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HYDROGEOLOGY

Unveiling the Nexus of Scientific Production, Water Resource Management, and Global Water Challenges

Natalia Carrillo-Acosta*[1], Ana C. Santos-Rocha[2], Maria Cristina Arenas Bautista[1], Martin Otalora Low[1].
1. Facultad de estudios ambientales y rurales, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá Colombia.
natalia-carrillo@javeriana.edu.co; maria.arenasb@javeriana.edu.co; m_otalora@livejaverianaedu.onmicrosoft.com
2. Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt. asantos@humboldt.org.co
* Corresponding author: natalia-carrillo@javeriana.edu.co

ABSTRACT

This study offers a comprehensive scientometric analysis of global developments in water management, with a particular emphasis on Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) regions, which collectively possess approximately one-third of the world's water resources. However, these regions are confronted with significant challenges, including scarcity, pollution, and inequitable distribution. The specific case of LAC is examined in order to explore these dynamics in greater depth. Notwithstanding the region's high per capita water availability, LAC continues to grapple with persistent challenges in water management and distribution, particularly in the context of agriculture and its associated vulnerable populations. The analysis demonstrates the impact of these challenges on agriculture and the livelihoods of vulnerable populations, underscoring the necessity for enhanced integrated water resource management (IWRM) practices to address pivotal sustainable development goals (SDGs), including access to clean water, agricultural sustainability, and climate action. The study employs scientometric analysis and the Tree of Science tool, supported by R-based analytics, to draw on data from Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). This approach offers a nuanced view of the field's evolution and identifies influential publications and collaborations. Furthermore, the study underscores the potential shortcomings of relying on selective databases, which could influence the depth of the findings. The graphical analyses provide insights into sustainable practices and policy frameworks and culminate in actionable recommendations aimed at improving water governance. By presenting specific insights pertinent to LAC, this research contributes to the advancement of integrated water resource management (IWRM) practices aligned with sustainable development goals (SDGs), including clean water access, agricultural sustainability, and climate resilience.

Keywords: Integrated Water Resource Management, Scientometric Analysis, Tree of Science Tool, Agricultural Sustainability.

Revelando el nexo entre la producción científica, la gestión de recursos hídricos y los desafíos globales del agua

RESUMEN

Este estudio ofrece un análisis cienciométrico integral sobre los avances globales en la gestión del agua, con un énfasis particular en las regiones de América Latina y el Caribe (ALC), que en conjunto poseen aproximadamente un tercio de los recursos hídricos del mundo. Sin embargo, estas regiones enfrentan desafíos significativos, como la escasez, la contaminación y la distribución desigual. El caso específico de ALC se examina para explorar estas dinámicas en mayor profundidad. A pesar de la alta disponibilidad de agua per cápita en la región, ALC sigue lidiando con desafíos persistentes en la gestión y distribución del agua, particularmente en el contexto de la agricultura y las poblaciones vulnerables asociadas. El análisis demuestra el impacto de estos desafíos en la agricultura y los medios de vida de las poblaciones vulnerables, subrayando la necesidad de mejorar las prácticas de gestión integrada de recursos hídricos (GIRH) para abordar objetivos clave de desarrollo sostenible (ODS), incluyendo el acceso al agua limpia, la sostenibilidad agrícola y la acción climática. El estudio emplea un análisis cienciométrico y la herramienta "Tree of Science", respaldados por análisis basados en R, utilizando datos de Scopus y Web of Science (WoS). Este enfoque proporciona una visión matizada de la evolución del campo e identifica publicaciones y colaboraciones influyentes. Además, el estudio resalta las posibles limitaciones de confiar en bases de datos selectivas, lo que podría influir en la profundidad de los hallazgos. Los análisis gráficos ofrecen información sobre prácticas sostenibles y marcos de políticas, culminando en recomendaciones prácticas orientadas a mejorar la gobernanza del agua. Al presentar ideas específicas relevantes para ALC, esta investigación contribuye al avance de prácticas de gestión integrada de recursos hídricos (GIRH) alineadas con los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible (ODS), como el acceso al agua potable, la sostenibilidad agrícola y la resiliencia climática.

Palabras clave: Gestión Integrada de Recursos Hídricos; Análisis Cienciométrico; Herramienta Tree of Science; Sostenibilidad Agrícola;

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1. Introduction

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Latin America and the Caribbean hold approximately one-third of the world's water resources (UNESCO, 2021). Despite this abundance, the region faces significant water stress, limited access to safe water and sanitation services, and additional pressures from population growth, economic development, climate change, pollution, and overexploitation (UN, 2021). Over the last two decades, countries like Colombia have experienced severe droughts, profoundly affecting agricultural productivity and the livelihoods of vulnerable farmers (Velasco et al., 2005). Even though Colombia boasts one of the highest levels of per capita water availability globally, issues of unequal distribution and scarcity persist, particularly in rural areas (IDEAM, 2023).

