

Public management in municipalities: Research trends using bibliometric indicators

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ABSTRACT

Objective. This article identifies research trends in public management within municipalities through a bibliometric analysis.

Design/Methodology/Approach. This is a bibliometric study using Scopus as a source for extracting scientific literature. For this purpose, indicators of productivity, impact, and thematic analysis are used.

Results/Discussion. The analysis of scientific production in public management reveals an exponential growth since 2000, with a marked increase from 2017, reaching its maximum in 2022 (41 publications). In addition, the ten most cited papers addressing topics such as organizational capacity, leadership, new public management (NPM), and e-government were identified. These papers coincide in pointing out that the organizational context and institutional characteristics are determinants in the impact of administrative reforms. Peru is poised to emerge as a key case study in 2024, with a focus on municipal management and local development. The most recurrent themes include efficiency in public services, NPM reforms, open innovation, and the role of e-government, evidencing a multidisciplinary research approach.

Conclusions. Publication practices in municipal public management are primarily carried out in specialized journals with a distinct local character. Meanwhile, the most recent research trends on the subject range from the use of ICTs to the work strategies of governments and decision-makers, in response to complex moments in decision-making.

Keywords: municipal public management; local public management; new public management; bibliometric analysis; public administration; local government.

INTRODUCTION

PUBLIC management is a fundamental pillar in the process of building fairer, more equitable and developed societies. In a global context characterized by accelerated changes, complex challenges, and increasingly

demanding citizen demands, the administration of public resources and services requires innovative, transparent, and efficient approaches. Public management encompasses not only the administration of goods and services but also the state's capacity to respond to the needs of its population, thereby guaranteeing

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collective well-being and promoting sustainable development.

In recent decades, public management paradigms have experienced significant changes. From adopting new public management models to integrating digital technologies and participatory methods, governments have aimed to adapt to a rapidly evolving environment. However, substantial challenges still exist, such as corruption, lack of transparency, inefficient resource use, and the need to enhance citizen participation in decision-making. There is a strong focus on the role of public management in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in creating more transparent, inclusive, and effective governments.

Public management is a crucial field for the efficient and effective operation of the State, as it is responsible for managing public resources and providing essential services to citizens. According to Hood (1991), modern public management focuses on efficiency, transparency, and accountability—principles that have guided administrative reforms over recent decades. In this context, public management involves not only resource administration but also the implementation of public policies that address social needs and promote sustainable development (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2016).

In a globalized world, public management faces complex challenges like digitization, crisis management, and increasing citizen participation. As Mergel *et al.* (2019) point out, digital transformation has changed how governments engage with citizens, demanding greater adaptability and innovation from public institutions. Additionally, the health crisis caused by COVID-19 has emphasized the need for efficient and resilient public management capable of responding effectively to emergencies (Boin & Lodge, 2021).

Collaborative governance has established itself as a key approach in modern public management. Ansell and Torfing (2020) highlight the critical importance of cooperation among public, private, and social actors to tackle complex and multi-sector challenges, such as climate change and social inequality. This approach not only enhances the legitimacy of public policies but also promotes inclusiveness and the co-creation of solutions.

After reviewing the literature on the subject, we identified works such as Birrell (2007), which offers a detailed analysis of the role played by local government in the process of reforming public administration in Northern Ireland. Throughout the text, challenges related to service improvement, devolution, and institutional modernization are discussed. The author emphasizes how these reform processes have impacted the structure and operation of local government, demonstrating a constant tension between centralization and the pursuit of greater local autonomy. In line with this theme, Birrell (2008) also examines the final outcomes of this administrative overhaul, focusing particularly on the tensions that develop between three main axes: the devolution of power, the principle of parity, and the goals of modernization. While recognizing significant progress, the author stresses that substantial obstacles still exist to implementing reforms that effectively balance these objectives.

From a different perspective, but equally focused on optimizing public management, Gomes and de Azevedo (2024) present a comprehensive review of the literature on the implementation of the *Balanced Scorecard* (BSC). The study examines the evolution of this strategic management tool, showing its gradual adaptation to improve institutional performance in the public sector while increasing transparency and efficiency. For his part, Halligan (2015) contributes to the field with a retrospective analysis of academic output in public administration, published in the *Australian Journal of Political Science*. Through an exhaustive and systematic review, the main trends and debates that have characterized this discipline are identified, emphasizing its growing role in analyzing public policies and responding to changes in the political and social context.

