Earth Systems, Resources, and Sustainability, 2026, 1(1), 1–17

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Article

Inclusive Green Growth as a Policy Framework for Operationalizing Sustainable Development Goals through the Triple Bottom Line

Moslem Ansarinasab [1,*] and M. Santosh [2,3,4]

[1] Department of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Vali-e-Asr University of Rafsanjan, Rafsanjan 77188-97111, Iran
[2] School of Earth Sciences and Resources, China University of Geosciences Beijing, Beijing 100083, China
[3] Yonsei Frontier Lab., Yonsei University, Seoul 03722, Republic of Korea
[4] Faculty of Science, Kochi University, Kochi 780-8520, Japan
* Correspondence: M.Ansarinasab@vru.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

Inclusive Green Growth (IGG) provides a comprehensive framework for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the form of a triple bottom line (TBL) of economic, environmental and social dimensions. This paper systematically reviews 58 peer-reviewed articles to highlight the role of IGG in achieving the SDGs and identifies gaps in existing research. The findings from this study show that IGG strengthens economic dimensions, especially SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), and environmental dimensions, especially SDG 13 (climate action). However, IGG still fails to address social dimensions such as inclusion, governance and equity, and the imbalance in this area is very evident. The bibliometric results show that China leads IGG research on the SDGs; however, interregional and interdisciplinary collaborations remain insufficient. Therefore, attention to governance mechanisms, social inclusion, and strengthening pluralism are essential for balancing the three fundamental pillars of sustainable development. Thus, the present study not only outlines a comprehensive framework for IGG and highlights research gaps in this area, but also proposes a roadmap for enhancing the role of IGG in achieving sustainable and equitable global development.

ARTICLE INFO

History:

Received: 26 September 2025
Revised: 22 October 2025
Accepted: 26 October 2025
Published: 4 November 2025

Keywords:

earth system;
Inclusive Green Growth (IGG);
Triple Bottom Line (TBL);
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
bibliometric analysis

Citation:

Ansarinasab, M.; Santosh, M. Inclusive Green Growth as a Policy Framework for Operationalizing Sustainable Development Goals through the Triple Bottom Line. *Earth Systems, Resources, and Sustainability* 2026, *1*(1), 1–17.

Research Highlights

- The adaptability and sustainability of environment and life under threat
- Inclusive Green Growth as an integral component of achieving Sustainable Development Goals
- Systematic bibliometric analysis with focus on the Triple Bottom Line
- Importance of pluralism and inclusiveness for the harmonious development of economy, environment and society

1. Introduction

Planet Earth is a dynamic system of internal and external sub-systems including the core-mantle-crust and related geodynamics, and the atmosphere-hydrosphere-biosphere interlink, that created the dynamic environment for modern life. However, the rapid industrial and technological advancements, population explosion, resource depletion, energy crisis, as well as climate change have posed a major threat to the adaptability and sustainability of life and environment on our planet [1–3]. The concept of sustainable development (SD) and the methods of achieving have thus become for the major agenda for planners and policymakers in the 21st century. Since the emergence of the concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), planners have sought policies that balance environmental protection, economic growth, and social justice [4,5].

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework to achieve balanced development, but in practice, the emphasis is more on economic growth and leads to unbalanced development. These shortcomings highlight the need for an integrated model to operationalize all dimensions of sustainable development through economic perspectives and social justice. Thus, the concept of Inclusive Green Growth (IGG) has emerged as a practical evolution of sustainable development. This e

and strives to advance the benefits of development equitably. Therefore, IGG bridges the gap between the theoretical aspirations of the SDGs and their practical realization and is consistent with the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework that considers economic, environmental and social objectives.

Although there is a tacit agreement and global consensus on the SDGs, the world continues to be plagued by uneven economic growth, severe social inequalities and growing environmental crises. Intermittent crises such as COVID-19 highlight these fragilities and necessitate the move towards Inclusive Green Growth (IGG). IGG provides a timely response by fostering green growth while ensuring the equitable distribution of the benefits of progress and growth for all regions and social groups. Therefore, operationalizing the components of IGG within the SDG framework is essential to guide policymakers towards a more sustainable and inclusive future.

The introduction of Inclusive Green Growth (IGG) has provided a promising step towards integrating growth-oriented development models and sustainability discourse. In contrast to traditional concepts of "green growth," which focus more on ecological productivity, IGG, taking into account inclusion, seeks to share the benefits of growth in a way that ensures social justice [6,7]. This vision of IGG for operationalization is closely aligned with the Triple Bottom Line (TBL)—the simultaneous advancement of economic, environmental, and social goals (Figure 1).

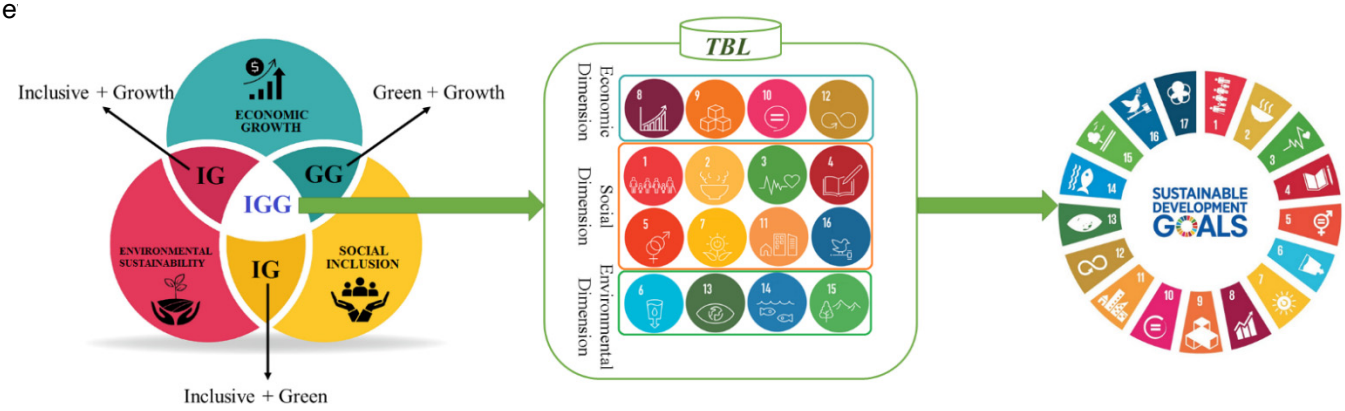

Figure 1. The relationship of IGG–SDGs through the Triple Bottom Line framework.

The economic dimension of IGG, which has received much attention, suggests policies that improve economic growth, such as investment in infrastructure, financial innovation, and digital economy which, ultimately facilitate green growth by increasing productivity as well as considering green components [8–10]. However, these policies lack the necessary inclusiveness, do not consider inequalities and social justice, and ignore the reduction of labor market problems in equal opportunities for society [11]. Another example is foreign direct investment (FDI), which, although helps in economic growth, remains incomplete without considering institutional quality and governance [12–14]. Thus, some of these major structural inequalities hinder the main goals.

In the environmental dimension of IGG, these problems are more acute. The definition of a concept such as the Gross Ecosystem Product (GEP) framework has been to further integrate natural and ecological assets into growth plans [15,16]. However, how these plans continue to promote exclusive and traditional growth patterns, without considering social

dimensions such as indiscriminate land allocation and wrong privatization of resources, makes it difficult to advance the balanced development of IGG [17,18]. Aesthetic goals such as climate change and the move towards carbon reduction only enhance green growth; however, if these policies are not implemented fairly and participatorily and lack sufficient inclusion, they will result only in heterogeneous development [19,20].