Efforts to manage water resources in Colombia have been considerable but growing demands and inadequate management practices continue to challenge sustainability (Ministerio de Ambiente, Vivienda y Desarrollo Territorial, 2010). The country struggles with pollution, the deterioration of aquatic ecosystems, and competition for water resources among agriculture, industry, and domestic supply. According to the Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y Estudios Ambientales (IDEAM), improving water management systems is essential, especially in rural regions where unreliable irrigation infrastructure hinders agricultural practices.

Poor management and competition for water resources have adversely affected food production, particularly in regions where limited water access hampers agricultural yields (UNESCO, 2019). Effective water management in agriculture is crucial for reducing hunger and malnutrition, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2: Zero Hunger (United Nations, 2015). Additionally, Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) plays a pivotal role in addressing multiple SDGs, such as SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, which focuses on ensuring universal access to clean water, improving water quality, and reducing pollution, and SDG 13: Climate Action, which stresses the importance of protecting natural resources like water to combat climate change (United Nations, 2015).

Within the sustainability framework, IWRM aims to meet current needs without compromising water availability and quality for future generations (OECD, 2022). Achieving this requires a long-term vision and carefully considered decision-making that accounts for the impact of policies on water resources. Tools like agent-based models are valuable in this regard, as they simulate various scenarios and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and strategies on water use (Star et al., 2016). IWRM also promotes sustainable agroecological practices, such as direct seeding, crop rotation, and soil vegetation cover, to enhance soil water retention.

Scientific advancements have enriched the available literature on water management (García-Peñalvo & Seoane-Pardo, 2015; Guerrero-Bote et al., 2021). Analyzing this progress requires efficient tools to process vast amounts of data objectively, reducing the limitations inherent in manual literature reviews. Scientometric analysis offers such a tool, allowing researchers to identify trends, emerging areas, and patterns of collaboration within a specific field (Cruz-Ramirez, 2015; Araya-Castillo et al., 2021).

This study employs a two-stage scientometric analysis. The first stage involves analyzing publications from databases like Scopus and Web of Science using the Tree of Science (ToS) tool (Zuluaga et al., 2022). The ToS tool organizes scientific literature hierarchically, akin to a family tree, categorizing works into roots, trunks, and branches based on their influence within a citation network. The second stage uses qualitative bibliometric techniques to analyze the nature and orientation of academic production over a selected period (Rincón-Nocoa & García-Peña, 2020).

We utilized R-based open-source code to conduct this analysis, supported by initiatives from the National University of Colombia and the Core of Science project (Eggers et al., 2022; Zuluaga et al., 2022; Robledo et al., 2023). The ToS algorithm mimics the sap distribution process in plants, classifying articles into foundational, structural, and emergent categories (Valencia-Hernández et al., 2020). Recent research has successfully applied the ToS algorithm to fields like sustainability, analyzed using R software to better understand academic trends (Aguirre & Paredes Cuervo, 2023; Rincón-Nocoa & García-Peña, 2020).

In this research, graphical representations using the Tree of Science provide a visual summary of knowledge evolution, aiding comprehension of complex topics. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of these visualizations. Science trees simplify reality and may not fully capture the intricacies of a discipline. Additionally, the analysis is inherently biased by the databases used, as grey literature or non-indexed publications are excluded. This is particularly relevant in the context of Latin America, where indexed national research is often scarce.

To conduct this analysis, we selected Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, given their comprehensive coverage of various publication types, including journals, conferences, books, and patents (Botero et al., 2023). These databases provide critical bibliographic data for measuring scientific production across disciplines. They rely on peer-reviewed sources to ensure data reliability, which allows for a thorough examination of trends, identification of influential publications, and mapping of collaboration networks among institutions and countries.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Data Sources and Search Strategies

The general methodology for scientific mapping is comprised of four stages, as delineated by Zupic & Čater (2015): (i) study design, (ii) data collection, (iii) data analysis and visualization, and (iv) interpretation. In the initial phase of the research process, the research objective is established, and the research question is formulated. During the data collection phase, search equations are developed and databases containing the bibliometric records to be analyzed are selected. In the data analysis and visualization stage, the appropriate tools or software for bibliometric or statistical analysis are employed, and a mapping process is conducted to present the results of the previous analysis. In the final stage, the results are subjected to analysis and discussion.

Accordingly, the objective of the search was to analyze global research productivity through the examination of original articles published in indexed journals available in the databases Scopus and Web of Science. Figure 1 depicts the flow diagram utilized for the bibliometric analysis.

The Web of Science (WoS) database (Clarivate Analytics, Philadelphia, PA, USA) and Scopus were employed to identify research articles on the topic of interest. Specifically, the Science Citation Index Expanded within the WoS Core Collection was selected as the source for locating research articles. Additionally, the search was broadened by including the Scopus database. This study utilized the search strategy outlined in Table 1, which displays the implemented search equations in the first column and the total number of results obtained from each consulted database in the second and third columns.