In the United States, Leach and Barnett (1997) examined how the principles of new public management (NPM) influenced local government review. The study demonstrates that NPM-inspired reforms have changed administrative practices, leading to increased efficiency and accountability, but also creating tensions related to standardization and loss of local authority. Over a decade later, Leach and Barnett (2013) revisit this topic to evaluate the outcomes of local government reorganization

in the United States. Their analysis shows how implementing NPM-inspired policies has reshaped institutional structures and brought both progress in modernization and ongoing challenges related to organizational adaptation and accountability.

On the other hand, Lee (1986) explores the role of judicial review in public administration, emphasizing its vital function in maintaining legality and ensuring administrative justice. The author contends that judicial review is a crucial mechanism for balancing the power of the administrative system and protecting citizens' fundamental rights against arbitrary decisions. Similarly, Montecinos and Contreras (2019) provide a critical review of the current state of citizen participation in public management. They highlight its value as a tool for enhancing transparency, accountability, and the effectiveness of public policies. However, they caution about the practical challenges involved in its effective implementation, especially in contexts with a low participatory culture or institutional weaknesses. Meanwhile, Nasi *et al.* (2023) have conducted an extensive systematic review of three decades of literature on urban competitiveness, with a specific focus on the role of public administration. Their study identifies key trends and overlooked areas of research, while proposing a future agenda aimed at connecting public management with sustainable urban development, acknowledging the increasing importance of cities as strategic spaces for innovation and governance.

A direct precursor to this study is the article: *"Tourism Versus Local Public Administration: Research Trends through Bibliometric Analysis,"* presented by Martins, Costa, and Costa (2023) at the *Smart Innovation, Systems, and Technologies conference*. This study explores the relationship between tourism and local public administration from an academic perspective, using bibliometric analysis to identify research trends and patterns in the field. It aims to understand how the interaction between the tourism sector and local government entities has been addressed in scientific literature, highlighting the challenges and opportunities that come with this dynamic. Through a comprehensive systematic review of scientific publications, the authors identify main research topics, commonly used methodologies, and the

most studied geographic areas. The bibliometric analysis shows a growing interest in tourism governance, sustainability, and the participation of local communities in decision-making. It also underscores the importance of cooperation between the public and private sectors to maximize tourism benefits and reduce its negative impacts.

The previously mentioned article emphasizes the need for greater integration between tourism policies and local development strategies, recommending that public administration take a more proactive and collaborative role. The authors conclude that although there is considerable research on the topic, gaps still exist in the literature, especially regarding comparative studies across different regions and the influence of new technologies on tourism management. Based on the background mentioned above, this study will analyze research trends in the literature on public management in municipalities, also known as local public management. This will be done through a thorough review of documents indexed in the Scopus database.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was based on bibliometric techniques, with procedures shown in Figure 1. First, a database was selected to search for and gather the scientific literature on the topic. In this case, the Scopus database was chosen. The resulting information was processed using tools like Excel, the EndNote bibliographic manager, and the study indicators were calculated with the Bibliometrix visualization and analysis tool. VOSviewer software was also used to represent thematic trends.

The Scopus database was chosen because it is multidisciplinary, international, and has extensive coverage. Therefore, the sample covered the period from 1978 to 2024. Terms related to the subject, along with their combinations, were defined using the Boolean operator *OR*. Additionally, the sample was filtered by document type to include only citable documents such as original articles, review articles, conference papers, and book chapters. To obtain the desired results, the following search query was used: *(TITLE ("public management") OR TITLE ("public administration"))*

