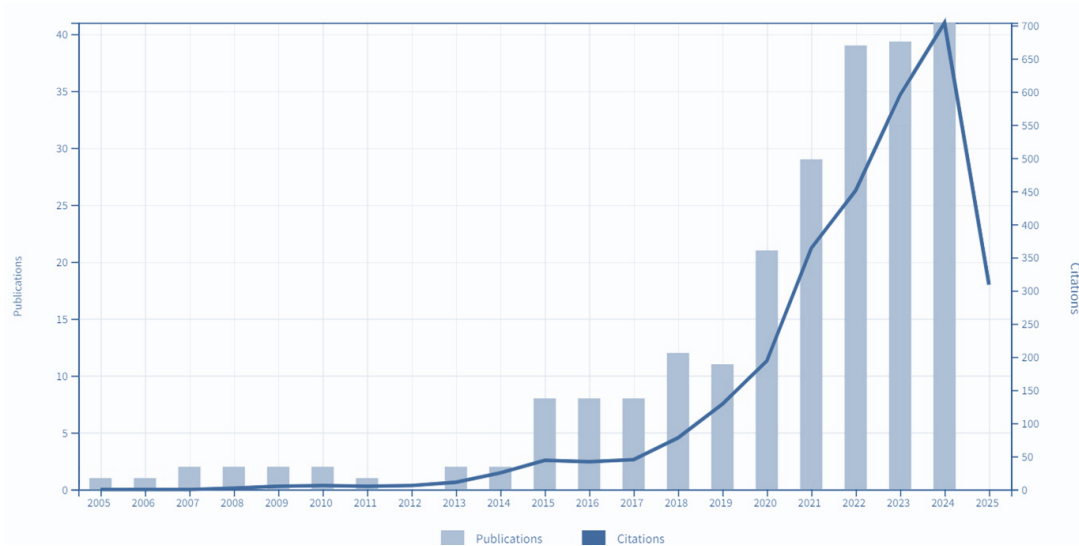


Figure 2. Number of publications and citations per year between the years 2004-2024 (Developed by Authors).

3.2. Country Based Analysis

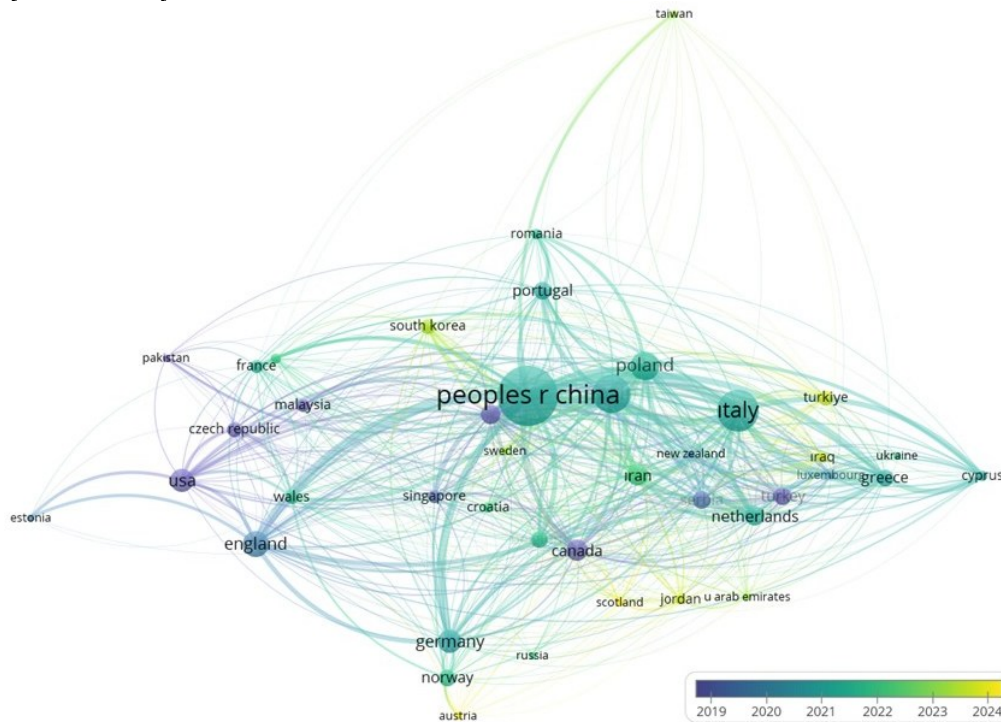


Figure 3. Country based analysis (Developed by Authors).