A time frame of 20 years was defined, including only articles published between 2002 and 2022. In addition, to ensure an accurate interpretation of the results, the publication language was restricted to English (according to the field label LA in WoS and Scopus). Only original articles were included (based on the WoSPT field label), excluding those classified as other types of documents.

Table 1. Equation Used for searching topics

Equation	Scopus	WoS
((“Model*”) AND (“IWRM” OR “water management”) AND (“sustainability” OR “Agricultural sustainability” OR “agroecosystem*”))	2680	895
Total	3575	

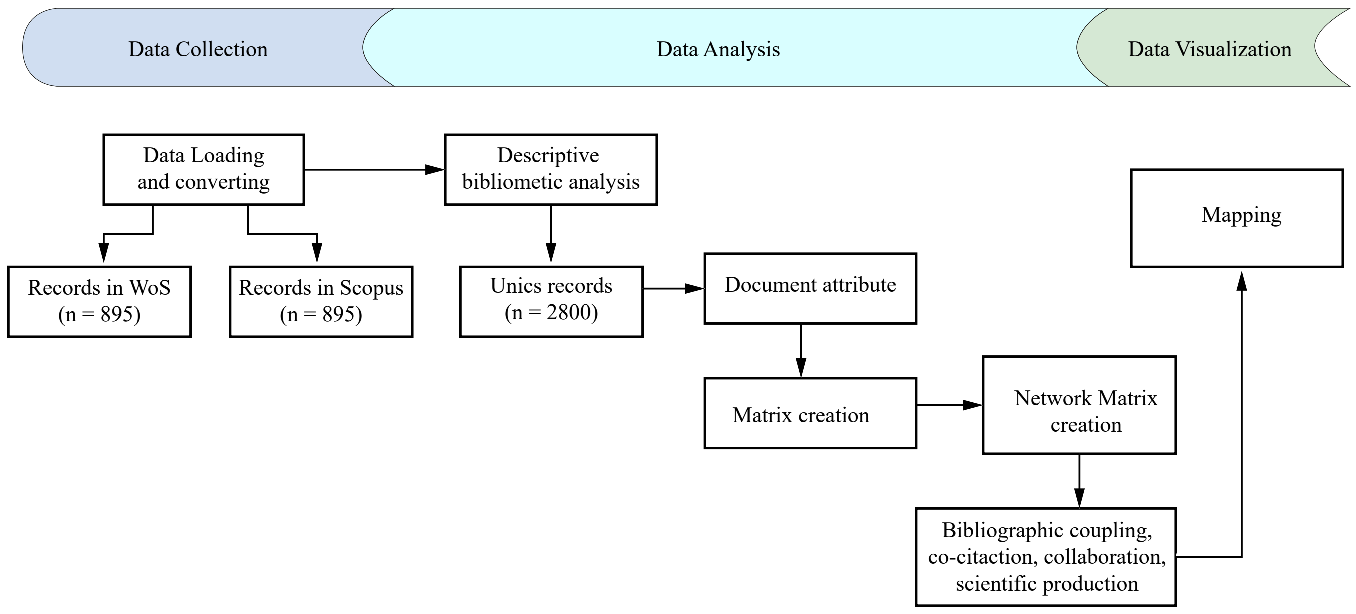

Figure 1. Flowchart used for scientometric analysis.*2.2 Bibliometric Analysis and Data Visualization*

First, the eligible records retrieved from WoS and Scopus were checked for anomalies using the 'remove duplicates' function of the Bibliometrix package (RStudio). A bibliometric analysis of the final 2800 records was then performed using the same tool (Bibliometrix package, CRAN). The Biblioshiny application provided a graphical web interface within the RStudio database. Journal impact factors were obtained from the 2023 Journal Citation Reports published by Clarivate Analytics.

We conducted an analysis using the Tree of Science (ToS), a fundamental concept in data and computer science. This model (Figure 2.) resembles a tree, where the roots represent the foundational elements of our field of research, the trunk represents the most cited studies, and the branching sections symbolize our extensive exploration and understanding of large datasets stored in databases.

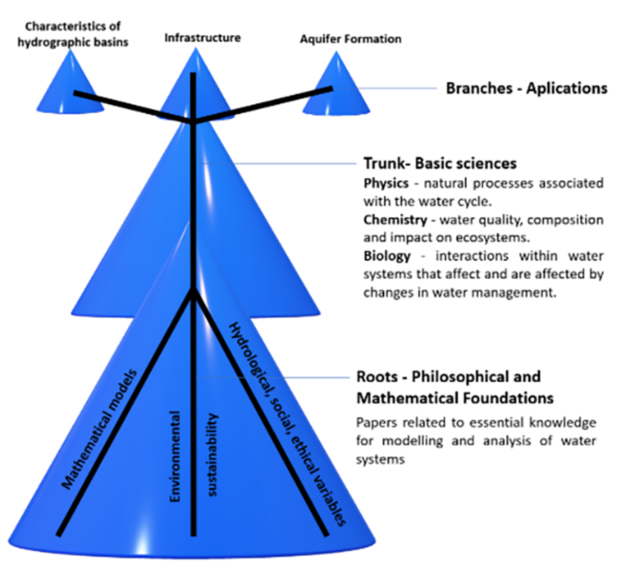

Figure 2. Tree Science Diagram -ToS.