The social dimension is the missing link in traditional growth theories and the main focus of IGG. The innovative frontier and cornerstone of IGG is based on its social dimension, rather than inclusiveness being a side-effect of the theory [5]. Growth-friendly policies such as digital finance, smart cities, and sound fiscal policy can play a critical role in ensuring equity and reducing inequalities [21–23]. Empirical studies, however, clearly show that the environmental and economic dimensions of IGG still dominate its social dimensions, and issues of equal employment opportunities, improved governance, and poverty reduction have been neglected in IGG research [21,24]. As emphasized by Munasinghe [25], crises such as COVID-19 have shown that social dimensions such as global resilience to major shocks have highlighted these shortcomings.

Despite all the above interpretations, the complexities of the IGG make it a useful framework for achieving the SDGs. By incorporating the social dimension of inclusion into green growth, the IGG goes beyond a one-dimensional "greening" of economic development and attempts to present a model of development that is transformative. However, the main gap, namely, a path to balance across all three dimensions of the IGG, remains a major concern for researchers. The major question is whether this imbalance can be addressed or whether the IGG will continue to lead to an updated version of traditional growth-oriented strategies.

In this study, with the help of TBL dimensions and its adaptation to IGG, we try to formulate a multidimensional framework for examining the extent to which sustainable goals are achieved. There have been several studies that combine theoretical and empirical approaches in in various fields such as economics, environmental science and social policy [8,12,15,21]. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on identifying critical practical and theoretical gaps in the field of IGG to help achieve a better and well balanced realization of IGG. This approach should also take into account both growth and ecological components and combines justice and inclusion, in order to effectively achieve the visions under the SDGs.

Thus, the main questions that we address in this study are as follows.

- To what extent has inclusive green growth developed in all three dimensions?
- In inclusive green growth, which dimensions have developed faster and which ones have been slower?
- Which sustainable development goals have improved inclusive green growth and which have neglected?
- What are the most important research gaps for the path forward in the field of inclusive green growth?

2. Materials and Methods

To achieve the objectives of the study outlined above, we adopted a systematic bibliometric approach to examine the "Inclusive Green Growth" (IGG) within the framework of sustainable development (SD) and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL). The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were used to ensure the transparency, accuracy, and reproducibility of the results.

2.1. Data Collection and Screening

In this study, peer-reviewed articles were collected from two reputable academic databases, Web of Science and Scopus. The search strategy for collecting articles included the keywords "inclusive green growth" and "sustainable development".

The keywords "inclusive green growth" and "sustainable development" were deliberately chosen to ensure conceptual coherence with the objectives of this study. "Inclusive green growth" is the foundation of this research and forms a comprehensive framework that connects economic, environmental and social dimensions through the triple bottom line (TBL). "Sustainable development" also places IGG within the broader global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The more detailed components of these two concepts bias the paper towards studies that are limited to only one component and do not have the necessary comprehensiveness, and take us away from the main objective. Therefore, the combination of these two keywords ensures that articles are reviewed that explicitly link IGG to the implementation of the SDGs. Thus, this choice ensures that the bibliometric analysis directly supports the main research questions.

Apart from filtering articles in English, no other restrictions were applied in any section.

The initial search yielded 49 records in the Web of Science database and 58 records in the Scopus database. After reviewing and removing duplicates and applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 58 peer-reviewed and unique articles published in the last fifteen years, between 2010 and 2025, were extracted and collected. All items mentioned and the steps taken for identification, screening, and eligibility assessment are summarized in the PRISMA flow chart in Figure 2.

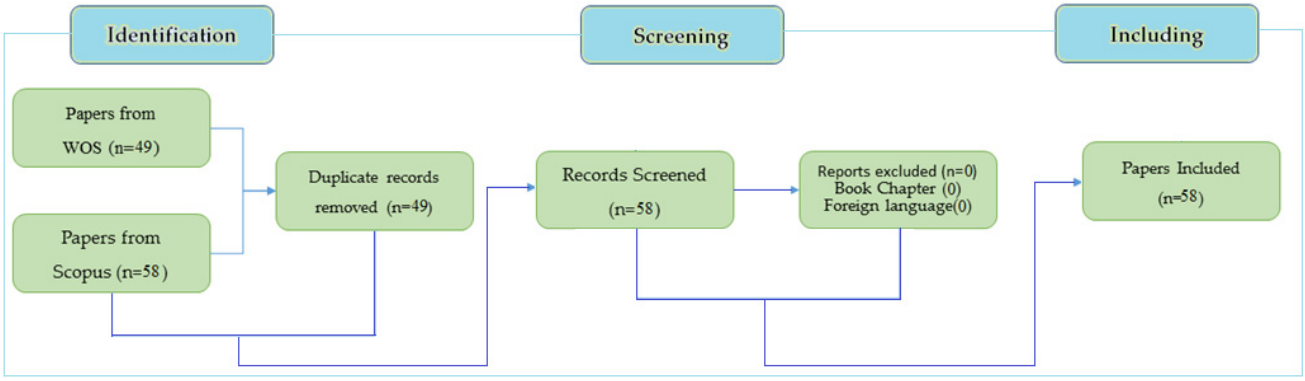

Figure 2. PRISMA flow diagram for article selection.

According to the PRISMA diagram, only peer-reviewed articles in English that explicitly addressed "Inclusive Green Growth" (IGG) and its relationship to "sustainable development" were included. All conference papers, book chapters, and non-peer-reviewed articles were excluded to ensure that high-quality and consistent studies were included. The inclusion of English-language articles was done to maintain data consistency and bibliographic comparability, although it should be noted that this introduces a potential bias by underestimating regional studies published in other languages.

2.2. Bibliometric Analysis

This study employs bibliometric techniques to examine the perspective, intellectual and thematic trends of research conducted on YAG in five stages:

(a) Keyword co-occurrence analysis: to extract key and emerging concepts and understand the links between them.
(b) Author keyword co-occurrence analysis: to extract new study priorities.
(c) Co-citation analysis: prominent and cited researchers to identify key intellectual foundations.
(d) Bibliographic link of sources: to highlight links between main sources of publication.
(e) Citation analysis of sources: to identify citing journals and benchmark sources.

We used the VOSviewer, a well-known software for visualizing links and building bibliometric networks in the above five stages by employing Total Link Strength (TLS), Frequency Count (TC), and Cluster Visualization.

2.3. Mapping IGG to the SDGs via the TBL

For a deeper analysis, the selected articles were first systematically coded before examining the IGG dimensions of inclusive green growth in terms of the three main economic, social and environmental dimensions of TBL and how each dimension relates to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Each article was carefully and manually reviewed and its relevance to each of the 17 SDGs was examined and categorized. This analysis resulted in a basic map of the relevance of IGG studies to the 17 SDGs to reveal and highlight the focused goals (e.g., SDGs 8, 9 and 13) and the neglected goals (e.g., SDGs 5, 16 and 17).

2.4. Validation and Reliability

To ensure reliability, the authors were independently coded and analyzed in the links to the SDGs without bias. Disagreements were resolved by consensus. On the other hand, an attempt was made to minimize coverage bias by using authoritative peer-reviewed articles from two major academic journal publishing databases (WOS and Scopus) and to ensure the accuracy and transparency of the study by using PRISMA.

3. Results

After manually extracting and reviewing 58 selected peer-reviewed articles, our scientometric analysis using VOSviewer software extracted the thematic and intellectual structure of the Inclusive Green Growth (IGG) field of these articles. Five types of bibliometric analysis were performed on the 58 selected articles: co-occurrence analysis of all keywords, co-occurrence analysis of authors' keywords, co-citation analysis of cited authors, bibliographic linkage of sources, and citation analysis of sources. These methods aided in systematically and scientifically extracting the set of key concepts, hotly debated topic clusters, influential journals, and prominent authors with transparency, and could also visually reveal the inception and direction of studies in the field of IGG.

3.1. Co-Occurrence Analysis of All Keywords

The output of the co-occurrence analysis of all keywords in the heat map (Figure 3) highlights the two keywords "sustainable development" and "inclusive green growth" in the center of the figure and with high frequency (deep red). These two concepts with the highest total link strength have accounted for the most studies in this field and have the strongest conceptual

connection with each other. The emergence of the next keywords, namely “China” and “green economy”, also in the hot areas (orange), indicates their high connection and the achievement of studies in this direction.