A country-based analysis of the collected publications was conducted using VOSviewer software, with the resulting network of countries and their connections illustrated in Figure 3. Figure 3 shows countrybased analysis between 2004-2024. As the publications include countries from around the world, a global trend can be observed. Studies conducted in different countries appear to have strong connections with each other. In particular, studies carried out in European countries often involve multiple nations, as they are related to the ERIH (European Route Of Industrial Heritage) network. China is the leading country in the studies with a rate of 29%. Next Italy (14%), Spain (11.6%), Poland (6.7%), England (5.4%), Germany (4.4%) and USA (4.4%) have dominance in the research area. Canada (3.5%), Iran (3.3%), Australia (3.1%), Netherlands (3.1%) and Turkiye (2.7%) have also emerged as active contributors to the field.

3.3. Co-authorship and Citation of Authors

A co-authorship network based on the obtained publications was generated using VOSviewer, as shown in Figures 4a and 4b. In the literature, there are multiple clusters that have established co-authorship with each other (Figure 4a). The most connected authors are Wang Y., Xiong, X., Li, H., Bazzazedeh, H. and Marcelo, V..

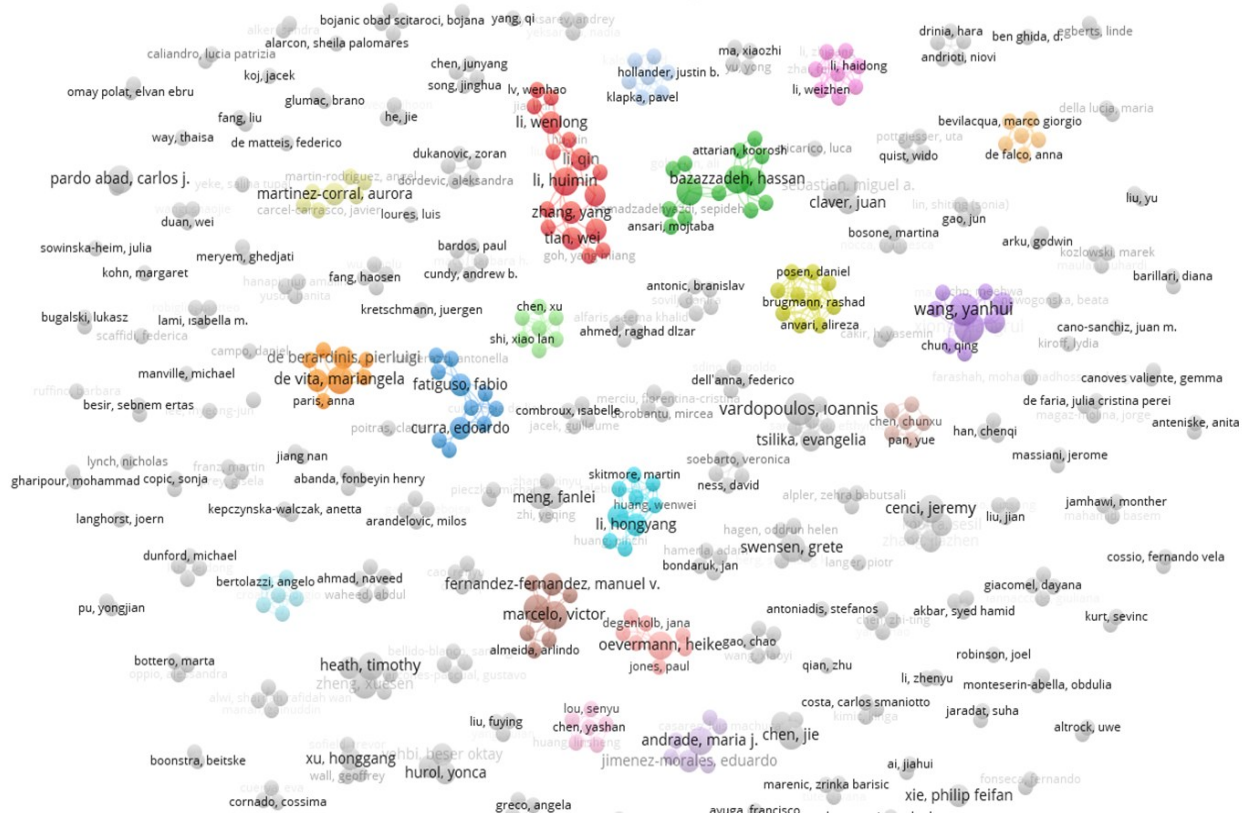


Figure 4a. Co-authorship of authors – Clusters (Developed by Authors).