The fundamental principles of database analysis are grounded in the systematic processes of data collection and organization, emphasizing the critical need for a solid framework in any research undertaking. As the tree of knowledge expands, its branches diverge into various domains, such as data mining, data processing and cleansing, exploratory analysis, statistical modeling, and machine learning. Each branch embodies a unique methodology for uncovering trends and relationships within the data. In the context of database analytics, the branches of the Tree of Science (ToS) yield valuable insights that facilitate accurate predictions, effective visualizations, the identification of business opportunities, and informed decision-making.

Following the execution of the R routine, we discerned particular production peaks at disparate times and identified the most cited authors within the context of our research topic. These findings are related to other aspects of the science tree, as outlined in the previous section, and will be explored further below.

3. Results

3.1. Scientometric Analysis

Over the 20-year period from 2002 to 2022, we identified 3575 indexed publications in the two databases (WOS Core Collection + Scopus). These documents included 3060 original articles, 190 books chapters, 52 conference abstracts, 92 review articles and 181 other types of publications. Finally, of the 3060 original articles, 3025 were consolidated in English and 225 duplicates were removed, resulting in a final total of 2800 articles.

Figure 3 shows article production in WoS and Scopus by year from 2002 to 2022. We have excluded 2023 due to incomplete data, which could distort the overall statistics. Over this period, the production of documents related to agro-ecological systems and water resource management, particularly through coupled models, has shown a steady increase, peaking in 19 with a maximum of 485 articles published. An average annual growth rate of 7.18% was observed, reflecting the growing interest of scientists in these areas.

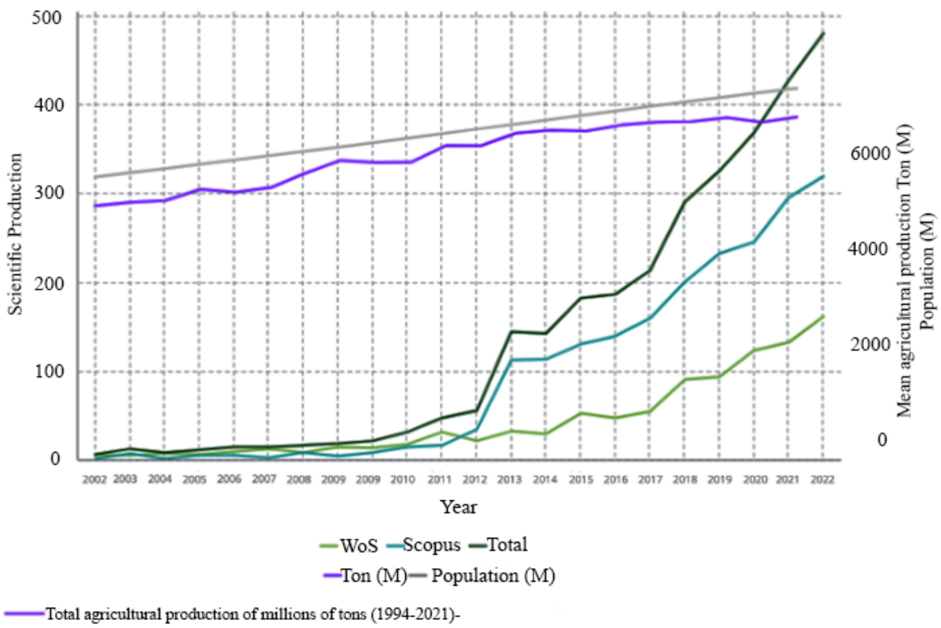

Figure 3. Average Agricultural Production vs Population Growth vs Scientific Production.

This surge in publications is likely to be driven by the pressures of global agricultural demands and rapid population growth. Since 2002, the world's population has increased from around 6.2 billion to over 8 billion in 2022, leading to an estimated 70% increase in food demand. To sustainably meet this demand, agriculture must now produce more with less, requiring innovations in water use efficiency, soil health and ecosystem resilience - key components of agroecological systems. As agriculture consumes about 70% of the world's freshwater resources, effective water management is critical to productivity. The rising research interest is in line with this urgency, as agroecological approaches help to optimise resource use and mitigate environmental impacts, addressing critical challenges posed by population-driven demand.

