

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT GROUNDED THEORY FROM RURAL TOURISM STUDIES?

O QUE SE SABE SOBRE O USO DE GROUNDED THEORY EM ESTUDOS SOBRE TURISMO RURAL?

¿QUÉ SE SABE SOBRE EL USO DE LA TEORÍA FUNDAMENTADA EN LOS ESTUDIOS SOBRE TURISMO RURAL?

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Abstract: Grounded Theory is a qualitative research method suitable for the extraction and interpretation of organized concepts presented in the form of a formal or substantive theory. This method has been employed in several fields. Internationally, researchers in the tourism field have been using Grounded Theory in their studies. Rural tourism has been considered a relevant segment of the economy as it provides diversification of activities on rural farms, generating new sources of income. The aim of this article is to identify the use and application of the Grounded Theory method in research on rural tourism and tourist routes. To achieve this, an integrative review of the literature was conducted, considering articles from the Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct, and Scielo databases from 2017 to 2022. The results show that the majority of studies do not clearly specify the approach used, whether it's classical, Straussian, or constructivist. Regarding the method's characteristics, the studies utilize the method partially, incorporating elements such as coding, constant comparison, memos and diagrams. Discussions on rural tourism are situated within the realm of public-private partnerships, the development of tourist regions, the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a perspective on restructuring a tourist destination, and tourist behavior. This integrative review provides information and insights on the topic and offers knowledge about the application of Grounded Theory, sparking interest for other researchers to adopt this method.

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Keywords: Rural tourism; Tourist routes; Grounded Theory; Integrative review.

Resumo: A Grounded Theory é um método de pesquisa de base qualitativa apropriado para a extração e a interpretação de conceitos organizados, apresentados em forma de teoria formal ou substantiva. O método tem sido utilizado em diversas áreas e, internacionalmente, os pesquisadores da área do turismo vêm empregando a Grounded Theory em suas pesquisas. O turismo rural tem sido considerado um segmento relevante para a economia por proporcionar diversificação das atividades realizadas nas propriedades rurais, o que gera novas fontes de renda. Este artigo tem por objetivo identificar o uso e a aplicação do método Grounded Theory em pesquisas sobre turismo rural e roteiros turísticos. Para isso, foi proposta uma revisão integrativa da teoria considerando artigos das bases de dados Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct e Scielo no período de 2017 a 2022. Os resultados mostram que a maioria dos estudos não apresenta claramente a abordagem utilizada, seja ela clássica, straussiana ou construtivista. Quanto às características do método, os estudos utilizam o método parcialmente, apropriando-se apenas da codificação, da comparação constante, de memorandos e diagramas. As discussões sobre o turismo rural inserem-se no campo da parceria público-privada e estão voltadas ao desenvolvimento das regiões turísticas, ao contexto da pandemia de Covid-19, à perspectiva de reestruturação de um destino turístico e ao comportamento do turista. Esta revisão integrativa oferece informações e insights sobre o tema e fornece conhecimento sobre a aplicação da Grounded Theory, despertando interesse para que outros pesquisadores adotem o método.

Palavras-chave: Turismo rural; Rotas turísticas; Grounded Theory; Revisão integrativa.

Resumen: La teoría fundamentada es un método de investigación de base cualitativa apropiado para la extracción e interpretación de conceptos organizados, presentados en forma de teoría formal o sustantiva. El método se ha utilizado en varias áreas y, a nivel internacional, los investigadores en el campo del turismo han estado utilizando la Teoría Fundamentada en sus investigaciones. El turismo rural ha sido considerado un segmento relevante para la economía ya que proporciona diversificación de las actividades que se realizan en las zonas rurales, lo que genera nuevas fuentes de ingresos. Este artículo tiene como objetivo identificar el uso y aplicación del método de la Teoría Fundamentada en la investigación sobre turismo rural e itinerarios turísticos. Para ello, se propuso una revisión integradora de la teoría considerando artículos de las bases de datos Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct y Scielo de 2017 a 2022. Los resultados muestran que la mayoría de los estudios no presentan con claridad el enfoque utilizado, ya sea clásica, straussiana o constructivista. En cuanto a las características del método, los estudios utilizan el método parcialmente, utilizando únicamente codificación, comparación constante, memorandos y diagramas. Los debates sobre el turismo rural se inscriben en el ámbito de la colaboración público-privada y se centran en el desarrollo de las regiones turísticas, el contexto de la pandemia de Covid-19, las perspectivas de reestructuración de un destino y el comportamiento turísticos. Esta revisión integradora ofrece información y conocimientos sobre el tema y proporciona conocimientos sobre la aplicación de la Teoría Fundamentada, lo que despierta el interés de otros investigadores en adoptar el método.

Palabras clave: Turismo rural; Rutas turísticas; Teoría fundamentada; Revisión integradora.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector has been benefiting from qualitative research to gain a more profound understanding of environmental, social, and economic factors associated with the industry (Salles, 2018). Rural tourism has been acknowledged as a significant segment for economic development (Padilha *et al.*, 2022), and its promotion contributes to the diversification of activities conducted by farms. However, studies related to the tourism sector describe the need of understanding the formation process of structural, conjunctural, and psychological factors in order to promote diversified activities in rural areas (Li; Westlund & Liu, 2019).