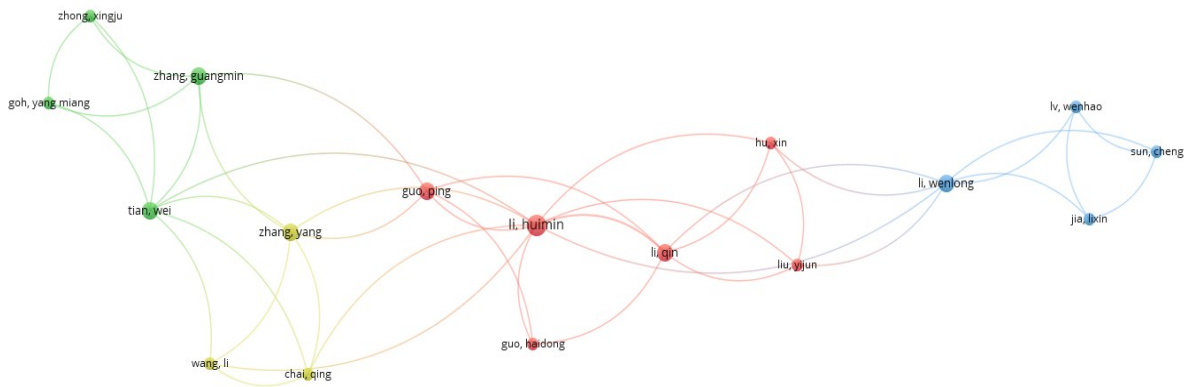


Figure 4b. Co-authorship of authors (Developed by Authors).

An author citation analysis of the selected publications was generated using VOSviewer software, as illustrated in Figure 5. The most cited authors are Vardopoulos, I. (213), Xie, P. F. (168), and Loures, L. (109). Chen, J., Liu F., Yang, Y., Zhao, Q., and Xie, P. stand out as co-cited authors in the visualization.