Figure 4 shows a chart of the 10 most prominent authors in research during the study period. The number of squares in the graph represents each author's contribution in terms of publications within each database. In the WoS database, which accounts for 11.11% of the total output, Professor Huang Ch from the University of Delaware stands out as the most prolific contributor in terms of the number of articles published during the study period. His research covers diverse areas such as industrial wastewater management, aquatic chemistry and groundwater remediation. In contrast, the Scopus database identifies Dr Wang Y from the University of Hong Kong as the leading contributor with 13.02% of publications, focusing on nanomaterials and their impact on aquatic systems.

Figure 5 shows the cumulative number of publications by the top 9 journals over the last 20 years. An analysis of journal publications in both databases shows that Agricultural Water Management published 68 articles in Scopus and 80 articles in WoS. These differences in the number of articles reflect differences in subject coverage, inclusion criteria, and editorial policies between Scopus and WoS, and highlight how each database selectively shapes the available literature in the field. On the other hand, the journal Sustainability published 170 articles in WoS and 70 in Scopus. Again, these differences may be due to the different thematic focus and indexing policies of each database.

Conversely, several journals, including Science of the Total Environment, Water, Journal of Hydrology, Journal of Environmental Management, Water Resources Management, Journal of Cleaner Production and Water Resources Research, had a higher citation frequency in Scopus, with 120, 115, 60, 78, 75, 41 and 21 articles published respectively. These differences are likely due to Scopus' broader coverage, specific quality criteria and editorial partnerships, which may favour the indexing of these journals.

Overall, the distribution of journals between Scopus and WoS highlights the need to consider the unique characteristics of each database when interpreting scientometric results. Several factors, including database coverage, subject coverage, coverage periods, quality and reputation criteria, publication costs and indexing processes, shape the representation of journals in these contexts.

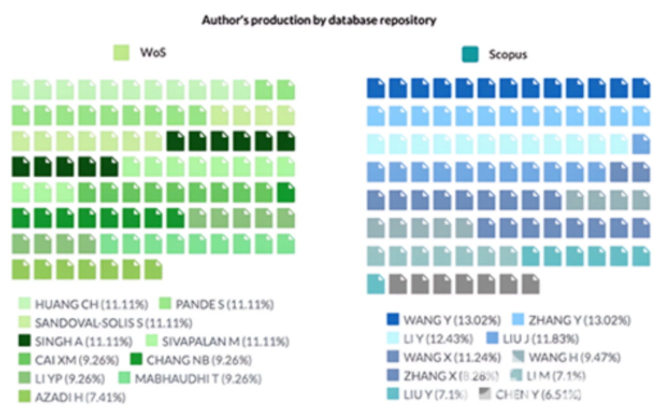

Figure 4. Author´s production by database repository.

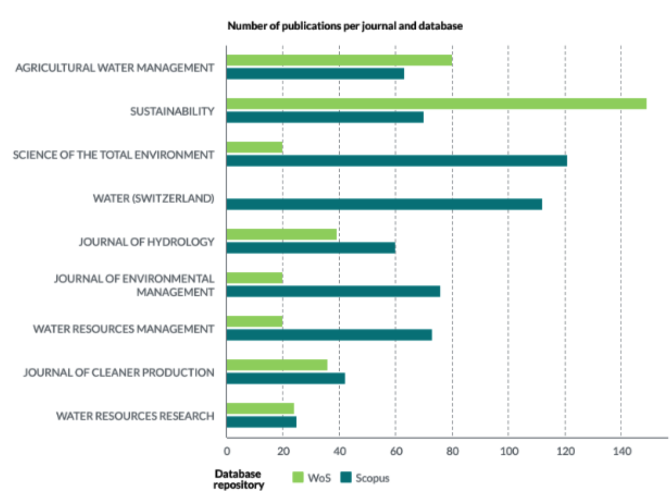

Figure 5. Number of publications per journal by database.

3.2. Tree of Science Analysis

3.2.1. Roots

The articles in the roots section represent the critical importance of effective water resource management in addressing both global and regional water-related challenges. In this study, four key articles illustrate how accurate simulations and a deep understanding of water availability are essential to mitigating worldwide water scarcity issues:

- "Model Evaluation Guidelines for Systematic Quantification of Accuracy in Watershed Simulations" (D. N. Moriasi et al., 2007) provides guidelines for evaluating the accuracy of watershed simulations, essential for effective global water resource management.
- "Global Monthly Water Scarcity: Blue Water Footprints versus Blue Water Availability" (Hoekstra et al., 2012) analyzes global water scarcity by comparing water demand with availability across regions, highlighting disparities and scarcity hotspots.
- "Groundwater Use for Irrigation – A Global Inventory" (Siebert et al., 2010) offers a global inventory of groundwater use for irrigation, emphasizing its significance for agricultural productivity.
- "The Impact of Irrigation Development on Regional Groundwater Resources in Bangladesh" (Kirby et al., 2015) examines the effects of irrigation on regional groundwater resources, focusing on Bangladesh as a case study of water stress in densely populated areas.