Associating rural with tourism is not justified only by the presence of a business in the tourism sector in the rural environment, but also due to the scope of related areas of knowledge, such as economy, heritage, environment, anthropology, and social, historical and cultural diversity (Salles, 2018). Rural tourism defined as a “set of tourist activities developed in rural areas committed to agricultural production, adding value to products and services, rescuing and promoting the cultural and natural heritage of communities” (Brasil, 2020, p. 5). It is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world. In terms of performance, tourism increased its revenues at the beginning of 2019. It is the highest recorded revenue in recent years, thus promoting direct and indirect jobs. This significant participation in the economy occurs in the international and national contexts (Grigaliunaite; Pileliene & Bakanauskas, 2015; WTO, 2019).

However, this sector is undergoing changes and in this evolutionary process, rural tourism needs to be fully understood (Silva *et al.*, 2018), which represents a change in research focus and approach. The tourist activity developed with a focus on natural resources and direct contact with nature and the environment stands out as a new demand. This occurs due to the individuals’ work pace which encompasses factors such as stress, pollution, lack of time for leisure activities, exhausting routines in urban centers and the pursuit of life quality, promoting the expansion and sustenance of the rural

tourism segment (Padilha *et al.*, 2022).

This change in approach should occur based on innovation, market intelligence, cooperation between entrepreneurs, tourists and everyone involved in the process, thus forming collaborative groups and networks to develop the activity (Salles, 2018). Diversification in rural areas includes opportunities for new tourism products, as well as diverse creative and well-being experiences, and active involvement and participation in actions developed by the community and by enterprises belonging to rural tourism (Oliveira & Dinis, 2018). The creation of tourist routes in the rural tourism segment encourages all social agents involved in the territorial agglomeration: owners, producers, distributors, tourist guides, and public authorities (Baletti & Marescotti, 2021; Chagas, 2018).

One of the methods used in tourism research is the Grounded Theory, which emerged in the 1960s from the works of Glaser and Strauss. The method allows the discovery of social theories based on qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The difference of this method is that it does not appropriate a pre-existing theory, generally used in scientific research. Grounded Theory seeks to extract a theory from data. For the authors, when using the method, the researcher goes in the field with the intention of discovering conceptual categories, since the field exposure takes place without a prior survey of existing categories in the literature. The researcher's interaction with the collected material promotes the identification of concepts, which generate categories that, after integrated, constitute a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In the data collection and analysis phase, the analysis of the information found takes place simultaneously and the researcher analyses the data by comparison until reaching a theoretical saturation. There are three main approaches to Grounded Theory. The first one is from Glaser and Strauss (1967), which marks the emergence of the method and tasks the form of a more objectivist (classical) approach. The second one (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) is known as Straussian. The third approach is from Charmaz (2009) and is characterized as constructivist.

Given these arguments and seeking to analyze published studies that relate the method to the chosen topic, the following research question arises: How has the Grounded Theory method been applied in research on rural tourism and tourist routes, and what approach is utilized in this context??

This work is a bibliographical study structured by an integrative review, aiming to demonstrate the conceptual approaches of Grounded Theory and the methodologies employed in researches on rural tourism and tourist routes. For this purpose, we carried out searches in the Web of Science, Scopus, Scielo and Science Direct databases. After the searches, we applied some inclusion and exclusion criteria to choose the works. The integrative review provides knowledge about the existing scientific production and identifies possible research opportunities, which in this study refer to and involve rural tourism and Grounded Theory.

This study contributes with information and insights on the topic, describing the procedures employed in using Grounded Theory and the three main approaches of the method. Additionally, it provides an overview of tourism research utilizing the method, outlining variations in data collection and analysis compared to more common techniques in Grounded Theory application. The integrative review aids in identifying gaps and essential requirements for method application, contributing to the dissemination of its employing. Rural tourism encompasses non-agricultural activities in rural areas, and research utilizing the method contributes to the interpretation of facts and the reality experienced by those involved. Furthermore, the research provides essential elements for contemplating alternatives and actions for small, medium, and large rural businesses engaged in or intending to engage in various tourism activities. This facilitates income diversification and also contributes to the retention of young individuals and women in rural areas. Therefore, this study is justified by presenting the application of the method in researches on rural tourism, not only establishing the approach used by the authors and differentiating them, but by presenting how the rural tourism theme has been studied. This article will present, at first, some concepts on the subject and its relevance followed by the steps for the studies selection. Next, we presented an overview of the publications and, finally, the considerations of the study with discussions on the analysis of the scientific production that serves as a foundation for future studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is a general method of comparative analysis originally developed by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, in the 1960s. In 1967, the book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research* was published, the first work that discusses the method. In this work, the authors explain how to implement the Grounded Theory and the methodological processes for this (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). The authors

conceptualize it as a method used for the development of a theory based on data. They are systematically collected and analyzed continuously with the purpose of constructing a theory.

There are three main approaches to Grounded Theory. The first one is by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which marks the origin of the method and stipulates that the researcher should not appropriate pre-existing theoretical concepts in constructing their grounded theory. Instead, they should maintain objectivity and avoid being influenced by the existing literature.

The second approach, proposed by Strauss and Corbin (2008), asserts that the researcher does not engage in grounded theorizing without drawing from their professional and academic literature. In other words, literature searches serve as a basis to enhance theory development rather than restricting it. The third and final approach, introduced by Charmaz (2009), offers a reflection on the role of theoretical grounding in the researcher’s formation and presents a constructivist philosophical foundation through which the use of literature should occur at all stages of research to construct theory, as data and theory are inseparable and not discovered in isolation.