The co-occurrence structure of two important quantities is well quantified: “Sustainable development” (41 occurrences, 704 TLS) and “Inclusive green growth” (37 occurrences, 550 TLS) are located with the greatest strength at the heart of the image and the main cluster. “China” (23,452), “Green economy” (19,394) and “Economic growth” (17,337) around the central cluster with high importance highlight the environmental-economic relationship. The key concepts “Environmental protection” (9,245) and “Cities” (9232) around the previous two clusters have formed the urban and environmental governance sub-cluster. Therefore, the sum of these clusters and links clearly shows that sustainability is not a one-dimensional and separate concept, but is a set of economic, environmental and regional concepts intertwined (Figure 4).

The centrality and prominence of the two concepts of “sustainable development” and “inclusive green growth” places IGG as an important tool for achieving sustainability. The importance of the key concepts of “green economy” and “economic development” indicates that the literature in this field considers it necessary to pay attention to environmental responsibility in the path of economic development. Also, attention to the concept of “cities” highlighted the attention of researchers to urban sustainability (Table 1).

The prominent role of the keyword “China” as revealed in this study suggests that the country has been positioned as a major experimental laboratory for implementing and evaluating IGG policies. The clustering of “green economy” and “economic development” also strongly highlights the place of economic logic in academic discourse on IGG, even as this discourse seeks to integrate environmental and social considerations.

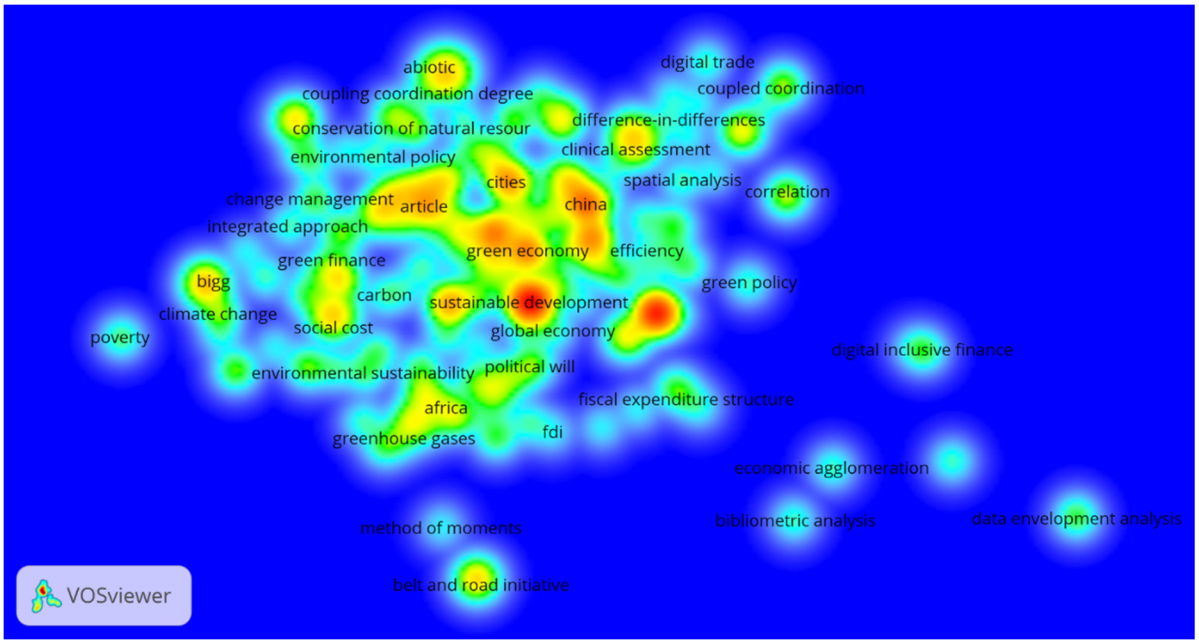

Figure 3. Heatmap of keyword co-occurrence in IGG research. The intensity of the color highlights the frequency of keyword co-occurrence. Darker areas highlight stronger relationships between frequently used terms, and vice versa. The size of each node indicates the number of occurrences, and the connecting lines between nodes reveal the strength of the overall connection. This figure clearly depicts the conceptual core of the IGG research area and helps to understand the degree of interrelationship between the main themes.

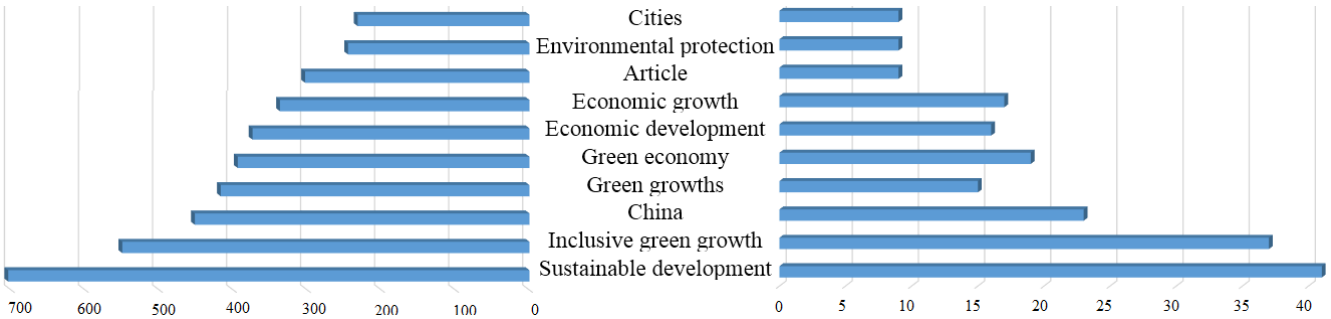

Figure 4. Co-occurrence of all keywords in IGG-related studies.

Table 1. Co-occurrence of keywords in the IGG literature.

No.	Keyword	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
1	Sustainable development	41	704
2	Inclusive green growth	37	550
3	China	23	452
4	Green growths	15	417
5	Green economy	19	394
6	Economic development	16	374
7	Economic growth	17	337
8	Article	9	303
9	Environmental protection	9	245
10	Cities	9	232

3.2. Co-Occurrence Analysis of Authors Keywords

The extracted form of the keyword analysis is shown a heat map of the main nodes with high intensity of the keywords “inclusive green growth”, “green economy” and “sustainability”, which show that these concepts have attracted the most attention of researchers (Figure 5). These main nodes are surrounded by other marginal hot concepts such as “politics”, “climate change” and “developing countries”. Co-occurrence analysis of authors’ keywords clearly shows that researchers in the IGG field have focused their studies in the areas of politics and development.

The cluster analysis image clearly highlights the economic and environmental thematic nodes scattered around the central node of “inclusive green growth”. The secondary cluster, which encompasses “environmental governance” and “institutional frameworks”, is a policy-oriented cluster, while the third cluster, focusing on “developing countries” and “Asia”, targets interregional development issues. The combination of these clusters shows that institutional-regional development has been the focus of most studies in the IGG field.

Keywords such as “climate change”, “resilience” and “equality” reveal the simultaneous attention to this field to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In contrast, the attention of scholars in this discourse to “green economy” and “sustainability” shows that environmental policies have also been in the spotlight. Regionally specific marginal concepts also indicate the localization of inclusive green growth in different socio-economic branches.