Collectively, these articles emphasize the delicate balance needed between groundwater use for agriculture and the preservation of global and regional groundwater supplies. By exploring how irrigation development influences groundwater levels in Bangladesh, Kirby et al. (2015) highlight the need for policies that address both agricultural demands and water sustainability in water-scarce regions, such as Bangladesh, which faces unique challenges due to its geography and population density. Moreover, Global Monthly Water Scarcity: Blue Water Footprints versus Blue Water Availability (Hoekstra et al., 2012) offers a global outlook by contrasting water footprint with actual availability, revealing substantial imbalances in water distribution worldwide. This comparison underscores the need for coordinated, sustainable approaches to tackle water challenges at both global and local levels.

3.2.2. Trunk

The articles included in the trunk section represent foundational works that build upon and expand the concepts introduced in the roots section. This study presents six key articles that provide a comprehensive examination of the conceptual epistemology underlying integrated water management, along with an analysis of the most widely implemented optimization strategies.

- Agricultural Water Management (Wheeler et al., 2015), explores the critical interconnection between water management and agriculture, proposing strategies to improve water utilization in regions facing severe water scarcity.
- A Coupled Modeling Framework for Sustainable Watershed Management in Transboundary River Basins (Khan et al., 2017) introduces an innovative framework for managing cross-border watersheds, highlighting the necessity of international collaboration.
- Water Resources Availability and Demand in the Mara River Basin (Dessu et al., 2014) provides a thorough analysis of water availability and demand, underscoring the importance of precise data for informed decision-making.
- The studies Water Footprint, Blue Water Scarcity, and Economic Water Productivity of Irrigated Crops in the Peshawar Basin, Pakistan (T. Khan et al., 2021) and Reduce Blue Water Scarcity and Increase Nutritional and Economic Water Productivity through Changing the Cropping Pattern in a Catchment (Nouri et al., 2020) examine the influence of altering cropping patterns on water availability and productivity. Both articles highlight that effective land and crop management are essential components of comprehensive water management strategies, especially in water-scarce regions.
- Efficient Irrigation Water Allocation and Its Impact on Agricultural Sustainability and Water Scarcity under Uncertainty (Li et al., 2020) discusses the significance of optimal irrigation practices under uncertain conditions to promote agricultural sustainability.

Together, these articles form the structural foundation of this investigation, providing an integrated understanding of how strategic water and land management can be leveraged to address complex challenges in global water resource management.

3.2.3. Branches

The articles included in the branches section represent foundational works that build upon and further develop the concepts introduced in the roots section. This study presents three branches that encapsulate recent research efforts, which apply, adapt, or even challenge established ideas, thereby paving the way for new areas of exploration and advancing the field's knowledge base.

3.2.3.1. Branch 1: Groundwater and Water Resource Management

The articles in this branch explore various strategies for Groundwater and Water Resource Management, emphasizing the integration of social and environmental factors. Studies like Sustainability Analysis for Irrigation Water Management in the Aral Sea Region (Cai et al., 2003) address sustainability challenges, while Game-Based Social Learning for Socially Sustainable Water Management (Kraker et al., 2021) uses gamification to promote collaborative practices. Additionally, research on community-based governance in Spain (Jégou & Sanchis-Ibor, 2019) and evolving water management in the Netherlands (Van Der Brugge et al., 2005) demonstrates the need for context-specific solutions.

Technological advancements are also emphasized, with works such as Decision Support for Sustainable Option Selection in Integrated Urban Water Management (Makropoulos et al., 2008) and Computer Architectures for Incremental Learning in Water Management (Kenda et al., 2022) highlighting the role of adaptive technologies. These innovations make urban water management more efficient and resilient by enabling responses to evolving conditions.

Together, these studies illustrate the necessity of adaptable, context-sensitive approaches that incorporate both community involvement and technological advancements to improve resilience and sustainability in water management.

3.2.3.2. Branch 2: Water Resource Management

The articles in this branch explore the complexity of sustainable water management across various regions, emphasizing the integration of natural, climatic, human, and social dimensions (Figure 6.B). They highlight the need for multidisciplinary strategies, particularly in disaster scenarios. For instance, studies like Flood Hazard Mapping on the Angkor World Heritage Site (Liu et al., 2019) and Groundwater Recharge Strategies in the Sutlej River (Mushtaq et al., 2023) address natural hazard management, while research on water quality and groundwater depletion, such as in Mexico (Troyo-Dieguez et al., n.d.) and Tianjin, China (Qin et al., 2023), emphasizes the interaction of natural and human factors.

Social and environmental considerations are equally important. Are Food Hubs Sustainable? (Shariatmadary et al., 2023) and Decision Support for the Eocene Aquifer in Palestine (Jonoski et al., 2023) illustrate the significance of community-based governance and policy-driven solutions. Additionally, simulation models like Groundwater Flow Dynamics in Rechna Doab, Pakistan (Awais et al., 2023) demonstrate the value of technological innovations for strategic water planning.