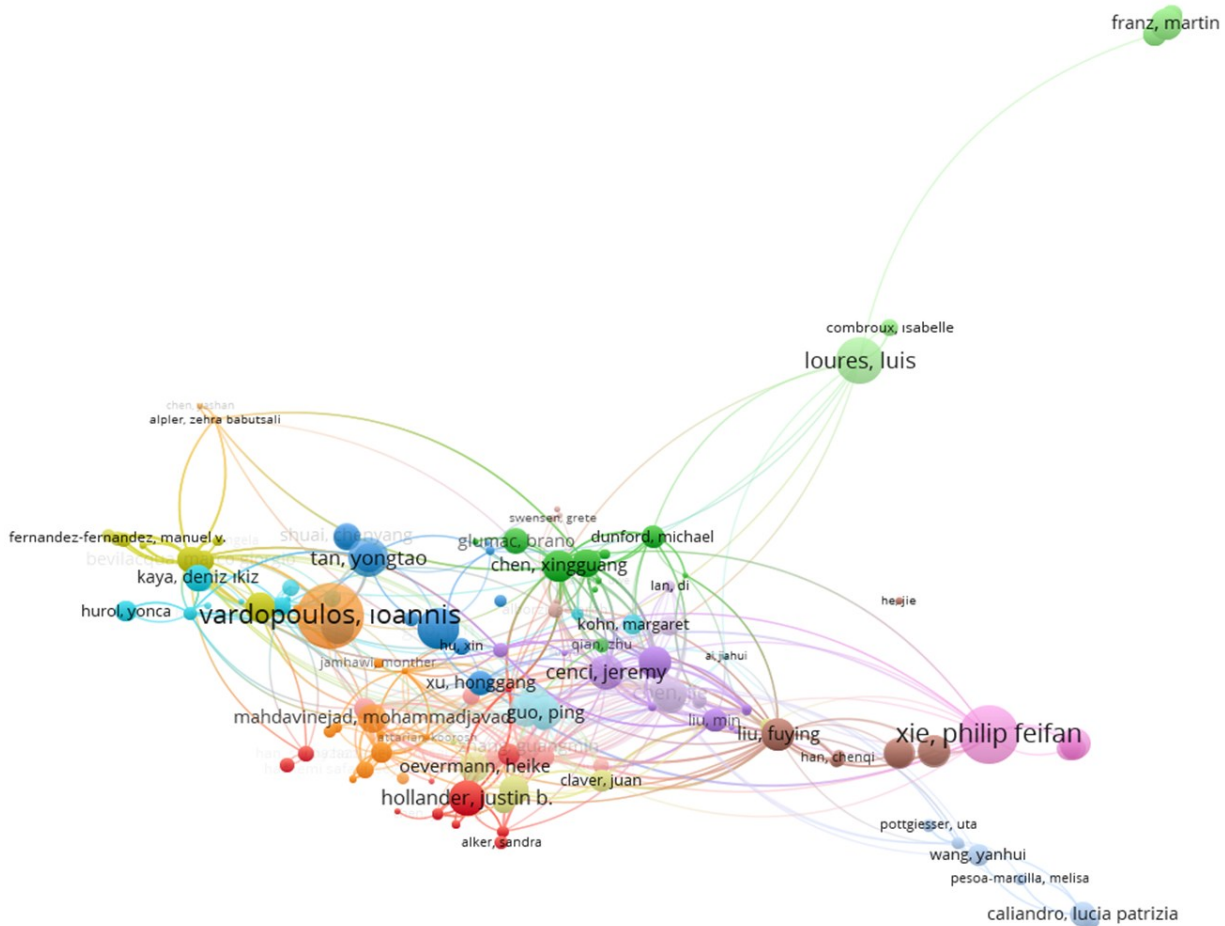


Figure 5. Citation of authors (Developed by Authors).

Table 2 presents the departmental affiliations of the selected publications. Table 2 information is derived from the WoS database as of April 2025. According to this, the highest number of publications originate predominantly from Architecture and Planning departments. Additionally, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; Environment, Geography and Applied Economics; and Tourism Management are other departments with significant publication outputs in the field.

Table 2. Affiliation with department analysis.

Affiliation with Department	Record Count	% of 224
Tongji University College Of Architecture And Urban Planning	5	2.232%
Beijing University Of Civil Engineering And Architecture School Of Architecture And Urban Planning	4	1.786%
Polytechnic Of Turin Department Of Architecture And Design	4	1.786%
Cardiff University College Of Arts Humanities And Social Sciences	3	1.339%
Cardiff University School Of Geography And Planning	3	1.339%
China University Of Mining And Technology School Of Architecture And Design	3	1.339%
Harokopio University Of Athens School Of Environment Geography And Applied Economics	3	1.339%
Polytechnic Of Milan School Of Architecture Urban Planning Construction Engineering	3	1.339%
Southeast University School Of Architecture	3	1.339%
Sun Yat Sen University School Of Tourism Management	3	1.339%

3.4. Publications Citation Analysis

As shown in the publications citation analysis, Table 3 displays the most highly cited publications in the field. The table information is derived from the WoS database as of April 2025. First and third most cited articles are on “sustainable development” with 134 and 109 citations. Subsequently second and fifth most cited publications are related to “industrial heritage tourism”. The fourth most cited paper addresses “a multi-criteria decision aid approach to heritage site conservation and reuse,” which remains a highly relevant and actively researched topic.

Table 3. Publications citation analysis.

Authors	Titles	Citations
Vardopoulos, I (2019)	Critical sustainable development factors in the adaptive reuse of urban industrial buildings. A fuzzy DEMATEL approach	134
Xie, PF (2006)	Developing industrial heritage tourism: A case study of the proposed jeep museum in Toledo, Ohio	117
Loures, L (2015)	Post-industrial landscapes as drivers for urban redevelopment: Public versus expert perspectives towards the benefits and barriers of the reuse of post-industrial sites in urban areas	109
Bottero et. al. (2019)	Ranking of Adaptive Reuse Strategies for Abandoned Industrial Heritage in Vulnerable Contexts: A Multiple Criteria Decision Aiding Approach	100
Gao et. al. (2020)	Authenticity, involvement, and nostalgia: Understanding visitor satisfaction with an adaptive reuse heritage site in urban China	81

3.5. Source Analysis

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate the source analysis of the publications. For this analysis of published journals, the minimum number of documents and citations of a source was set in VOSviewer software at 3 and 1 respectively (Figure 6). “Sustainability” is the most interconnected international journal which is followed by “Land” and “Buildings”.