The author’s keywords, such as “politics,” “climate change,” and “developing countries,” highlight the growing attention to the concepts of political and institutional process in IGG studies. The focus on “developing countries” also suggests that strengthening inclusion and sustainability is most challenging in areas where institutional capacity and social justice mechanisms are still weak. These thematic patterns therefore highlight the study’s aim to identify gaps in the social and governance dimensions of IGG.3-3. Co-Citation Analysis of Cited Authors

The heatmap obtained from the Co-Citation Analysis (Figure 6) shows that the highest citation density is around the authors “Hao Y.”, “Wu H.”, and “Li Y.”. In addition to the high number of citations of these authors, the red areas around them also highlight their strong co-citation strength, meaning that these authors are cited in similar articles. Therefore, it can be said that they are prominent pioneers in the fundamental structures of this field of IGG knowledge, especially environmental economics and policy analysis.

The findings show that after “Hao Y.” is cited 55 times with a total link strength (TLS) of 2707, two other prominent researchers are Wu H.” with 54 citations and 2614 TLS, and “Li Y.” with 45 citations and 2172 TLS. After these three, three prominent researchers “Zhang J.” (45, 2072), “Wang J.” (39, 2043), and “Zhang X.” (46, 1865) have made effective contributions to the promotion of this knowledge with a combined total of about 1700 TLS. In addition to these six researchers, the role of “Ofori I.K.” with the highest citation count (56) and TLS of 1758 has been prominent in green development research.

The output co-citation clusters reveal a prominent group of Chinese researchers working on IGG field in China and elsewhere in Asia who are frequently cited (Table 2). A smaller cluster identifies other international researchers who have integrated sustainability indicators with green policies. The separation of these two clusters highlights the low level of cross-regional integration in IGG knowledge.

Our analysis shows that the Chinese scholars have taken lead in IGG research, thus advancing IGG studies using policy simulations and econometric models. These have promoted other researchers to follow. The leadership of these Chinese scholars justifies the choice of China as a case study in the discussion of inclusive green growth. These citations to these key authors also show why the field has focused more on models of environmental-economic interaction.

The prominence of Chinese researchers in IGG research has several systemic and policy-related factors. In recent years, China has included inclusive green growth in its long-term five-year economic plans,

emphasizing the concept of "ecological civilization." The government has therefore encouraged public institutions and universities to conduct research in the areas of national sustainability. One of these incentives has been the allocation of government funds and the provision of extensive environmental and economic data sets to researchers. On the other hand, the Chinese government has emphasized measurable policy outcomes, which has led to the expansion of econometric and quantitative approaches and strengthened China's presence and leadership in the global IGG literature.

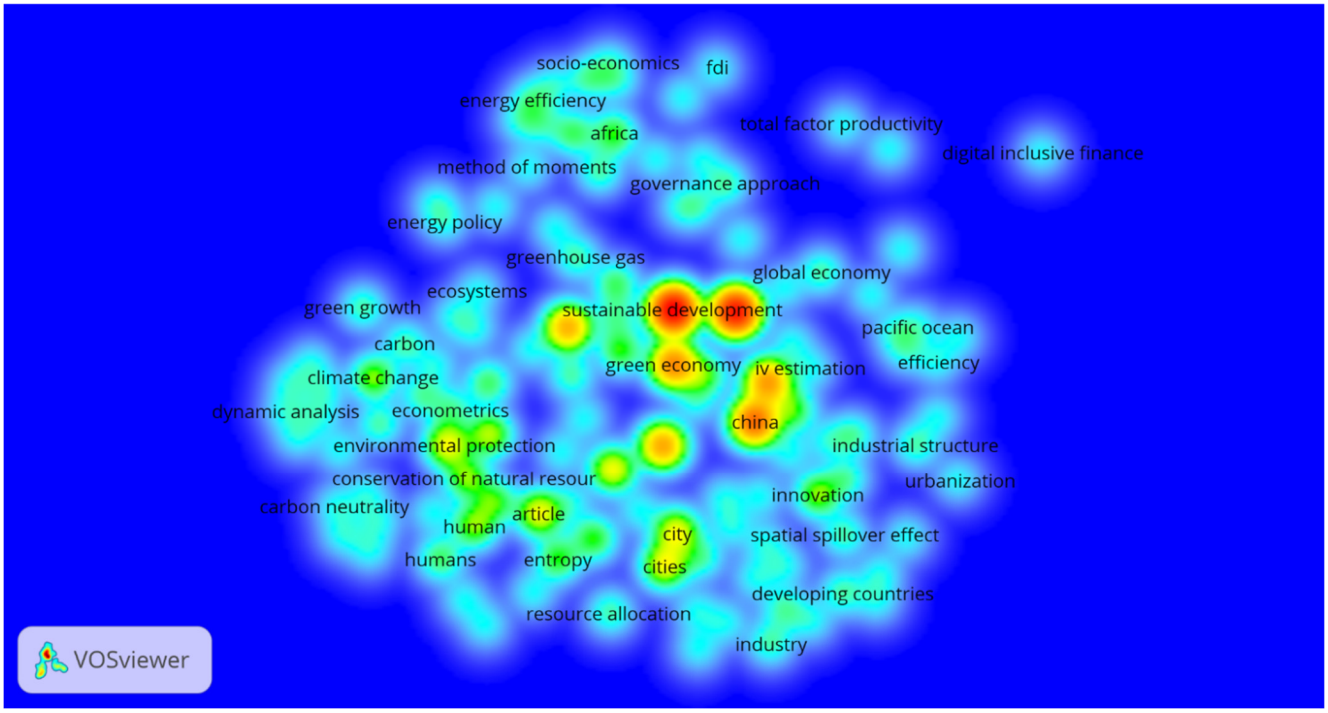

Figure 5. Network visualization of keyword co-occurrence. Each node represents an author keyword and its size is proportional to its frequency of occurrence. The distance between the nodes indicates the strength of relevance of the author keyword. The difference in colors emphasizes thematic clusters and guides the researcher in how to group research topics in IGG.

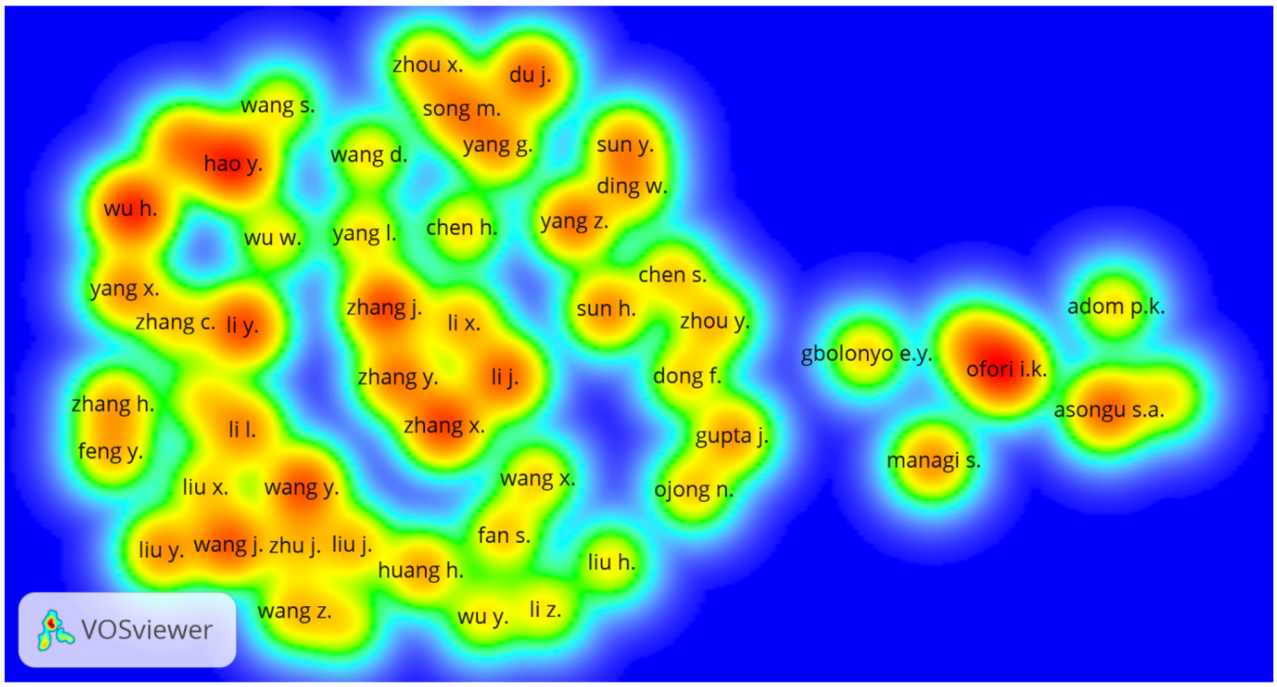

Figure 6. Co-citation analysis highlighting leading authors in the IGG field. In the figure, the citation density is plotted using a co-citation heatmap. Warmer colors (red) highlight highly cited authors, and cooler colors (blue) highlight the opposite. Each cluster represents a group of researchers who are frequently cited together.