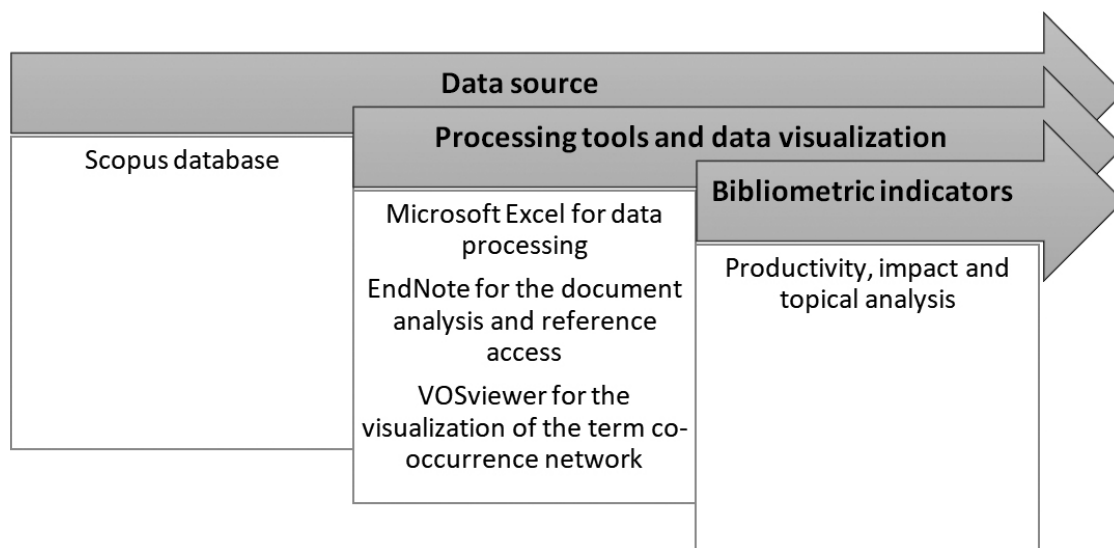


Figure 1 . Bibliometric analysis procedure used in the study.

AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("local participation") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("local government") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (municipality) AND PUBYEAR > 1977 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "cp") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ch") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "re"))*.

The retrieved data were cleaned and normalized. Additionally, files were exported and imported to carry out the procedures before calculating the indicators. For generating frequency reports of the variables being measured, the integral analysis was performed in *R* using the *Biblioshiny* package. The bibliometric indicators calculated and analyzed qualitatively are shown below.

- Scientific production indicators: number of papers per year, number of most productive publication sources, and number of most productive institutions and countries.
- Scientific impact indicators: average number of citations per paper and number of most cited papers.
- Thematic analysis: map of thematic trends over the last 10 years and keyword co-occurrence network.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Figure 2, the number of published papers has significantly increased since 2017. Conversely, there has been a notable rise in

citations during the early years of the 21st century. In the first two decades (1978-1999), the numbers are relatively low, fluctuating between 1 and 8, with no clear trend of growth in scientific output. Starting from 2000, a more pronounced increase is evident, especially since 2003 when scientific publications begin to surpass 10 papers annually. This growth accelerates after 2015, peaking in 2022 with 41 records. Although there are minor fluctuations in recent years (e.g., a decline in 2023 and 2024), the overall trend remains upward, indicating sustained research growth in the field.

The most recent period (2017-2024) is characterized by high scientific output, with over 30 papers produced each year, approaching nearly 40. This contrasts sharply with the 1980s and 1990s, when publication rates were sporadic and much lower. The significant difference between the two periods may suggest a change in the conditions that drive research activity in the field.

As shown in Table 1, the list of the ten papers with the highest number of citations highlights the results that have had the greatest impact in the scientific community and therefore hold notable relevance during this period. Below is a summary of the main findings and the most frequently used contents in research on these topics.

- Andrews & Boyne (2010) examine the relationship between organizational capacity, leadership, and performance in the public sector. The authors present a "black box"