The primary distinction among these approaches lies in the researcher’s relationship with their theoretical framework during the theorization process (Correa & Gosling, 2020). Therefore, the approach chosen by a researcher is related to the type of proposed research, which can be more rigid or more open (TAROZZI, 2011). Table 1 outlines the characteristics of the main approaches of the method.

Table 1 – Characteristics of Grounded Theory approaches.

	Classic or Glaserian	Straussian	Constructivist
Research Question	It is not a statement that identifies the problem to be studied. It is impossible to define it before going into the field (it starts in an open manner from a research area).	It is a statement that clearly identifies the problem to be studied. It allows for narrowing down and managing the research area.	It does not exist. Sensitizing concepts (Blumer), personal interests, and disciplinary concerns initiate the research.
Data types	Everything is data	Indifferent about all observations.	Semi-structured interviews and textual analysis. Joint construction of data.
Categories	They emerge almost magically and are intuitively improvised at the beginning or end of a research endeavor.	Making them emerge requires substantial data manipulations. There is no single main category.	There is a prevailing main category.
Encoding Types	Theoretical substantive.	Open, axial and selective.	Initial, focused, axial and theoretical.

Source: Tarozzi, 2011, p. 56.

It is noteworthy that Grounded Theory is an increasingly used research method, as the idea of generating and constructing, a new theory from data has become popular among social scientists (Birks & Mills, 2015). To construct theories, it is important to pay attention to two main aspects: constant comparison and theoretical sampling. Comparison goes through foundations, data collection and analysis to construct a theory; sampling allows data collection, coding, and analysis to understand the phenomenon (Pinto & Santos, 2012).

In the data collection and analysis phase, the identified information is analyzed simultaneously, and the data are compared until theoretical saturation is achieved. Comparison of data results in codes and categories. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the essential elements of the theory are conceptual categories; Corbin and Strauss (2015) suggest some steps for the coding process: Open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). For the authors, open coding occurs with the identification of concepts. This analytical process enables the identification of properties and dimensions in the collected data. In axial coding, the creation of categories and subcategories occurs. At this stage, questions about the phenomenon are addressed, such as when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences, thereby providing greater explanatory power to the concept (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This process explains the phenomenon and identifies

actions and interactions related to the phenomenon. Following this construction, integrative coding links the categories and refines the theory, forming a larger theoretical framework.

Rural Tourism

Rural tourism is an activity that contributes positively to rural resources, promotion of income, and solutions to existing problems in rural areas, thus protecting the environment through sustainable practices and fighting rural exodus (Ohe & Kurihara, 2013). The concept of rural tourism is still under construction. The definition of the term follows two trends, one based on supply elements and the other based on the distribution of income generated by the activity in rural communities (Silva *et al.*, 2018).

Rural tourism is inserted in the context of globalization due to product commercialization, use of technologies, appropriation of marketing techniques and other tools to attract tourists and make the activity more attractive (Silva *et al.*, 2018). One of the actions taken to keep this attraction is the formation of collaboration networks and tourist routes, which provide the incorporation of a cultural system, values, and symbols represented by a place or region (Xavier *et al.*, 2012). The structure of networks and the creation of tourist routes promote economic development by reducing losses through a sustainable use of natural and local resources, adding value to products, attracting external resources (such as technological or financial ones), and disseminating them to interested parties (Silva *et al.*, 2018).

A relevant factor for the development of regions and communities belonging to rural tourism is the structuring of collaboration networks that compound tourist routes. The conceptualization of route is an itinerary defined by the departure and arrival points. In this study, an itinerary is a certain route with a visitation interest (Grigaliunaite; Pileliene & Bakanauskas, 2015).

In rural tourism, tourist routes “represent a specific and institutionalized network aiming to sustain the development of rural tourism closely linked to the improvement of production” (Beletti & Marescotti, 2021, p. 12). They offer access to various local attractions considered a “description of a route (...), specifying places (...) and proposing a series of activities and services” (Correia, 2005, p. 58). They contribute to resource management to optimize the length of stay of visitors and provide access to places and leisure times (Beletti & Marescotti, 2021).

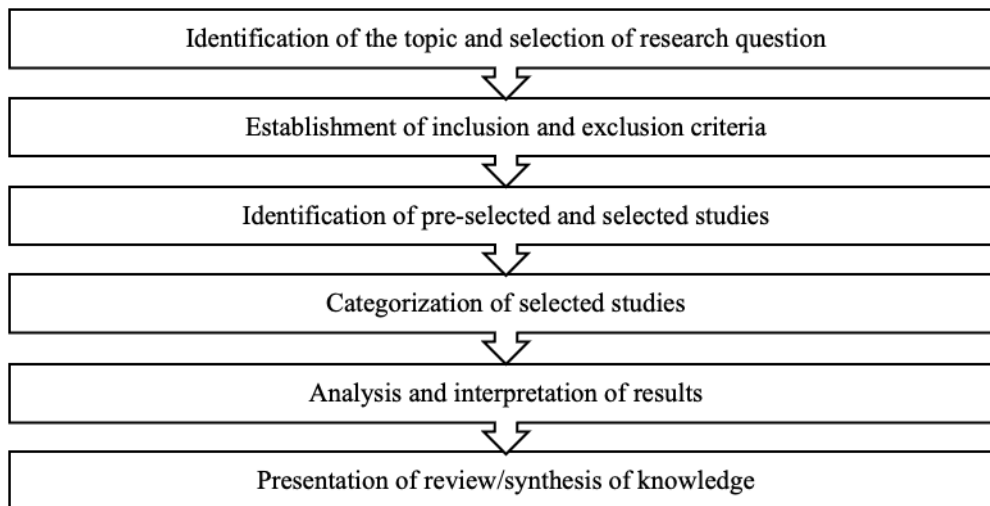
The factors identified in the literature as relevant for the formation of collaboration networks are interaction, confidence, planning, and sharing of information and resources. Those involved have their actions aligned in order to develop a product, a service or an experience. Sharing information, trust, innovation, geographic space, and the statute of those involved are the bases of tourism routes (Meyer, 2004; Icomos, 2008; Figueira, 2013).