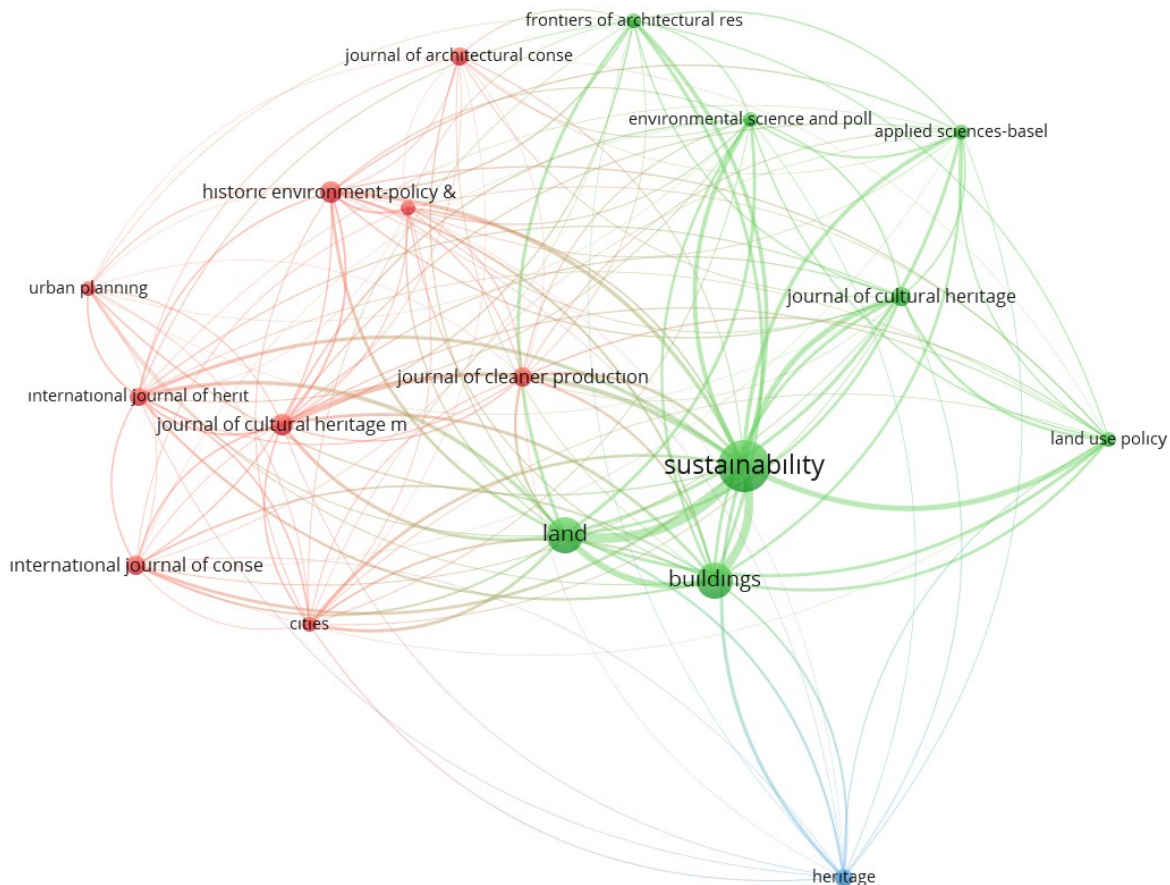


Figure 6. Source analysis (Developed by Authors).

MDPI (76) accounts for 34% of the published articles, followed by Taylor & Francis (37) with 16% and Elsevier (29) with 13%. Springer Nature (10) and Emerald Group Publishing (8) are also prominent publishers in the field.