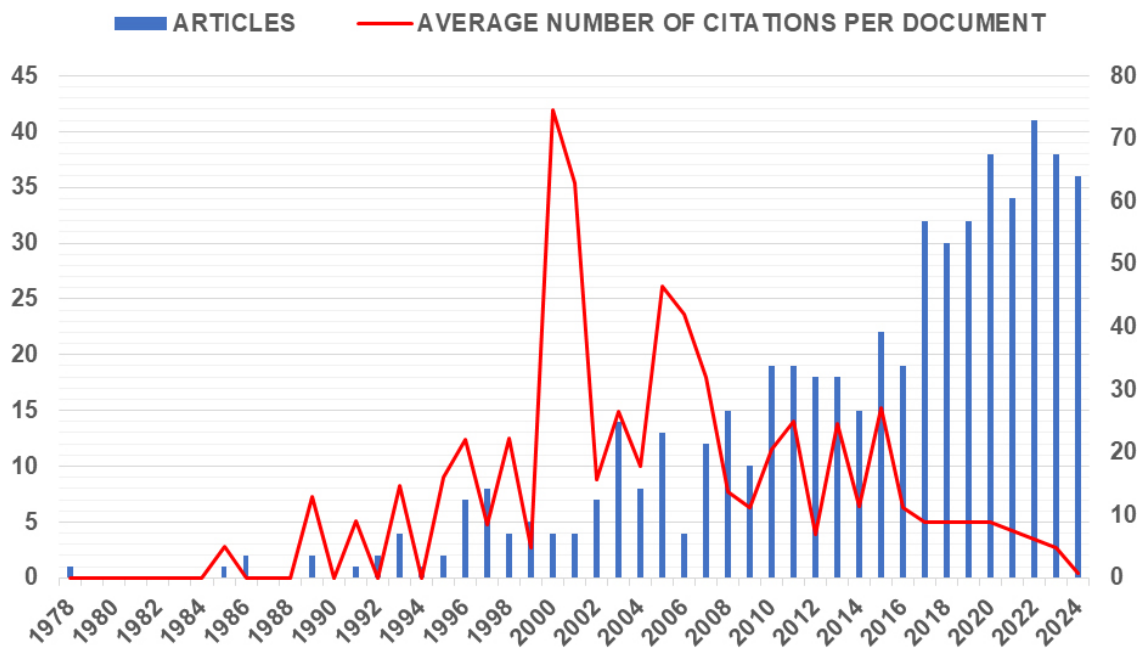


Figure 2. Evolution of the number of documents and average number of citations per year.

model suggesting that capacity and leadership influence organizational performance. Their findings indicate that both factors are vital, although their impact varies based on the context and the organization's inherent characteristics.

2. Andrews & van de Walle (2013) conducted a study analyzing how citizens' perceptions of the efficiency, equity, effectiveness, and responsiveness of local services are influenced by NPM practices. The findings indicate that NPM positively affects perceptions of efficiency but does not necessarily improve other aspects such as equity or effectiveness.
3. Feller, Finnegan, & Nilsson (2011) examine how open innovation can transform public administration and business models. They propose a typology of transformation that includes changes in organizational structure, processes, and culture, highlighting the potential of open innovation to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector.
4. Gendron, Cooper & Townley (2001) explore the shortcomings in implementing the NPM from the perspective of government audit and accountability. The authors contend that while the NPM has increased audit and control, questions remain about whether it truly enhances transparency and independence in public administration.
5. James & John (2007): a study examining how information about local government performance affects voters' support for incumbent candidates. The findings indicate that voters tend to recognize and appreciate governments that perform well. This suggests that good governance can directly influence electoral results.
6. O'Toole & Meier (2015): a broader theory of governance is developed, considering context and performance. As mentioned earlier, it is essential to recognize that organizational and environmental contexts are key in understanding how management practices influence performance. Therefore, a theoretical framework that incorporates these factors has been suggested.
7. Perez-Lopez, Prior & Zafra-Gómez (2015): examines the long-term effects of different service delivery methods under the NPM on the efficiency of Spanish local governments. The findings indicate that although some delivery methods may boost efficiency in the short term, they do not guarantee sustainable long-term improvements.
8. Torres, Pina & Royo (2005) explore in depth how *e-government* is transforming public administrations in the European Union, beyond the NPM. After a thorough investigation, it is concluded that e-government represents a

- second wave of reforms that complements, but does not replace, the principles of the NPM. It is also determined that its impact varies depending on the national context.
9. Vigoda (2000): an article that examines the relationship between internal politics in public organizations, work congruence, organizational citizenship behavior, and role performance. The results show that internal politics negatively affect congruence and performance, but not necessarily organizational citizenship behavior.
10. Walker & Boyne (2006) assess the impact of the UK Labour Government's public

management reforms on public service performance. The findings show that the reforms had a positive effect, although this varied depending on the type of service and the organizational context.

As shown, the articles cover different aspects of public management, from organizational capacity and leadership to NPM reforms and e-government effects. There is a general agreement on the importance of context and organization-specific traits in understanding how management practices influence performance and citizen perceptions.