METHOD

Integrative review is a methodological approach that seeks to understand a given phenomenon and determines the current and more comprehensive knowledge on a specific topic (Botelho; Cunha & Macedo, 2011), identifying, analyzing, and synthesizing the results found in the literature. It characterizes as qualitative research, serving as a review of concepts, evidence, theories, and ideas that allow inferences in relation to studies carried out on the subject (Doolen, 2017).

To carry out an integrative review, it is necessary to follow some steps presenting details so that other researchers can replicate the review (Torraco, 2016). This type of review enables an understanding of the existing landscape in a specific context or theme and contributes to explaining consistent and highly complex issues (Doolen, 2017). Botelho, Cunha and Macedo (2011) present the necessary steps to carry out a review.

Figure 1 - Steps for carrying out an integrative review.



Source: Adapted by the authors from Botelho, Cunha and Macedo (2011).

To conduct the research following the sequence illustrated in Figure 1, the first step involved identifying the theme, keywords, and research question. The theme of rural tourism was defined with a focus on studies that utilized the Grounded Theory method. The keywords used in the searches were “rural tourism,” “route,” “tourist route,” and “grounded theory.” Table 2 illustrates how the keywords were entered into the databases, highlighting the detailed use of Boolean operators.

Table 2 – Search strategy for the review.

Database	Search strategy
Scopus Web of Science Science Direct Scielo	(TITLE-ABSTRACT-KEYWORDS (“rural tourism”) OR TITLE-ABSTRACT-KEYWORDS (route) OR TITLE-ABSTRACT-KEYWORDS (“tourist route”) OR TITLE-ABSTRACT-KEYWORDS (tour*) AND TITLE-ABSTRACT-KEYWORDS (“grounded theory”)) (TITLE (“tourist route”) OR TITLE (“rural tourism”) AND TITLE (“grounded theory”)) (KEYWORDS (“rural tourism”) OR KEYWORDS (“tourist route”) OR KEYWORDS (route) AND KEYWORDS (“grounded theory”))

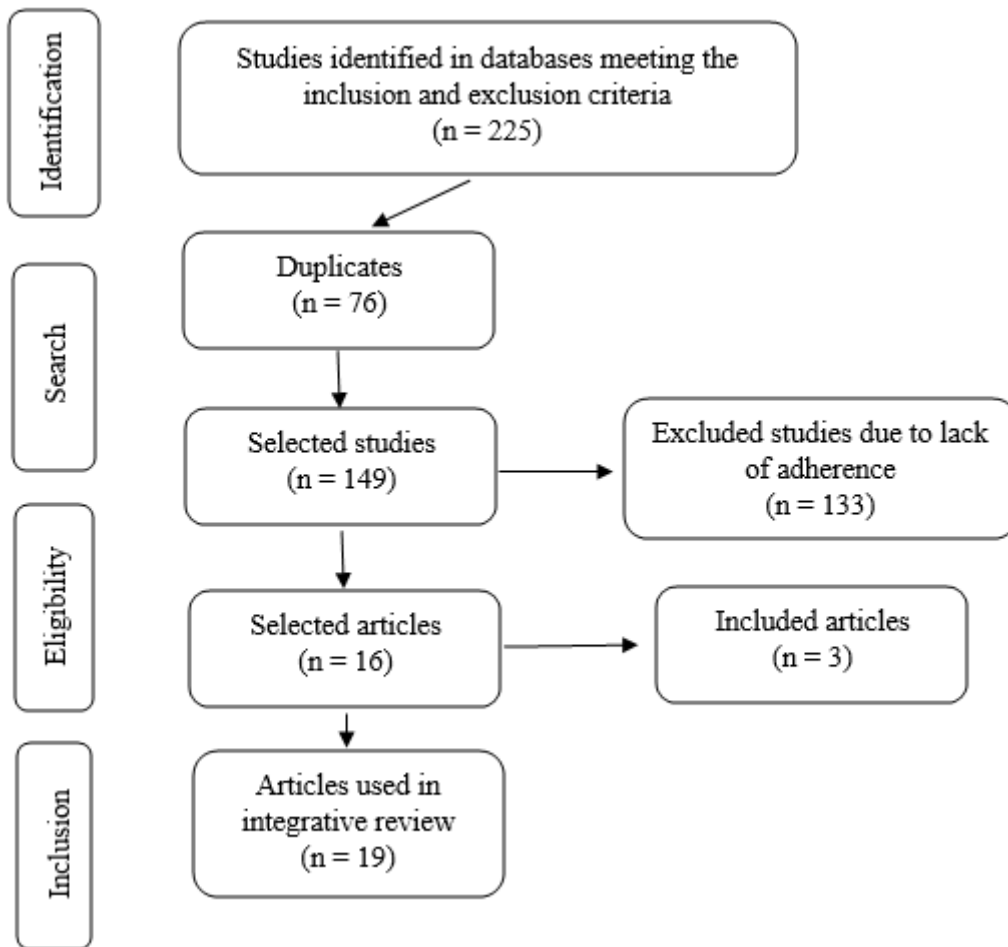
Source: Created by the authors.