Overall, these studies underscore the importance of integrating flood risk mapping, groundwater management, social engagement, and advanced technologies to create resilient, equitable, and sustainable water management systems.

3.2.3.3. Branch 3: Water Resource Quality

This branch explores innovative technologies and approaches for sustainable water resource management, focusing on water quality, agricultural productivity, and environmental impact (Figure 6.C). Key advancements include the integration of micro-sprinkler irrigation with organic fertilizers, which enhances water efficiency and soil health while boosting agricultural yield, providing a sustainable model for regions with water scarcity.

Several articles address wastewater treatment innovations. For example, Hoelzle et al. (2020) and Naha et al. (2023) propose energy-efficient methods, such as microbial fuel cells and nanofiltration, to reduce costs and environmental footprints. Microbial-based approaches, like those by Al-Hazmi et al. (2023) and Shivaram et al. (2023), use biological processes for pollution mitigation, offering lower toxicity and minimal chemical inputs. Additionally, Leovac Maćerak et al. (2023) highlight the use of biochar and nanotechnology for improved treatment efficiency, promoting a circular economy.

Chen et al. (2023) examine sustainable disinfection methods developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, balancing public health with environmental concerns. Conde et al. (2023) focus on electrochemical methods to enhance pollutant removal, aligning with global sustainability goals. In agriculture, Yue et al. (2023) present water-efficient irrigation systems combined with organic fertilizers, crucial for water-scarce regions. Deng et al. (2023) emphasize the reuse of wastewater in pollution remediation, underscoring the importance of closing resource loops.

Overall, these technologies offer scalable, cost-effective solutions that address environmental challenges, improve water quality, and align with sustainability goals. Their implementation could transform water management practices, benefiting industries, agriculture, and public health while informing future policies.

Figure 6. Branches of ToS

4. Discussion

This comprehensive scientometric study, anchored in the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases, provides a nuanced analysis of global research output in water resource management, revealing critical regional dynamics that influence both agricultural and non-agricultural practices. The concentration of research efforts in countries such as the United States, China, Spain, India, Australia, Germany, and the Netherlands reflects a substantial commitment to advancing water management solutions in these high-output nations. However, this pattern also exposes a significant gap in research and collaboration with regions facing severe water challenges, particularly in the global South, including Latin America and the Caribbean. Addressing this disparity through targeted knowledge transfer and collaborative initiatives is essential for developing innovative and contextually relevant solutions (Figure 7).

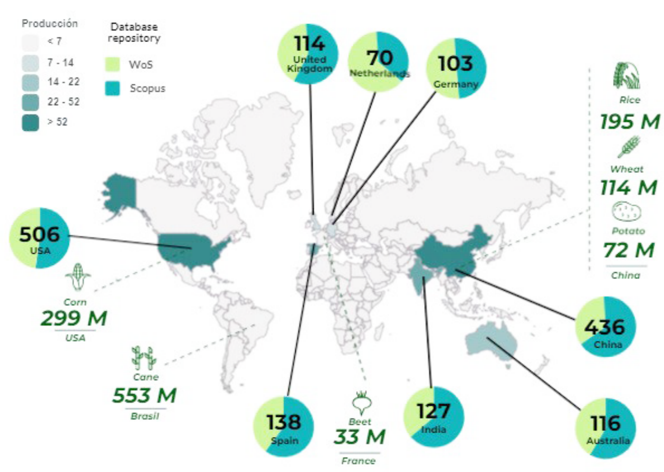

Figure 7. Agricultural production of millions of tons and scientific output.

The focus on major water consumers in crop production, such as the United States, China, and Brazil, emphasizes the urgent need for efficient water use policies in agriculture, one of the most water-intensive sectors. Given their pivotal roles in the global food supply, these countries must prioritize strategies that sustain agricultural productivity while mitigating growing water scarcity, which disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations. Latin America, with its extensive agricultural activities and dependency on natural resources, stands to benefit significantly from the adoption of these water efficiency measures, which are crucial for building resilience to climate-induced water stress.

Spain's prominent position in water management research aligns with pressing regional challenges like drought and desertification, underscoring the necessity of sustainable practices. This trend is mirrored in countries like India, the United Kingdom, and Australia, demonstrating a global effort to combat water scarcity through rigorous scientific inquiry. Nevertheless, regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean remain underrepresented in research, despite grappling with similar or more severe water issues. Bridging this research gap is critical, as more focused efforts could yield solutions tailored to these regions' unique environmental and socio-economic conditions.

The notable scientific output of the United States and the rapid expansion of China's research capacity highlight their proactive approach to sustainable water management, supported by strong infrastructures for scientific research and resource allocation. Together, these countries serve as potential models for others striving to enhance their water management capabilities. However, the global water footprint assessment (Figure 8) reveals stark inequalities in water distribution, with significant burdens falling on countries in the southern hemisphere. Nations like Nigeria, Pakistan, Argentina, and Brazil experience immense pressure on water resources due to high agricultural demands and population growth, intensifying the need for effective and equitable water management strategies.