Table 2. Most frequently co-cited authors in IGG research.

No.	Author	Total Citations	Total Link Strength
1	Hao Y.	55	2707
2	Wu Y.	54	2614
3	Li Y.	45	2172
4	Zhang J.	45	2072
5	Wang J.	39	2043
6	Wang J.	42	1899
7	Zhang X.	46	1865
8	Li J.	39	1804
9	Ofori I.K.	56	1758
10	Du J.	40	1727

3.3. Bibliographic Coupling Analysis of Sources

A bibliographic coupling analysis of sources reveals a heat map of journals such as Business Strategy and the Environment, Environmental Science and Pollution Research, and Journal of Environmental Management with the highest total link strength as the main sources of publication of IGG findings (Figure 7). The dense and strong links between these sources indicate how these journals have taken lead in the bibliographic footprint of IGG-related research.

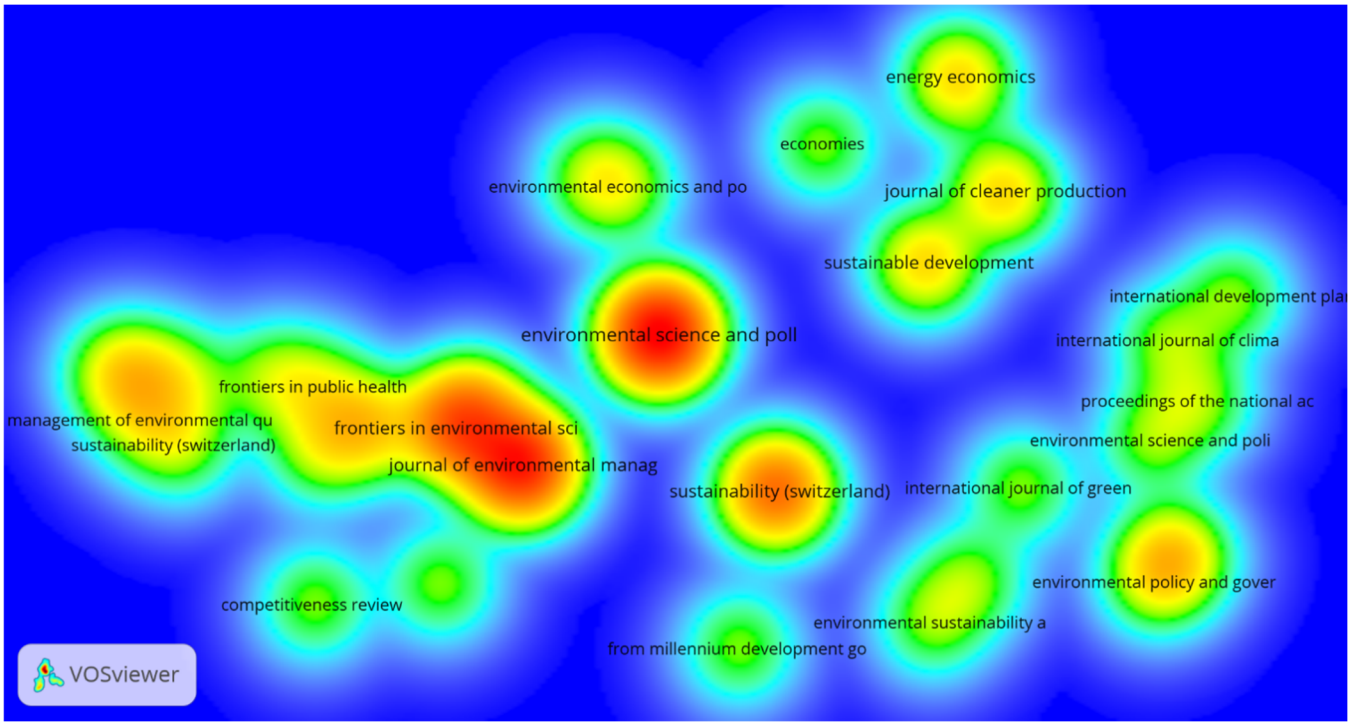

Figure 7. Bibliographic coupling network of journals publishing IGG studies. The color codes are as explained in Figure 6.

According to the findings of this study (Table 3), "Business Strategy and the Environment" is at the top of the list with 274 citations and 149 total link strength, followed by "Environmental Science and Pollution Research" with 176 citations and 155 total link strength. Meanwhile, "Journal of Environmental Management" is the key journal with the highest total link strength in the IGG field with 189. "Journal of Environmental Management" has 71 citations, but it has strong and effective links with 197 total link strength. Given the importance of the IGG field, even sources such as "Clean Technologies and Environmental Policy" have contributed to the spread of this knowledge with 60 total link strength.

One finding was consistent across all the results: economic and environmental dimensions continue to dominate IGG research, while attention to the social dimension has been neglected. This imbalance suggests that while inclusiveness is one of the main goals of IGG, the current trajectory is driven by a growth-oriented and technocratic bias. Addressing this gap is therefore essential to realizing the transformative potential of IGG under the Sustainable Development Goals.

Table 3. Bibliographic coupling of journals publishing IGG studies.

No.	Source	DOC	TC	TLS
1	Business strategy and the environment	2	274	149
2	Environmental science and pollution research	7	176	155
3	Journal of environmental management	6	78	189
4	Journal of cleaner production	2	71	197
5	Sustainability (Switzerland)	5	68	153
6	Energy economics	2	62	143
7	Sustainable development	2	24	146
8	Frontiers in environmental science	3	21	115
9	Environmental economics and policy studies	1	15	54
10	Clean technologies and environmental policy	1	3	60

3.4. Citation Analysis of Sources

Studies and articles published by the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, with 370 citations, represent the centrality and significant influence of these studies in the citation heatmap (Figure 8). Other relatively hot spots include business and environmental strategy, and science and environmental pollution research in the next ranks. The concentration of citations in these three sources highlights a strong core in the IGG literature around the development of theoretical foundations for subsequent studies (Figure 8).

PNAS leads the field of inclusive green growth by a wide margin with 370 citations and leads the field. Business Strategy and the Environment with 274 citations and 16 TLS and Environmental Science and Pollution Research with 176 citations and 21 TLS showed interest in publishing research in this area (Table 4). In contrast, Environmental Policy and Governance with 165 citations has no linking power, meaning its effects are often isolated. Journal of Environmental Management (78 citations, 6 TLS) and Sustainability (Switzerland) (68 citations, 3 TLS) have moderate power in the field of inclusive green growth, while less cited sources such as the International Development Planning Review (31 citations) diversify the sources of studies in this area.