The second stage of the research included the establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria. In this way, the search strategy was the databases Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct, and Scielo. The choice of databases is justified by the range of published and available studies, allowing finding a significant number of scientific works related to the proposed topic. In order to obtain ample material for the integrative review, we correlated the following terms: in the word tourism, the radical tour* to involve other relationships and find studies that contain words such as tourism, tourist, touristic.

The search took place between May 9 and 11, 2022. Initially, we selected titles, abstracts, and keywords; then, given the significant number of articles found, we carried out the search considering only titles. Then, the search involved only keywords.

We used filters in the search, providing a greater alignment of articles with the proposed topic. The inclusion criteria were as follows: English and Portuguese, period from 2017 to 2022, peer-reviewed papers and studies related to management and accounting, social sciences and multidisciplinary sciences. Exclusion criteria were duplicate studies, lack of approach to rural tourism and articles not available for download. We opted for published articles and/or review articles. The chosen period refers to the last five years of publications, seeking to understand the discussion on the topic and the application of the method in a more recent period. Figure 2 shows the article selection process.

Figure 2 - Selection criteria stage.



Source: Created by the authors (2022)

The third stage of the research corresponded to the identification of pre-selected and selected studies. The search returned 225 studies and 76 papers were identified as duplicates in the databases, remaining 149 works in the sample. In the next step, we used the software Start to classify the studies by degree of relevance and select articles that met the purpose of this research.

In the stage of categorizing the selected studies (step 4), we read the abstracts of articles and excluded duplicates and studies that did not use Grounded Theory or those that did not discuss the definitions of rural tourism, resulting in 16 selected articles. At the stage of article reading, we recorded the approach, the application of the method, and the topics discussed in the literature on rural tourism and tourist routes, as well as the construction of a theory. We carried out a search in the bibliographic references of the articles with the objective of finding articles related to the topic that the initial search stage did not return. We selected three more articles for analysis summarizing 19 papers for the integrative review.

Stages five and six consisted, respectively, of the analysis and interpretation of the results and the presentation of the integrative review. For stage five, a comprehensive reading of the selected articles was conducted, analyzing the application of the method and the results reported by the authors. The results of stage six encompass the number of publications per year, the themes addressed in rural tourism, the methodological approach used in the articles, and the most cited Grounded Theory authors. The execution of the method was also analyzed, whether it was applied in its entirety or partially. The literature explores the themes, keywords used, journals in which the publications were made, a synthesis of each study with information on the sector, as well as limitations in the use of the method and suggestions for future research are presented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis showed that the year with the highest number of publications was 2022 with five works considering publications until May of that year. The period between 2021 and 2017 had four publications, and 2018, 2019 and 2020 had two publications each.

The temporal evolution of publications shows the topics discussed in each period. In 2017, the articles focused on investment in the tourism sector and the partnership between public and private sectors; in 2018, experiences, engagement and innovation were the focus of the researches; in 2019, collaboration; and in 2020, the approach on tourist regions stands out. In the period 2021 and 2022, research on ecotourism, agrotourism, tourism, and entrepreneurship and issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic stands out. The more recent the articles, the more is discussed the act of creating businesses in the sector.

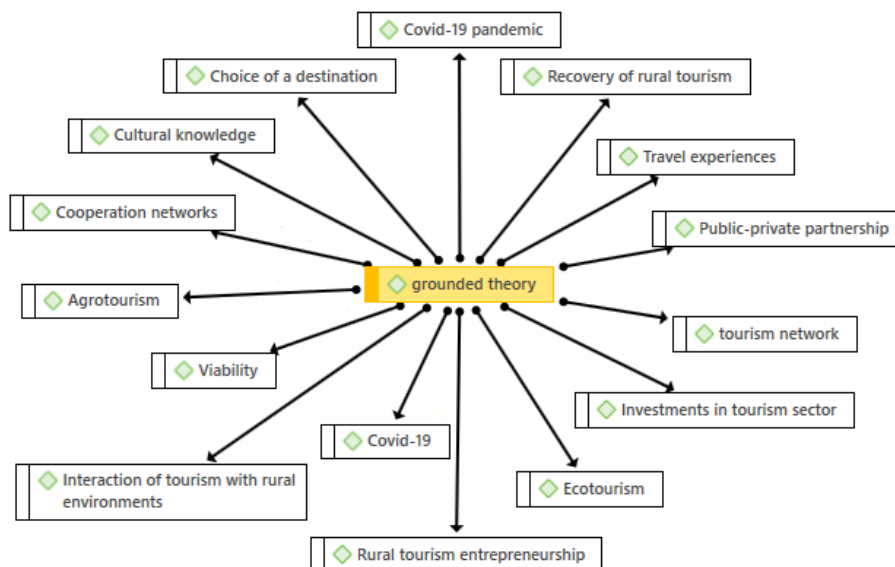
With regard to the design of studies in relation to the three main approaches of the method and their respective authors, most studies did not clearly present the approach used, whether classic, Straussian, or constructivist. The method is mentioned in the studies without detailing the adopted procedures. The rigor of the method lies in the specificity, clarity, stages, and transparency of actions and decisions throughout the research process, thereby enhancing and validating the steps proposed by the authors. However, the most cited authors to reference the method were Glaser (six articles), Strauss and Corbin (five studies), and Charmaz (two articles). It is noteworthy that these citations only indicated characteristics of the method and the process of conducting the studies, providing an overview of one or a few stages of the method. The works by Metteucci and Gnoth (2017), and Petrick and Marada (2022) cited more than one author in their research to explain Grounded Theory. It is noteworthy that in some studies, the authors did not present the methodological processes or cite the authors; there was only mention of the method using a coding process.