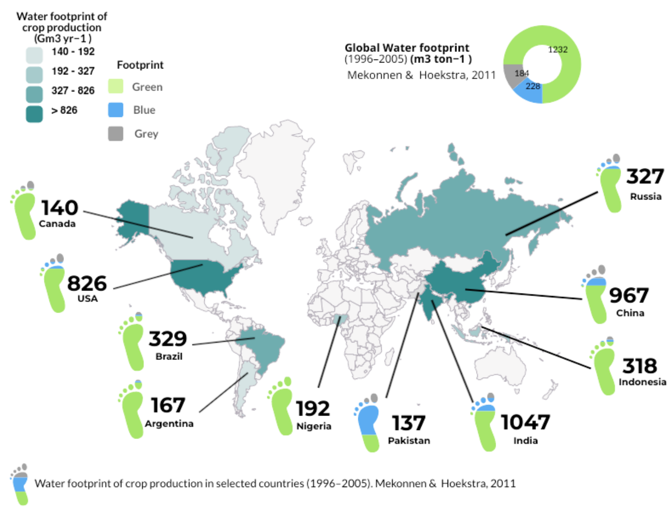

Figure 8. Water footprint of crop production in selected countries (1996-2005). Mekonnen & Hoekstra, 2011.

The study emphasizes that a comprehensive approach to water management must extend beyond agriculture to include urban and industrial needs. Industrial sectors, particularly in China and India, are major water consumers and contributors to pollution, necessitating policies that address waste management, recycling, and pollution control. Urban centers, especially in rapidly growing regions like Latin America, face challenges in providing clean and accessible water, a problem further exacerbated by climate change. Recognizing and incorporating these factors into water management strategies is essential for developing resilient urban infrastructures capable of sustaining economic growth and population increases.

The global South's vital role in global food production and its significant water demands underscore the urgency of focused research and tailored solutions. Latin America and the Caribbean, despite their abundant freshwater resources, require innovative strategies to manage their water footprint effectively. Expanding research and collaboration in these regions would promote environmental justice and support the development of sustainable practices. This approach would not only benefit local communities but also contribute significantly to global water security.

Ultimately, this integrated analysis highlights the intricate interconnections between scientific research, food security, and the global water footprint. Addressing these linkages with a focus on interdisciplinary and globally inclusive strategies will drive sustainable practices that benefit humanity and ensure a more equitable distribution of water resources worldwide.

5. Conclusions

This scientometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of global research in water management, emphasizing the need for collaborative approaches and region-specific solutions to tackle the distinct challenges faced by different areas. The substantial contributions from countries such as the United States, China, and other research leaders highlight the critical importance of international cooperation and collective action in achieving sustainable water resource management. However, regions like Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) require special attention due to their unique context and significant yet unevenly distributed water resources.

Despite holding nearly one-third of the world's water resources, LAC continues to grapple with pressing issues such as water scarcity, pollution, and inequitable distribution. Climate change exacerbates these problems through unpredictable rainfall patterns, more frequent extreme weather events, and rising temperatures. This combination places immense strain on water management systems, particularly affecting agriculture and the livelihoods of vulnerable populations. The region's complex hydrological and socio-economic landscape calls for adaptive, region-specific strategies that address both water conservation and agricultural productivity.

In this context, the application of advanced modeling and management tools is crucial for enhancing water use efficiency and ensuring long-term sustainability. Hydrological, economic, and simulation models, along with decision-making frameworks, are essential for anticipating water dynamics and identifying effective management strategies. These tools provide a more nuanced understanding of water behavior, enabling the development of resilient systems that can withstand climate variability and meet the increasing demands of agriculture and urbanization.

Effective water resource management also depends on active stakeholder engagement and robust governance structures. Transparent and participatory governance—encompassing governments, communities, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector—is vital for addressing water challenges equitably. In LAC and other regions, fostering such collaboration is key to implementing integrated water resource management (IWRM) practices that are both effective and inclusive.

Given that agriculture is one of the largest consumers of water, it demands focused attention. Implementing efficient irrigation technologies and sustainable agricultural practices is essential to balance water use with productivity. Considering agriculture's critical role in the economies of many LAC countries and its dependence on water resources, integrated strategies that prioritize both food security and water conservation are imperative.

Overall, the reviewed studies emphasize the need for a holistic approach to water management, considering factors such as resource availability, agricultural demand, and environmental impacts. Regional and global cooperation remains vital for the sustainable management of transboundary basins, while flexible strategies are necessary to adapt to an increasingly unpredictable climate. By applying these insights, policymakers and stakeholders can make informed decisions that effectively address urgent water-related challenges and promote long-term sustainability. This approach is particularly relevant for Latin America and the Caribbean, where tailored, science-based solutions are essential to address the region's unique environmental and socio-economic dynamics

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