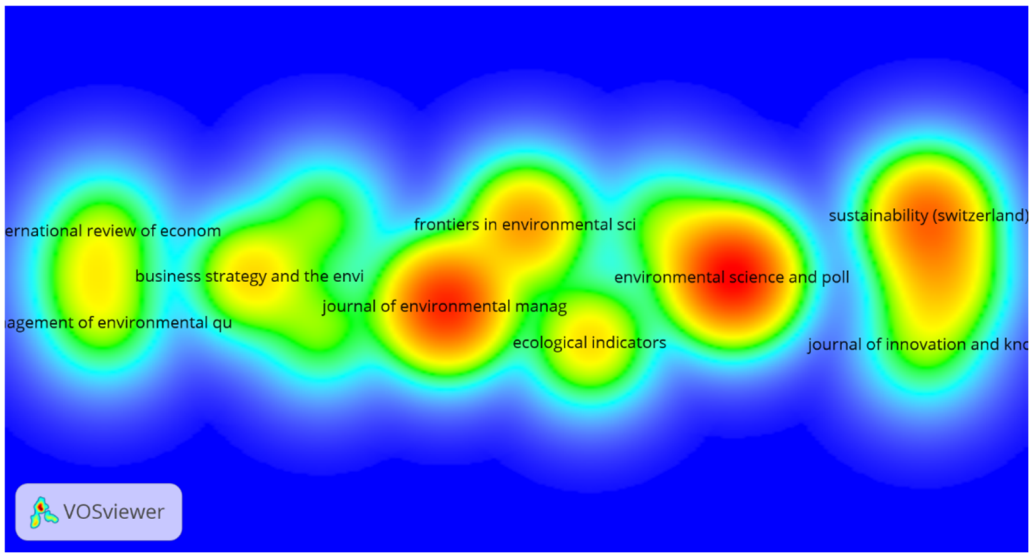

Figure 8. Citation density map of main journals contributing to IGG research. The color codes are similar as explained in Figure 6.

Table 4. Citation analysis of major sources in the IGG domain.

No.	Source	DOC	TC	TLS
1	Proceedings of the national academy of sciences of the USA	1	370	1
2	Business strategy and the environment	2	274	16
3	Environmental science and pollution research	7	176	21
4	Environmental policy and governance	1	165	0
5	Journal of environmental management	6	78	6
6	Journal of cleaner production	2	71	0
7	Sustainability (Switzerland)	5	68	3
8	Energy economics	2	62	0
9	Ecological indicators	2	41	3
10	International development planning review	1	31	0

The central role of transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary journals, on the one hand, demonstrates the inclusive nature of the IGG concept, and on the other hand, the high number of citations indicates that fundamental studies in this field have been diverse, especially the development of concepts of sustainability criteria, growth policies, and governance models. This number of citations indicates scientific trust in fundamental sources as the main focus of IGG research.

3.5. Relationship of Inclusive Green Growth to the SDG Goals via the TBL

The analysis of 58 single and exhaustive articles from these reviews in the table above clearly shows how the important concept of Inclusive Green Growth (IGG), which consists of three fundamental dimensions, operationalizes the key dimensions of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), namely economic, social and environmental, through direct and transparent links to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By examining the selected articles and their links to the SDGs, it was found that the economic dimension, especially the three dimensions SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), had the most references. The frequency of these interactions in both the bar chart and the table clearly shows that the economy-oriented SDGs have continued to be the focus of attention for IGG researchers.

The social dimension, although not as extensive as the economic dimension in terms of citations, contributes significantly to the inclusion of sustainable development. The four social dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals—SDG 3 (health and well-being), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and SDG 17 (participation for the Goals)—are the most important social dimensions that have received significant attention in IGG studies. The findings also clearly show that important concepts such as justice, resilience, and governance are increasingly receiving attention, but the bar chart shows that there is still a great need to integrate social research with environmental-economic strategies to balance the multidimensional IGG studies.

The third dimension in the studies, namely the environmental dimension, is linked to the Sustainable Development Goals through the three goals of SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), and SDG 13 (climate action). Table 5 shows the numerous studies of the IGG discourse that have been formed around the environmental dimension. The pie chart highlights the unique role of this area. The high importance of SDG 13 in theoretical studies clearly points out the urgent need to integrate practical climate action into IGG programs. This shows that the concept of IGG, although apparently a development-oriented concept, has its scientific appeal stemming from an environmental dimension.

The relationship of studies with all three dimensions of inclusive green growth in the form of Triple Bottom Line (TBL) clearly revealed a severe imbalance. High attention has been paid to economic aspects, both in the number of articles, the number of citations and theoretical and empirical insights. Environmental interactions have attracted a moderate number of studies, but social inclusion in this area has been neglected, and the pie and bar graphs have made this imbalance very prominent (Figures 9 and 10). Therefore, it seems that with all the progress made, the concept of IGG has developed more of an environmental-economic concept like “green growth” and its inclusion has not been developed from either a theoretical or a practical perspective. This neglect leads to increasing concerns from a policy and practical perspective: if the dimensions of equality and social justice are not paid attention to, the concept of IGG will be reduced to “green growth” instead of its main function, which is the inclusive sustainable development model.

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Table 5. Mapping Inclusive Green Growth to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) via the TBL.

TBL	IGG	SDG	Source	Score	NO
Economic Dimension	Economic Growth	SDG(1)	[4,20,26]	3	99
		SDG(2)	[4,27]	2	
		SDG(8)	[5–9,11–14,16,18,21,22,24,25,28–53]	41	
		SDG(9)	[4,8–11,13,14,17,21–24,32,34,36–38,40–42,44–50,52–59]	37	
		SDG(10)	[4,5,8,9,11,18,20–22,29,34,44,46,49,50]	16	
Social Dimension	Inclusive Growth	SDG(3)	[4,26,27]	3	26
		SDG(4)	[4]	1	
		SDG(5)	[4]	1	
		SDG(11)	[4,10,17,21,23,32,37,40,52,54,55,57,59,60]	14	
		SDG(16)	[4]	1	
		SDG(17)	[4,13,38,42,46,51]	6	
Environmental Dimension	Green Growth	SDG(6)	[4,15]	2	53
		SDG(7)	[1,4,13,14,44,46]	7	
		SDG(12)	[4–7,18,29–31,33,35]	10	
		SDG(13)	[4,6,12,13,15–17,20,24,26–28,30,31,33,36,46–48,51,53,56,58,60,61]	26	
		SDG(14)	[4,61]	2	
		SDG(15)	[4,15,16,35,59,61]	6	