In order to conduct research using Grounded Theory, it is necessary to meet some characteristics, such as the exploration of a process (of phenomena), theoretical sampling, simultaneous data collection and analysis, constant comparison, coding, concept elaboration, and memos and diagrams. In this way, the analysis of the studies considered whether the developing of the method was total or partial, that is, if they followed all the proposed steps or used only some of them.

No article fully presented the application of the method. The characteristics that represent a partial use of Grounded Theory were codification, constant comparison, and memos and diagrams. The studies did not cited or discussed other steps of the method. The application of coding or coding steps shows and justifies the use of Grounded Theory in most studies.

Regarding the topics explored in the literature that used the method, the studies show the identified problems and possible solutions. It is important to know the proposed areas and discussions in order to identify research gaps and promote the evolution of the topic with new discussions. Figure 3 summarizes the topics discussed in the studies that contemplated

Figure 3 - Tourism themes explored using Grounded Theory



Source: Created by the authors (2022)

Another analysis carried out of the articles aimed to find out how the literature defines the topic and, for that, we identified the keywords used. We present the result of the analysis as a word cloud to demonstrate the degree of repetition. It is important to note that the search carried out in the databases concentrated mainly on the information highlighted in the keywords; thus, it becomes relevant to present how we identified the articles and how the literature presents them.

Figure 4 - Keywords used in the articles.



Source: Created by the authors (2022)

With regard to the journals that published the studies, these are concentrated in 15 journals:

Table 3 – Journal and number of papers

Journal	Total
Tourism Management	3
Sustainability	2
Environment Development and Sustainability	2
Tourism Management Studies	1
Tourism Management Perspectives	1
Land Use Policy	1
Annals of Tourism Research	1
Brazilian Journal of Tourism Research	1
Turismo: estudos e práticas	1
Journal of Environment Management and Tourism	1
Moravian Geographical Reports	1
Maritime Business Review	1
International Journal of Entrepreneurship	1
International Journal of Management Projects in Business	1
Journal of Destination Marketing & Management	1

Source: Created by the authors (2022)

The most common journals are Tourism Management, Sustainability, and Environment Development and Sustainability. It is important to notice that the journal Tourism Management is a reference for the sector, being one of the most significant journals in the area. Studies on the tourism sector have addressed the Grounded Theory in different ways aiming to identify the factors that affect the development of rural tourism and the government's participation in the development of this segment (Wang *et al.*, 2022).

In addition to the factors necessary for the development of the segment, Grounded Theory has been used to investigate

the role of agrotourism in rural areas. The findings show that the promotion of agrotourism contributes to both local and regional economic development and promotes environmental and agricultural practices. However, the segment needs a physical, well-organized, and planned structure (Abadi & Khakzand, 2022). The authors relate agrotourism to sociocultural, economic, agricultural, and environmental aspects from an entrepreneurship perspective. It is noteworthy that agrotourism is a strategy for the development of rural tourism, collaborating with environmental preservation.

Ghorbani *et al.* (2021) explored ecotourism aiming to understand questions about environmental, sociocultural, and economic impacts of ecotourism in Nehbandan County, Iran. The results highlight that ecotourism is well planned and organized by rural enterprises and that its practice is associated with environmental conservation, security, subsistence, and job creation.

Devadas and Jayasooriya (2021) specifically reported on the rural tourism segment regarding the success factors and challenges faced by entrepreneurs working in the tourism sector, especially in the accommodation sector. The authors align success factors with the government's involvement with the local promotion of tourist attractions, as well as the importance given to training human resources. For the authors, people create a tourist destination and it becomes relevant to achieve success, improve the attractions and services offered, and maintain competition. The listed challenges are mainly finding financial resources.

About the factors that promote rural tourism, the discussions emphasize the power of governance and collaboration networks (Want *et al.*, 2022). The authors addressed the recovery process of rural tourism after the critical period of the Covid-19 pandemic. They conducted a study in a province of Hunan, China. The choice of this place was because it is officially considered one of the main national villages that contributes to the development of rural tourism. The results indicate that the recovery of the segment happens when there is governance by the local government, collaboration networks and innovation of mechanisms for the sector's development, persistence, and resilience.

Regarding collaboration networks, Coria, Castro and Juarez (2021) explored the advantages of tourist developments to integrate local cooperation networks. The authors carried out a literature review on 92 articles from international journals and using the Grounded Theory and identified that the benefits of cooperation networks are access to resources, reduction of transaction costs, and conception of local culture. The results directly relate Cooperation to people involved in the sector, whether public or private.

Agarchand and Laishram (2017) and Pilving *et al.* (2019) addressed discussions on partnerships. The partnerships between public and private sectors are essential factors for the development of rural tourism and consequently promote local and regional development. To establish a partnership, the participation of those involved, the transparency of acts performed and the decisions taken are necessary (Agarchand & Laishram, 2017).