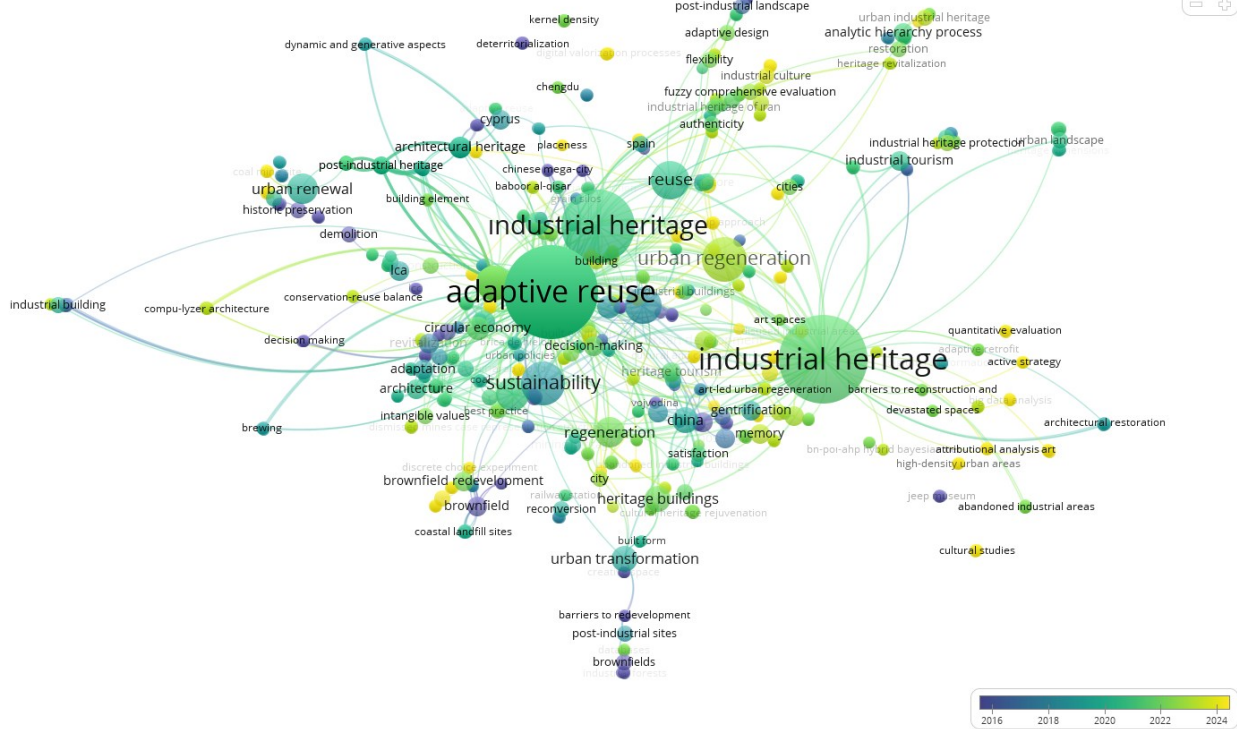


Figure 9. Co-occurrence of keywords (Developed by Authors).

3.7. Analysis of Sub-themes and Themes

VOSviewer software is a powerful tool for identifying sub-themes in research. This study used articles selected through the PRISMA Protocol as its data sources. A network map was created based on keywords that occurred at least three times (Figure 8). The clusters identified in this network map were exported to Microsoft Excel for further analysis. The authors carefully read the articles and analyzed them using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This process led to the identification and naming of sub-themes. Table 4 presents the keywords (codes) from the studies and their clustering, which represent the research sub-themes. Concepts were grouped based on keyword co-occurrence through network mapping, then organized into 13 sub-themes and analyzed.

Table 4. Keywords, Concepts and Sub-themes (Developed by Authors).