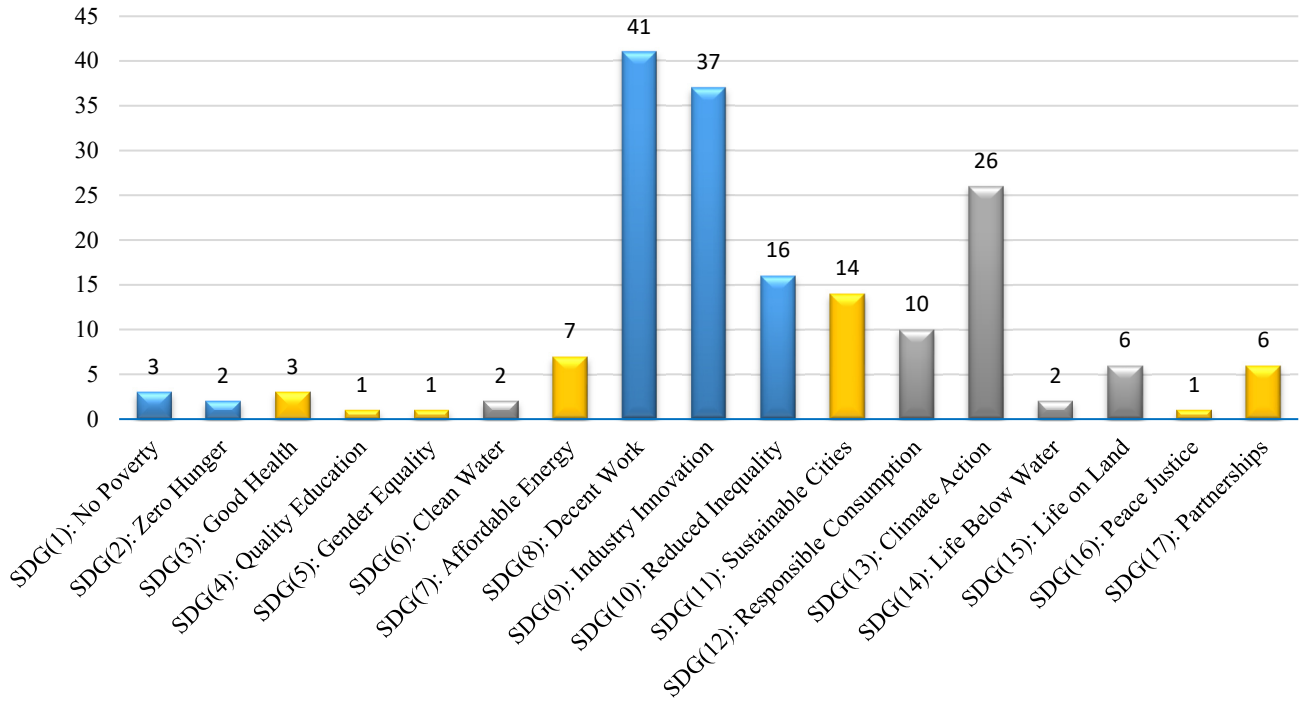

Figure 9. Bar chart of SDGs most frequently linked with IGG studies.

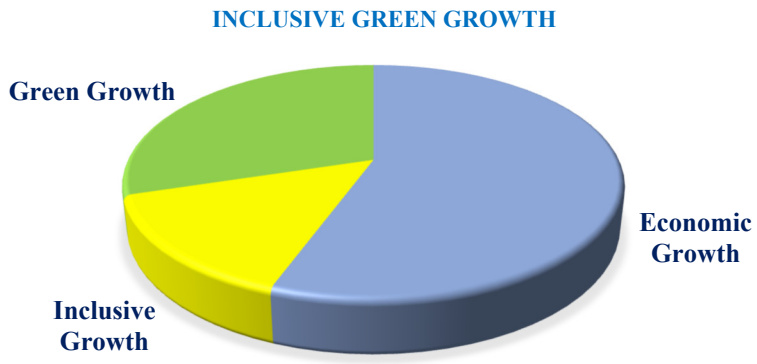

Figure 10. Pie chart showing imbalance across IGG's three dimensions.

The distribution pattern of the connection of the various to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) clearly demonstrates the interdisciplinary nature of the IGG concept. The prominence of SDGs 8, 9, and 13 in IGG research indicates the impact of its programs in integrating economic policies, climate action, and technological innovation. On the other hand, the scattered but effective links of the selected studies to SDGs 3, 5, and 11 indicate that human development perspectives have attracted attention. Although examining these clusters shows the connection of the selected articles to the SDGs and highlights specific goals, on the other hand, it reveals existing gaps. The most important gaps are the lack of attention to social concepts such as gender equality, governance, and partnerships to improve the "inclusive" dimension of the IGG for balance in research.

Integrating the findings from this study lead to a roadmap for future research: expanding studies on the social dimension, timely sectoral and cross-regional case studies, and proportionate analysis of all SDGs. The imbalance as revealed in the table, figures, and graph as presented in this work not only quantitative but also qualitative: in some areas, such as economic growth and climate action, research has been dynamic, while in others, such as equity, participation, and governance, the studies are yet to take up momentum. These gaps provide an opportunity to reform policies towards IGG within a more inclusive framework to make the SDGs substantively operational through TBL.

4. Discussion

This study presents a systematic review of representative research, highlighting the thematic and intellectual structure of inclusive green growth for operationalizing sustainable development (SD) through the Triple Bottom Line (TBL). The findings from our study through careful analysis, integrating co-occurrence patterns, co-citation structures, bibliographic linkages, and citation analysis, along with examining the linkages of sustainable development goals to economic, social, and environmental pillars, significantly help in planners and policymakers to comprehend the benefits and limitations of theoretical and practical aspects IGG.

The keyword co-occurrence analysis revealed the centrality and importance of the two concepts of "sustainable development" and "inclusive green growth". The strong and clear linkage of IGG with "green economy", "economic growth" and "China" showed that this concept follows a scientific perspective both thematically and regionally. China takes lead in IGG empirical studies and has emerged as a focal regional for global sustainability debates, although the transferability of results to other regions with different socio-political structures is limited. The review also reveals an imbalance in the dimensions of IGG research, where the inclusive dimension of IGG has received less attention and there is a clear research gap in this area.

The authors' keyword analysis suggests that the authors of the IGG studies have consciously integrated the importance of policy, climate change and development priorities. Thematic clustering highlighted two dominant perspectives: institutional-political frameworks and regional development. These two perspectives have created a tension in empirical planning between IGG as a lever for governance policymakers or a path for regional development and prosperity. The only solution is to develop intermediate studies to bridge the two dominant perspectives. Such a perspective can only be achieved by considering the multi-scale and intersectoral framework of the SDGs.

The co-citation analysis shows research leadership by a cluster of Chinese authors who advance the IGG discourse with empirical studies of quantitative policy modeling and a focus on environmental economics, especially with a case study of China. Although this path has developed quantitative and applied models and research, limited co-citation among Chinese researchers in this cluster has restricted the

international exchange of ideas and reduced the diversity of the knowledge base in this field. To increase diversity in IGG research, the need for interregional and trans-regional collaborations is strongly felt. The different geographical regions need to be bridged by promoting IGG studies, especially in cultural, social, institutional, and environmental fields.

Citation and bibliographic analysis indicate that IGG research is interdisciplinary. The major journals such as Business Strategy and the Environment, Environmental Science and Pollution Research, and Journal of Environmental Management publish the mainstay of research in this field. The combination of journals from the three fields of economics, business, and environmental science highlights the coherence of the IGG discourse. However, citation patterns indicate a high concentration of influence in a few journals, especially PNAS, where theoretical criteria are still shaped around sustainability. This finding suggests that IGG research has not yet passed the transition stage and is still relying on other disciplines and is gaining independence. For IGG to be independent, specialized publications and distinct specialized frameworks need to be developed.

The findings in Table 4, along with the accompanying bar and pie charts, highlight the alignment of IGG with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the TBL framework, as schematically shown in Figure 11. The economic dimension, particularly SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), are the most cited. This suggests that IGG continues to be a growth-oriented conceptual framework in the literature, relying on innovation, productivity and industrial development. The environmental dimension, particularly the focus on SDG 13 (climate action), reinforces the urgency of environmental transitions. However, the social dimension has been neglected, with few researchers in the IGG literature studying SDGs 3 (health), 5 (gender equality) and 17 (partnerships). This imbalance and lack of attention to inclusiveness—the boundary that distinguishes the IGG concept from traditional paradigms such as green growth—highlight a major gap in the literature.

The neglect of the social dimension in IGG studies and sustainability frameworks can be explained by theoretical foundations aligned with growth-oriented and technocratic discourses. These foundations focus more on economic productivity and environmental performance because they can be easily measured. However, social inclusion, including justice, participation and equity, is often a qualitative concept and not compatible with current measurement systems. Therefore, these social components are particularly neglected by planners.

The neglect of social inclusion in IGG research is a fundamental and critical gap. Without due attention to social concepts such as justice and governance, IGG risks being reduced to an older and narrower concept of green growth. A concept that lacks the potential for inclusiveness and transformation within the SDG framework. This deliberate bias in research towards the environmental and economic dimensions demonstrates the dominance of technocratic and growth-oriented discourses in sustainability discussions, while the foundations of inclusive green growth are built far beyond environmentally friendly growth. The social dimension must be strengthened by analyzing structural inequalities, ensuring equitable access to resources, and expanding participatory governance. This goal will not be achieved without strengthening marginalized voices, reducing gender inequality perspectives, and transforming local knowledge systems.