For Pilving *et al.* (2019), partnership in rural tourism requires leadership and institutional changes that meet collective interests. The authors carried out research in Estonia to understand the impediments to establishing partnerships in rural areas. The results indicate that lack of leadership, confused objectives, poor communication, timing, uncertain funding, and lack of collaboration with the urban environment are considered harmful to promote rural tourism.

Another important aspect identified in the studies was the search to understand the interests in tourist destinations and the interactions generated between tourists and rural enterprises. Lin *et al.* (2021) explored the concept of cultural tourism and proposed a framework to understand the interaction mechanism of tourists with the environment regarding cultural experiences. They conducted 33 interviews, and the results showed that there is a need to explore the local culture to generate a better service to tourists.

Olson and Reddy-Best (2019) also focused on knowing the interaction between tourists and rural enterprises. However, the aim of the study was to identify the travel experiences of transgender and gender-unconfirmed tourists. They carried out fifteen interviews and found that there is embarrassment related to identification documents and on-site installation procedures. The results show anxiety on the part of the group of tourists explored in the study and suggest behavioral changes as improvement actions.

Regarding the knowledge promoted by rural tourism, Garrod and Nicholls (2022) sought to understand how tourists interact and acquire cultural knowledge of a tourist destination. The authors interviewed twenty informants using only British travelers who visited a Muslim territory as a criterion in order to elaborate a conceptual model, thus better understanding the cultural adaptation on the part of tourists. The result of the study consists of a theory based on acculturation and host culture.

Petrick and Marada (2022) sought to understand the factors that affect behavior when choosing a destination and

identified safety as the main factor. The authors also addressed the choice of the most used means of transport on the Prague-Munich Route. The results showed that time is a very important factor when choosing the means of transport and that railroads are the most used means of transportation. They conducted interviews with 30 informants and considered time and security important factors for the construction of the theory.

Zou and Yu (2022) addressed safety. They explored the sense of safety of the tourists' destination from a socio-constructivist perspective, so that safety needs to exist before, during, and after the trip. The authors considered safety as a relevant aspect when choosing a destination, one that may promote the place or region. The results indicate that human factors, infrastructure and marketing of the place or attraction drive the development and expansion of rural tourism. Another factor corresponds to the government's participation in offering basic conditions such as public lighting and public heritage agents to support tourist activity.

In a more integrated way, Tsend and Pilcher (2017) carried out a survey to learn about the feasibility of the Northern Sea Route in Shanghai and Taiwan. They conducted nine interviews with government officials and identified that the Route provided benefits such as practicality, cost reduction, and information and contributed to the natural resources of the region.

In constructing a theoretical model to evaluate tourist regions in the city of Hamedan, Khairabadi *et al.*, (2020) showed that the tourist region provided economic benefits, development of infrastructure and services on site, increased the ability to attract tourists and strengthened the brand or tourist destination.

In this scenario, the research by Hesan, Kezemi and Rezazadeh (2017) sought to understand the elements that attract national investors to the tourism sector in order to contribute to the evolution and improvement of tourist destinations. They identified that structure, well-formalized regulations, capital, and economic, social and political issues are relevant factors to promote enterprises and tourist attractions.

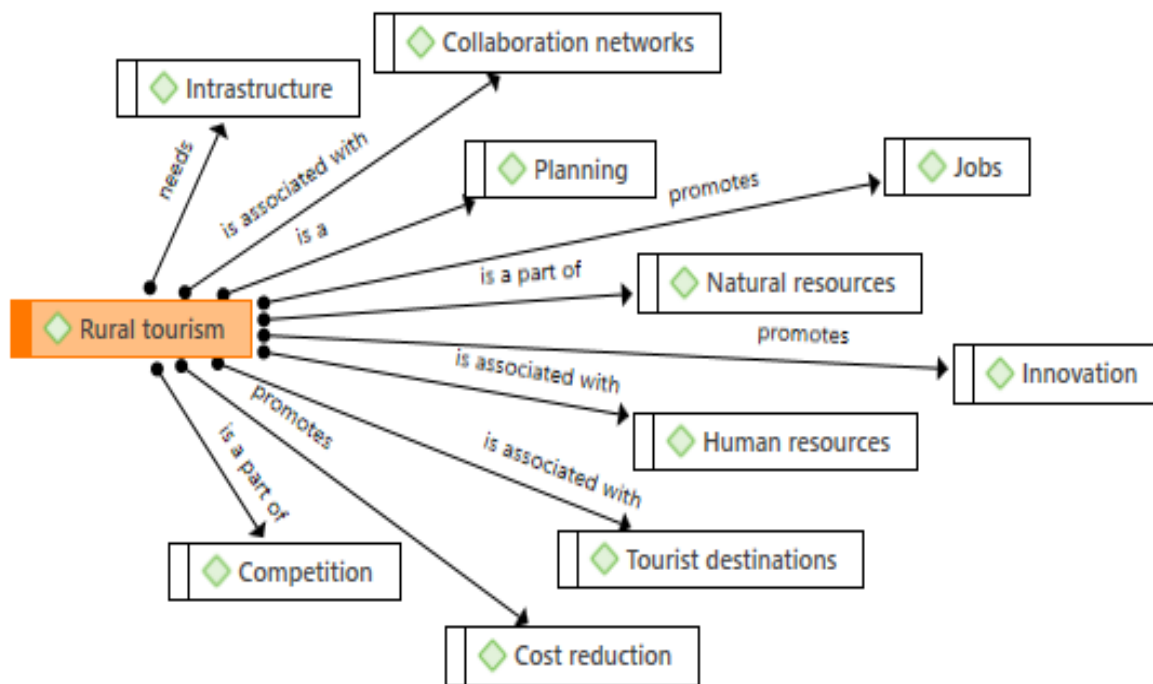
Metteucci and Gnoth (2017) presented an overview of studies that appropriated Grounded Theory in tourism research. The authors carried out a literature review in the main journals on tourism, including *Annals of Tourism Research*; *Tourism Management*; and *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*. They identified that many studies adopt a more positivist and post-positivist approach based on Glaser Stauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998).