<p>Cluster 1: Heritage Tourism & Urban Identity commodification gentrification heritage buildings heritage tourism industrial heritage tourism nostalgia perceived value regeneration ruins satisfaction urban development urban heritage waterfront</p>	<p>Cluster 3: Architectural Transformation architectural heritage demolition historic preservation life cycle assesment post-industrial heritage reconstruction refurbishment shrinking cities urban renewal</p>	<p>Cluster 6: Industrial Heritage Value authenticity value assessment fuzzy comprehensive evaluation industrial culture old industrial buildings sustainability assessment analytic hierarchy process delphi method Dempster-Shafer theory</p>	<p>Cluster 9: Cultural Values cultural heritage fix brewery intangible values urban sustainability</p>
<p>Cluster 2: Sustainable Development adaptation architecture circular economy industrial buildings mining post-mining revitalization sustainable development</p>	<p>Cluster 4: Rural Industrial Landscape adaptive design flexibility grain store post-industrial landscape reuse silo storage unit wheat</p>	<p>Cluster 7: Brownfield Redevelopment brownfield redevelopment governance industrial heritage creative industries creative space place-making</p>	<p>Cluster 10: Urban Transformation brownfields city post-industrial sites urban transformation</p>
	<p>Cluster 5: Sustainable Reuse adaptive reuse building adaptation built environment decision-making heritage sustainable</p>	<p>Cluster 8: Urban Memory & Preservation cities industrial archaeology memory preservation urban regeneration</p>	<p>Cluster 11: Heritage Decision Tools analytic hierarchy process restoration urban industrial heritage</p>
			<p>Cluster 12 : Heritage Policy and Tourism industrial heritage protection industrial tourism private-public partnership</p>
			<p>Cluster 13 : Industrial Conservation conservation industrial buildings</p>

To identify the main themes within the field, a combined approach of quantitative and qualitative analysis methods was employed. At this stage, data collection was conducted using articles selected in accordance with the PRISMA Protocol.

A table was developed using Microsoft Excel to identify the methods employed and the focal points of these studies. The analysis revealed that the existing literature predominantly concentrates on four main thematic areas. The sub-themes identified through VOSviewer clustering were found to align with these four overarching themes. Notably, certain sub-themes were associated with more than one main theme, indicating thematic overlaps within the field.

Table 5. Four main themes and 13 sub-themes (Developed by Authors).

Architectural Renovation & Design	Urban Renewal & Development	Cultural Identity & Tourism	Heritage Management & Decision-Making
Reuse and architectural adaptation of industrial heritage, spatial regeneration, building adaptation, physical conservation, and reconstruction.	Urban revitalisation, regeneration processes and urban politics.	Heritage values, cultural identity and tourism	Heritage management, policy development, decision support systems.
Industrial Conservation (Cluster 13)	Sustainable Development (Cluster 2)	Heritage Tourism & Urban Identity (Cluster 1)	Heritage Decision Tools (Cluster 11)
Architectural Transformation (Cluster 3)	Urban Transformation (Cluster 10)	Heritage Policy & Tourism (Cluster 12)	Industrial Heritage Value (Cluster 6)
Rural Industrial Landscape (Cluster 4)	Sustainable Reuse (Cluster 5)	Rural Industrial Landscape (Cluster 4)	Cultural Values (Cluster 9)
Urban Transformation (Cluster 10)	Brownfield Redevelopment (Cluster 7)	Cultural Values (Cluster 9)	Heritage Policy & Tourism (Cluster 12)
	Urban Memory & Preservation (Cluster 8)		
	Rural Industrial Landscape (Cluster 4)		

The first main theme is “Architectural Renovation & Design.” Within this theme, the reuse and architectural adaptation of industrial heritage, spatial regeneration, building adaptation, physical conservation, and reconstruction have been examined. Case studies discuss the preservation and adaptive reuse of industrial heritage through spatial and architectural transformations. The second theme is “Urban Renewal & Development.” This theme focuses on urban revitalization, regeneration processes, and urban politics. Another significant theme is “Heritage Management & Decision-Making,” which encompasses discussions on heritage management, policy development, and decision support systems. The fourth theme is “Cultural Identity & Tourism,” covering heritage values, cultural identity, and tourism.

4. Discussions

The findings of this study reveal evolving thematic focuses and methodological tendencies across micro, meso, and macro scales, highlighting significant developments in the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage over the past two decades. At the micro scale, the field addresses structure, building, space, and materials; at the meso scale, the impact on neighborhoods or districts; and at the macro scale, urban and international influences. This holistic study in the field of research has revealed that studies with social and participatory content have increased. On the other hand, there has been a notable rise in studies focusing on sustainability-related topics such as circular economy, life cycle assessment (LCA), recycling & reuse of materials, and the use of building information modelling (BIM) across macro, meso, and micro scales. The quantitative nature of the datasets associated with these studies has facilitated their greater representation in the Web of Science (WoS) database, which serves as the basis for this research. Several studies have emphasized the challenges of collecting data for socially oriented research, highlighting the need for countries to develop more comprehensive datasets at the regional and neighborhood levels.