Article reference	DOI	Citation
O'TOOLE LJ, 2015, J PUBLIC ADM RES THEORY	10.1093/jopart/muu011	240
ANDREWS R, 2013, PUBLIC MANAGE REV	10.1080/14719037.2012.725757	220
WALKER RM, 2006, J POLICY ANAL MANAGE	10.1002/pam.20177	161
TORRES L, 2005, ONLINE INFO REV	10.1108/14684520510628918	159
VIGODA E, 2000, PUBLIC PERS MANAGE	10.1177/009102600002900203	152
GENDRON Y, 2001, ACCOUNT AUDIT ACCOUNT J	10.1108/EUM0000000005518	148
JAMES O, 2007, J PUBLIC ADM RES THEORY	10.1093/jopart/mul020	145
PEREZ-LOPEZ G, 2015, J PUBLIC ADM RES THEORY	10.1093/jopart/muu088	139
ANDREWS R, 2010, PUBLIC ADM REV	10.1111/j.1540-6210.2010.02158.x	131
FELLER J, 2011, EUR J INF SYST	10.1057/ejis.2010.65	116

Table 1. List of the ten most cited papers.

It is essential to note that this discipline is characterized by its specialization in a specific field of knowledge, closely linked to public administration, management, and specifically oriented towards the public context. The *Revista Venezolana de Gerencia* is presented as a local, regional, and Latin American publication, which has maintained a strong presence throughout the extensive period of analysis.

In another order of ideas, we note that, of the total of 408 institutions, two Spanish universities stand out as leaders in productivity on the subject (Table 2). The presence of Venezuelan and Italian institutions is also notable in this corpus of documents. In contrast, this situation is not evident in the most productive countries, where the United States, Brazil, and Italy stand out as leaders in this field (Figure 4).

When analyzing the trending topics of the period, relevant terms are identified (Figure 5). It is clear that Peru appears at the end of the period in 2024, a point discussed in the article by Pozo Enciso *et al.* (2024). This study focuses on

public management for local development within the administrative area of a municipality in Peru. The authors explore how public management can influence local development, emphasizing the perceptions of the actors involved in municipal administration. It is important to highlight the importance of efficient and participatory management to improve public services and promote sustainable development in the Peruvian context.

Other studies in 2024 focus on various geographical contexts or general public administration topics, such as digitalization, collaboration in forest policies, crisis management, new public management, citizen participation, as well as topics related to governance and public management. The contemporary world faces complex challenges that require innovative and adaptive approaches. Work such as that of Aiello *et al.* (2024) highlights the importance of territorial monitoring services for local administrations, like the *IRIDE EOS4LPA Lot 3* project, which integrates geospatial technologies to