By analyzing approximately 40 published articles, the authors could understand that studies tend to develop a substantive theory related to a specific area, and that in some cases the substantive theory promotes a formal theory in which the scope is broader and can be applied to different contexts. It is worth nothing that there was no limitation to the period of queries. The authors concluded that Grounded Theory method is used by researchers in the field of tourism because it offers a new level of understanding of interactions with the touristic system and that the method generates explanations for events, experiences lived individually or in groups, thus reflecting on processes and decisions.

Tapia (2018) analyzed experiences of young people in popular neighborhoods of Buenos Aires. In his research, the author considered only low-income young people to know the habits and opportunities offered or available to this public. After some interviews, Tapia identified the need to promote young, accessible tourism, with attractions aimed at the age group classified as adventure tourism, or any other type of attraction with a low cost. As a result, the motivation of travels made by young participants of the study are family ties, religious groups or planning. The authors highlighted social inequality and encouraged the development of local rural tourism.

The promotion of tourism raised the discussion of other factors. Pozo and Tachizawa (2018) developed a management model for tourism business organizations in the city of Três Corações, Brazil. They structured the model around essential beliefs and values to induce greater engagement and promote tourism in the region. The authors showed a management model based on marketing strategies and social responsibility. The results reinforce the need for cooperation networks, sharing of information and resources, and the existence of public-private partnerships.

Figure 5 - Summary of results.



Source: Created by the authors (2022)

Considering the results, the key point of the research is that Grounded Theory allows a more detailed and observable evaluation of the phenomenon. The approaches used by the authors and the different exploration areas belonging to the tourism sector contribute to the evolution of the theme and identify existing gaps for future research.

It is worth highlighting some limitations in the studies related to the method, such as the exclusive use of Grounded Theory is a research limitation (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). The authors state that the method of Grounded Theory contemplates, through a substantive theory, a specific context, making generalizing inappropriate. They suggest that future research apply the method in line with other ontological and epistemological structures, such as ethnography, to better approach and explain an individual, a group, or a context.

Wang *et al.* (2022) presented a qualitative approach based on interviews with a subjective character as a limitation, as evidenced in the use of the method. The use of Grounded Theory did not allow measuring the factors that explain the recovery of rural tourism after the pandemic period through a quantitative analysis. As a suggestion, they point out the use of mixed methods, allowing generalization of results.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to carry out an integrative review of works that applied Grounded Theory in research on rural tourism and on tourist routes. The number of studies that have employed the Grounded Theory method in the tourism sector provides an understanding of how the sector has been explored in the literature and what results have been identified.

The analysis allows understanding that the studies that address the method are few and that the application of the method is partial, not clearly presenting the approach used. The partial use of the method in the studies involves coding, constant comparison, memoing, and diagrams. It is observed that the application of coding, or coding stages, demonstrates and justifies the use of the Grounded Theory method in a significant portion of the studies.

Among the studies that highlighted the approach or mentioned the authors, there is a prevalence in the use of the classic and Straussian approaches. It is noteworthy that the studies did not develop theories, whether formal or substantive. This evidenced gap means research opportunities and shows that great advances are yet to come. There is a need to emphasize it to comprehend one of the sectors that directly contributes to the GDP of countries.

Another aspect perceived in this study is the format of the theories produced: most are substantive theories, which deal with a specific context, without generalization. The surveys analyzed do not specifically deal with tourist routes. In view of the topics presented and explored in the research, there is no evidence of works that used Grounded Theory in the context

of tourist routes, reinforcing the opportunity for research in this area.

The literature does not explore studies that present the trajectory of a tourist attraction or a tourist route. This result identifies that it is possible to explore rural tourism in other areas, since the physical and managerial structure of the sector and the segment treated here, rural tourism, contributes to the development of a region and adopts several factors to offer a service of quality, with confidence and safety.

The integrative review showed that Grounded Theory is appropriate for researches that contemplate rural tourism. However, its application needs to meet the characteristics required by the authors, such as the exploration of a process, theoretical sampling, simultaneity between collecting and analyzing collected data, constant comparison, codification, elaboration of concepts and the production of memos and diagrams, according to the method approaches, such as the classical, the Straussian, and the constructivist.

This article met the proposed objective and answered the research question, converging to a greater understanding in the tourism sector. The importance of studies employing Grounded Theory to comprehend phenomena and interpret the lived reality of diverse individuals in various contexts is evident. Furthermore, the results represent a significant advancement in the field, as the need for intervention or refinement and a deeper understanding of the method's development in the tourism sector were identified. This is particularly noteworthy since the method was often utilized partially, lacking essential elements for its application.

As a contribution, this study provides knowledge about the application of Grounded Theory, disseminating interest for new researchers to adopt the referred method and offering information and insights on the subject. A limitation of this study are the databases used; future studies may use other databases, offering greater breadth. Another limitation was the publication period restricted to five years.

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