In the field of Architectural Renovation & Design, the adaptive reuse of post-industrial structures is discussed primarily at the micro and meso scales from architectural, spatial, and structural perspectives. There is ongoing research on the long-term preservation of buildings, preservation methods, and strategies for ensuring a sustainable future. (Bertolazzi, 2023; Wang et al, 2021; Babutsalı Alpler et al, 2020; Thiebat, 2016). Urban Renewal & Development is a research topic explored across all scales, though it is more frequently addressed at the meso and macro levels. Case studies have been conducted to examine the reuse of industrial heritage sites, focusing on their potential or actual environmental, social, and economic impacts (Scaffidi, 2024; Zhong et al., 2024; Sun & Chen, 2021; Loures, 2015). In addition to these, researchers are also developing models to better understand and guide adaptive reuse practices. Under the main theme of Heritage Management & Decision-Making, studies have employed mixed methods that combine qualitative and quantitative analyses to develop models related to heritage management, policy development, and decision support systems (Liu et al, 2024; Zhao et al., 2024; Vecchio & Arku, 2020; Nogués & Arroyo 2016). Cultural Identity & Tourism is one of the core themes in the field. Concepts such as heritage values, cultural identity, and tourism are explored within this thematic axis and are linked to various sub-themes at different scales. Among the most extensively studied topics within this theme are heritage tourism management, the concept of authenticity, and heritage routes (Andrade, 2024; Yeke, 2023; Della Lucia & Pashkevich, 2022; Aydeniz & Taddonio, 2016).

5. Conclusions

This study analyzed the existing literature on the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage sites, identifying relevant themes, sub-themes, general trends, current directions, and research gaps. A literature review was conducted using the Web of Science database, and 224 publications were identified based on the PRISMA protocol. A systematic review was then carried out on these selected publications. At this stage, analyses conducted using VOSviewer software and Excel provided strong support in identifying the main and sub-themes in the field, detecting prevailing trends, and uncovering topics with potential for further development.

The results reveal that, in practice, the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage sites within cities has been increasing on an international scale, and there has been a parallel rise in academic interest under various thematic headings. These heritage structures, which remain unused within urban areas, are often regarded as a driving force or key

element for sustainable development. Similarly, industrial heritage sites in rural areas are seen as significant catalysts for regional development. In the reuse of post-industrial sites, aspects such as function selection, governance models, the identification of key stakeholders, methods of adaptation, and the assessment of potential impacts have become prominent areas of qualitative and quantitative research at the micro, meso, and macro scales, particularly over the last decade. During the 2010s, topics like spatial, structural, and architectural preservation, along with the protection of heritage value, were frequently discussed. Today, adaptive reuse of industrial heritage is addressed not only in relation to heritage value but also by integrating social, economic, and environmental impact assessments. Many studies have focused on developing multi-criteria evaluation models that can assess post-conversion impacts in a holistic manner.

This study has revealed that literature on adaptive reuse in industrial heritage tends to concentrate around four main thematic axes. Sub-themes were identified through keyword (code) clustering and link analysis using VOSviewer software and Microfost Excel. The sub-themes determined through this clustering process were found to be consistent with the four overarching themes. Notably, several sub-themes were associated with more than one main theme, indicating thematic overlaps within the field. Urban regeneration, sustainability, conservation, heritage, and culture are among the most commonly encountered concepts in this area of study. Moreover, a year-by-year systematic review of the literature on reuse in industrial heritage revealed increasing research attention toward sustainability, social participation, and their interrelations with various topics. These findings underscore the need for more comprehensive and guiding studies in these domains.

The bibliometric findings of this research offer valuable insights for researchers, designers, policymakers, and practitioners regarding potential areas of study related to the adaptive reuse of post-industrial spaces. This study was based on data from the reputable Web of Science database. For future research, expanding the scope by incorporating databases such as SCOPUS—which includes a broader range of studies in the social sciences—would enrich the scale and perspective of analysis.

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Conflict of Interests

The Authors declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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