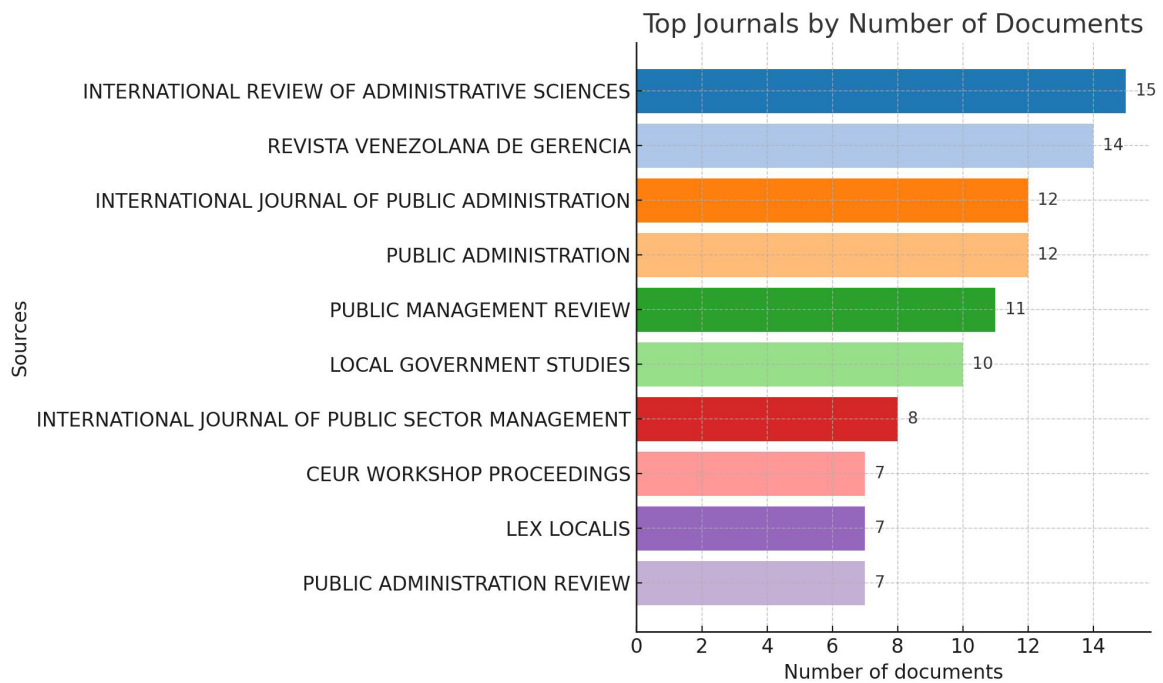


Figure 3. Most productive sources of information on the subject (1978-2024 in Scopus).

Affiliation	Country	Number of articles
Autonomous University of Madrid	Spain	10
University of La Laguna	Spain	8
Bucharest University of Economic Studies	Romania	7
Cardiff University	United Kingdom	6
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu	Romania	6
Politecnico di Milano	Italy	6
University of Torino	Italy	6
University of Zulia	Venezuela	6
Federal University of Mato Grosso	Brazil	6
University of Muenster	Germany	6
University of Zenica	Bosnia and Herzegovina	6
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University	Kazakhstan	5
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv	Ukraine	5
University of São Paulo	Brazil	5
University of Cagliari	Italy	5
University of Catania	Italy	5
University of Granada	Spain	5
University of Milan	Italy	5
University of Parma	Italy	5
University of Siena	Italy	5

Table 2. Scientific productivity by institutions.

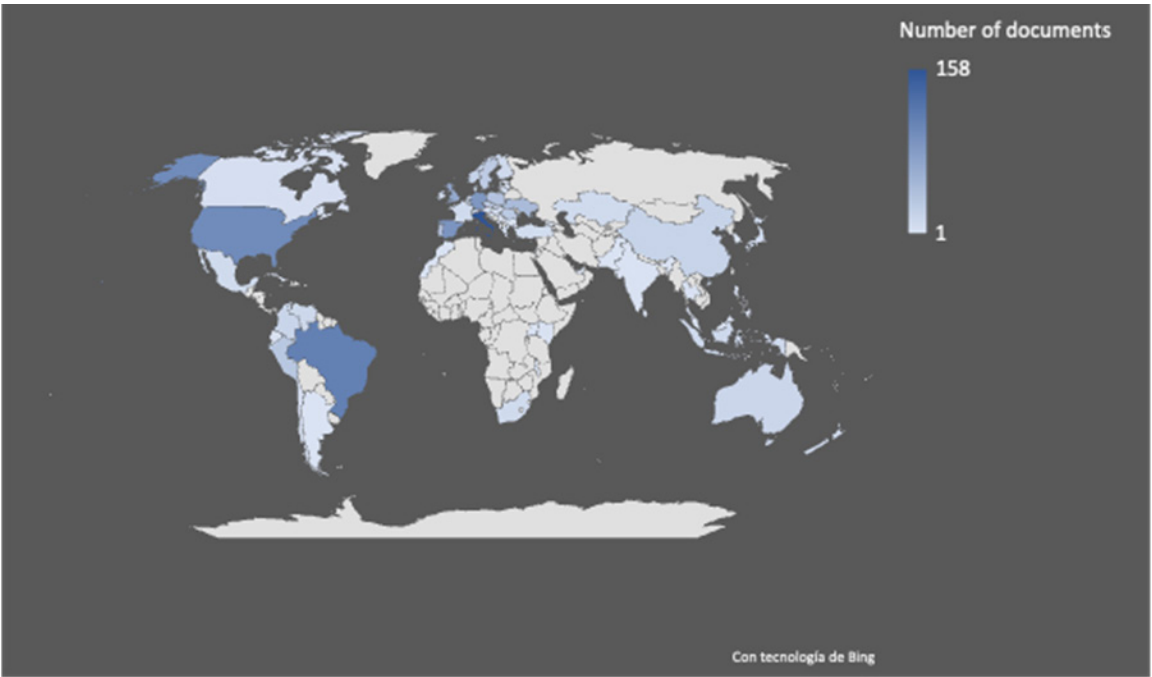


Figure 4. Map of countries with the most significant presence in research on public management in municipalities (1978-2024 in Scopus).