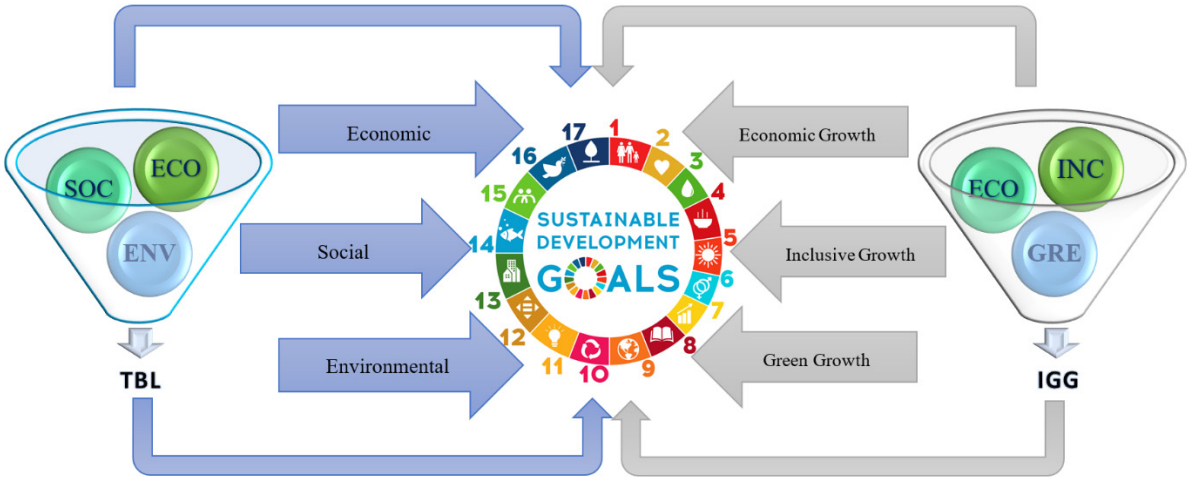

Figure 11. Schematic representation of IGG–SDGs relationship.

Other findings from our review highlight the need for methodological diversity. Studies relying on quantitative and econometric modeling, especially among Chinese researchers, while advancing the

economy-environment-policy interactions, the social dimension of IGG requires qualitative and dynamic approaches that incorporate theories of participation, governance, and cultural adaptation. Methodological pluralism and diversity of interdisciplinary studies not only fill the gaps identified in the table but also provide a useful avenue for a comprehensive and comprehensive understanding of how IGG is operationalized.

Finally, the findings emphasize the strategic role of the IGG in linking the SDGs to the TBL framework. The pattern extracted from the selected articles showed that the IGG is leading a discourse that simultaneously drives forward economic, environmental, and social goals. But the flaw lies in the imbalance of this progress. Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners need to be convinced that inclusion is not a secondary goal but a fundamental and central principle. Therefore, the gaps highlighted in this review should be redefined as opportunities: opportunities to strengthen methodological theories, extend empirical findings to a broader regional coverage, and deepen theories on the social dimensions of sustainability. If progress is made on the above opportunities, then IGG can achieve its original function as a transformative model capable of guiding the transition to sustainable and equitable futures.

Thus, although IGG connects sustainability theory to policy practice, some shortcomings remain. The current framework needs to be expanded from a descriptive to a critical modeling of governance structures to promote equity and how the benefits of green growth are distributed.

Despite the advantages of the IGG framework in addressing both economic and environmental dimensions, the socially focused Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—especially Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions)—remain largely ignored. Gender equality is a key concept for ensuring the equitable distribution of the benefits of green transitions, but this article shows that few studies have examined how IGG policies address gender gaps in access to employment, education and green decision-making. On the other hand, focusing on governance and institutional quality, which are key to SDG 16, would ensure transparency, accountability and the rule of law in the implementation of green growth initiatives. Ignoring these dimensions in the IGG framework would result in environmentally sustainable but socially flawed economic growth.

Critical Reflection and Limitations

Although this study brings out the intellectual and thematic structure of Inclusive Green Growth (IGG), there are several limitations. First, this analysis included English-language articles indexed in Scopus and the Web. Studies in other languages or published in local databases may provide additional valuable results. Second, bibliometric indicators focus more on quantitative relationships, but qualitative insights can also deepen the findings. Third, although this study highlights global and regional trends, these findings are themselves the result of global inequalities. Recognizing these limitations will allow future studies to build on a more diverse and methodologically pluralistic foundation.

Future research should expand the IGG discourse in several ways: studies should move beyond a focus on South Asia, especially China, to other regions. Second, combining qualitative methods in addition to quantitative bibliometric methods could highlight additional valuable findings. Third, focusing on the commonalities between digital transformation, green finance, and social justice could operationalize the inclusive nature of IGG. Finally, future work should develop interdisciplinary models that would provide a stronger empirical basis for implementing IGG policies for the balanced achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

5. Conclusions

This study systematically analyzed set of selected 58 peer-reviewed articles to examine and elaborate on the impact of implementing inclusive green growth within the sustainable development framework based on the triple bottom line. The study examined the relationship between sustainable development growth and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, thematic clusters, the intellectual structure of prominent researchers in this field, and the research trends and gaps in this topic. The findings showed that although inclusive green growth is closely related to the concept of sustainability, it has not yet been able to lead to smooth and homogeneous development in all three social, environmental, and economic dimensions.

Inclusive green growth has significantly improved economic criteria such as Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 9 and environmental criteria such as Sustainable Development Goal 13. However, inclusive green growth has not yet been able to lead to adequate global improvement in improving social dimensions such as governance, inclusion and justice, which shows that its inclusiveness has not yet been operationalized in the three aspects of IGG. In order to harmonize all dimensions of inclusive green growth, strengthening social dimensions, paying attention to international cooperation, interregional diversity and strengthening justice and governance are of great importance.

There were several limitations in the course of conducting this study such as the lack of attention to non-English articles and focusing on the bibliometric method, which can lead to a deficiency in the depth of

analysis. Future investigations could expand interregional studies and highlight global challenges in all three dimensions of inclusive green growth, especially justice, governance, digital energy transition, and climate resilience.

To operationalize the social dimensions of IGG, such as inclusion and pluralism, governance needs to be strengthened and participation improved. Strengthening multi-level governance systems that encompass national, regional, and local institutions can lead to the development of green, equitable growth strategies. Participatory policy design and implementation—green initiatives that involve civil society, academia, and the private sector—can help improve transparency and shared ownership. International partnerships, such as South-South and triangular cooperation, promote inclusion and global justice by learning from policy and transferring inclusive technologies across regions of the world, especially in developing regions. Finally, incorporating inclusion components (gender participation, community benefit indicators, and social justice audits) into IGG programs will institutionalize pluralism and enhance the balance between economic, environmental, and social goals.

In summary, IGG serves as a comprehensive and valuable concept in theory, but more attention need to be focused on all its dimensions including planning. Devoting more attention to existing gaps and expanding international planning on related issues can guide life on Earth towards a more just, developed, and sustainable future.

If policymakers are to foster inclusive green growth, a shift from conceptual frameworks to practical actions is imperative. Therefore, planners, especially governments, need to implement coordinated and comprehensive policies. For example, linking environmental taxation, social protection schemes and innovation incentives can advance green transitions and social inclusion in a balanced way. Improving the business environment, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in green industries, and improving equitable access to finance can strengthen inclusive justice. Such practical recommendations can transform the IGG from a theoretical agenda to an operational roadmap for sustainable and equitable development.

Author Contributions

M.A.: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation; Visualization; Writing—original draft. M.S.: Visualization; Investigation; Supervision; Validation; Writng-review & editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

All data reviewed in this work are presented in the paper.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. Co-author M. Santosh is Senior Consultant of this Journal, and was not involved in the editorial review or the decision to publish this article.

Use of AI and AI-assisted Technologies

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for initial writing. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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