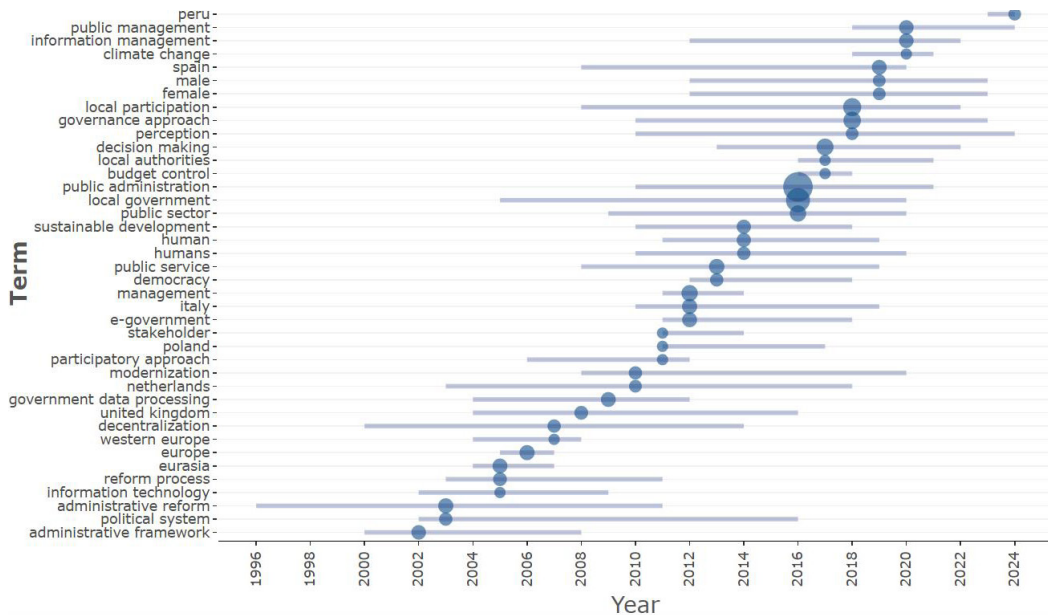


Figure 5. Trends in public management in municipalities in Scopus).

enhance urban and environmental planning. Meanwhile, Aristovnik *et al.* (2024) propose an empirical model to assess digitization in public administration, emphasizing the need for standardized frameworks to measure its impact on efficiency and transparency. Similarly, Bjärstig *et al.* (2024) examine collaboration as a policy

tool in forest governance, demonstrating how cross-sector partnerships can overcome institutional barriers. These works exemplify a trend toward technological and collaborative solutions for complex public issues, though they also reveal tensions in implementation, such as resistance to change or institutional fragmentation.

The intersection of public management and global crises has sparked new research directions. Caramia *et al.* (2024) examine how auditors in Italy developed *sensemaking* during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting adaptability as a crucial factor in uncertain situations. Meanwhile, Castellini *et al.* (2024) investigate the evolution of new public management in Italian municipalities, emphasizing risk management as a key element. Other researchers (e.g., Dacombe & Wojciechowska, 2024) connect democratic theory and public administration, arguing that citizen participation can enhance the legitimacy of decisions. Studies like Falanga (2024) in Lisbon show that participatory processes can change civil servants' perceptions, though gaps remain between expectations and outcomes. These contributions highlight the importance of balancing innovation, accountability, and institutional resilience, particularly in times of crisis or digital transformation.

The literature on public administration in 2023 highlights key challenges such as adapting to turbulent environments, digitization, and sustainability. Ansell, Sørensen and Torfing (2023) emphasize the need for strong governance to manage complex crises, while Kostyrev *et al.* (2023) and Kuhlmann and Marienfeldt (2023) demonstrate the transformative role of digitalization in improving government efficiency and transparency. Conversely, Bisogno *et al.* (2023)

and Moretti and Stamponi (2023) underscore the importance of incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into local management through inter-institutional collaboration and renewable energy initiatives. Additionally, Criado and Villodre (2023) note that citizen participation, facilitated by social networks, enhances trust in institutions. These studies reflect a public agenda centered on resilience, technological innovation, and inclusive policies, although issues like multilevel coordination and resistance to change still remain (Profiroiu and Nastacă, 2023; Schäfer *et al.*, 2023).

To complement the thematic analysis, the keyword co-occurrence network with trend visualization over the past 10 years is shown in Figure 6. The network reveals the formation of 11 key thematic clusters. These are related to terms such as: new public management, citizen participation, local administration or management, decentralization, digital government and transformation (e-government), efficiency, corruption, administrative reforms, public policies, and democracy. As a significant trend in public management, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is also evident. This phenomenon affected local governance structures, leading to crises in management. In this context, the literature also reflects the different strategies and policy designs that have emerged in response to the social changes since 2020.

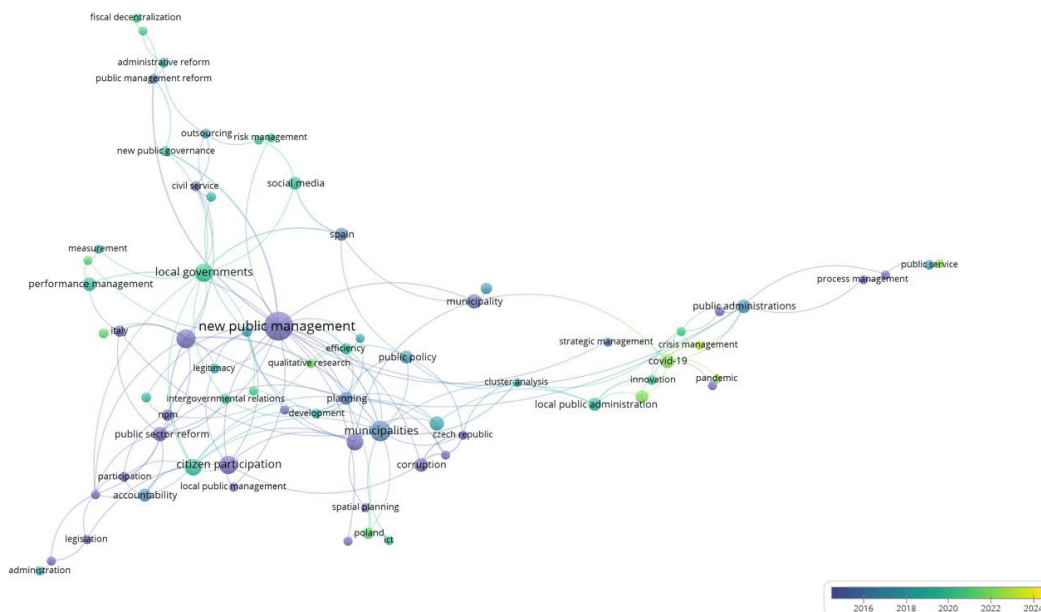


Figure 6. Network of keyword co-occurrence during the years 2015-2024.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As can be seen, publication practices on municipal public management are mostly conducted in specialized journals with a distinct local focus. Concerning the latest research trends on the topic, these include the use of ICTs and the work strategies of governments and decision-makers, aiming to address complex decision-making moments. The goal is to achieve more effective local leadership and management during economic crisis scenarios and to leverage local potential.

Research in public management has experienced rapid growth in recent years, especially since 2017, reaching a peak in 2022. This growth reflects the increasing academic and practical importance of the field, driven by the need to improve the efficiency, transparency, and adaptability of public administrations in a constantly changing world. A key finding is the emphasis on context as a crucial factor for the success of reforms. The most cited studies agree that models like the NPM do not have a uniform impact; instead, their effectiveness varies based on the institutional, cultural, and political characteristics of each country. This challenges the idea of universal solutions and underscores the importance of adjusting management strategies to local realities.

Geographically, although the United States and Europe continue to lead in scientific output, Latin America is emerging as an active research region, with notable contributions from countries such as Brazil, Venezuela, and more recently, Peru. These studies provide valuable insights into the specific challenges of public management in developing contexts, enhancing the global discussion. Regarding future trends, topics like open innovation, e-government, and local development are expected to grow in importance. However, analyzing these areas will require multidisciplinary approaches that consider not only technical factors but also cultural, social, and institutional ones. This paper shows the dynamic evolution of the field and emphasizes the need for more comparative research to understand differences in reform outcomes worldwide and to move toward more inclusive and practical models.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest.

Statement of data consent

The data generated during the development of this study have been included in the manuscript. ●

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