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STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstrak

Perubahan tata kelola pemerintahan yang bersifat dari terpusat ke desentralisasi menjadikan keberadaan pemerintah lokal (daerah) menjadi sangat penting dalam penyelenggaraan urusan publik dan pelayanan kepada Masyarakat. Tingginya harapan Masyarakat dan perubahan lingkungan global menjadi tantangan tersendiri bagi pemerintah daerah. Oleh karena itu, pemerintah lokal dituntut lebih adaptif dan inovatif dalam mengelola pemerintahannya. Seiring dengan reformasi manajemen sektor publik, pada dua dekade terakhir dalam praktik maupun kajian administrasi publik menekankan pentingnya adopsi alat atau instrumen manajemen yang dikenal dengan sebutan manajemen strategis sektor publik. Penelitian berusaha menggali informasi perkembangan teori dan konsep manajemen strategis yang dikaji oleh peneliti-peneliti yang telah dipublikasikan melalui database bereputasi internasional. Penelitian ini menerapkan metode systematic literature review dalam tema manajemen strategis sektor publik di pemerintahan lokal untuk mengetahui perkembangan kajian tema tersebut dalam dua dekade terakhir. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi berbagai celah dan menyoroti tema-tema yang terus berkembang dalam manajemen strategis, dengan menekankan pentingnya integrasi metodologi lintas disiplin dan perspektif global. Penelitian di masa depan diharapkan dapat memprioritaskan pemanfaatan teknologi digital, kerangka kerja partisipatif, dan pendekatan inklusif untuk menjawab kebutuhan tata kelola yang terus berubah secara dinamis

Kata Kunci: *Strategic Management; Local Government; Systemic Literature Review*

Abstract

The shift in governance from a centralized to a decentralized system has made local governments increasingly significant in managing public affairs and delivering services to society. The high expectations of the public and changes in the global environment present unique challenges for local governments. Consequently, local governments are required to be more adaptive and innovative in their governance practices. In line with

public sector management reforms, the last two decades have seen both practices and studies in public administration emphasizing the importance of adopting management tools or instruments known as public sector strategic management. This research seeks to explore the development of theories and concepts of strategic management as studied by researchers and published in internationally reputable databases. A systematic literature review method is applied to the theme of public sector strategic management in local government to examine the development of this theme over the past two decades. This research identifies gaps and highlights the evolving themes in strategic management, underscoring the need to integrate interdisciplinary methodologies and global perspectives. Future studies should prioritize leveraging digital tools, participatory frameworks, and equity-driven approaches to address rapidly changing governance demands.

INTRODUCTION

The global shift from centralized to decentralized governance systems has profoundly reshaped the role and responsibilities of local governments. Decentralization, characterized by transferring fiscal, political, and administrative powers to the local level, is often viewed as a medium to improve governance responsiveness and efficiency. This shift has elevated local governments as pivotal actors in managing public affairs, addressing societal challenges, and delivering essential services. However, decentralization's success largely depends on the robustness of local institutions and their ability to navigate governance complexities (Faguet, 2011; Wang, 2013).

As local governments assume greater responsibilities, they must address rising public expectations and adapt to dynamic global conditions, including economic instability and climate change. This necessitates governance models that are both innovative and strategic. Strategic management, widely regarded as essential in public sector governance, has emerged as a vital tool for local governments seeking to optimize performance and respond proactively to their complex environments (Bryson, 2010). Studies show that decentralization can improve governance outcomes, including increased public accountability and service delivery efficiency, particularly when local

institutions actively engage stakeholders and maintain accountability structures (Cuadrado-Ballesteros, 2014).

The intersection of decentralization and strategic management highlights the importance of tailored approaches in local governance. Effective implementation of strategic management practices requires consideration of contextual factors such as local capacities, political dynamics, and resource distribution. Comparative studies across various regions, including Asia, Africa, and Latin America, reveal that while decentralization can enhance governance responsiveness, its effectiveness is influenced by institutional strength and the degree of public participation (Devas & Delay, 2006).

Innovation and adaptability are essential components of strategic management in the public sector. Local governments are tasked with addressing challenges such as urbanization, resource scarcity, and sustainability. Strategic management frameworks allow for the development of long-term goals while addressing immediate community needs. These tools also enable governments to measure the impact of policies and engage effectively with diverse stakeholders (Wright et al., 2016).
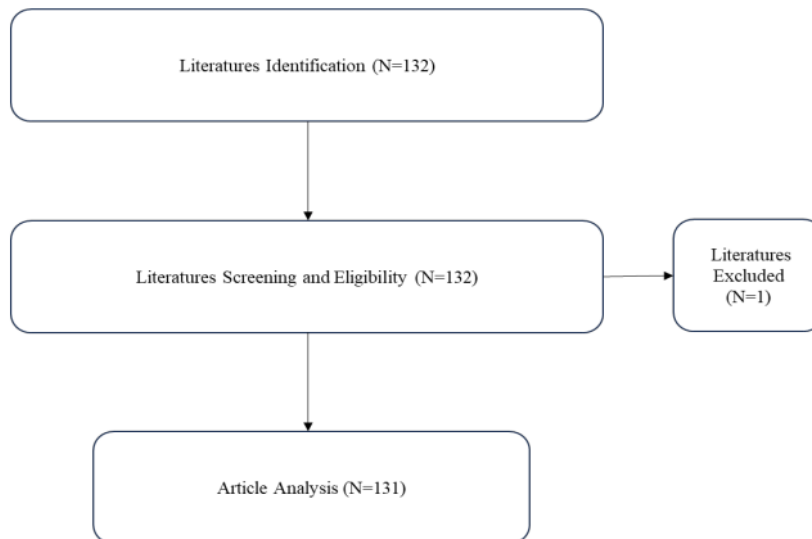
Despite its potential, decentralization is not without challenges. Inequities in resource distribution and variations in governance capacities across regions can undermine its effectiveness. Studies from Bolivia and Indonesia, for instance, highlight both the opportunities and limitations of decentralization, emphasizing the need for comprehensive planning and capacity building (Nijenhuis, 2002; Shah & Chaudhry, 2004).

This research seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on the role of strategic management in local goverment. By conducting a systematic literature review, the study aims to map the evolution of strategic management theories and their application in diverse government contexts. It examines how these tools have shaped the capacity of local governments to address emerging challenges over the past two decades (Rumbach, 2016).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, a systematic, accountable, and explicit process for reviewing research literature (Gough et al., 2012). The primary objectives of a systematic literature review are twofold. First, to identify and synthesize existing knowledge on a specific research topic or objective, enabling researchers to understand the body of relevant scientific knowledge (Dekkers et al., 2022). Second, to identify areas for future research by highlighting gaps in the existing knowledge, uncovering unanswered questions, and suggesting directions for further investigation. Accordingly, this study will review the literature on Strategic Management in Local Government to explore its development and outline potential future research directions.

Graph 1. Systematic Literatur Review (SLR) Process

Literatures Identification (N=132)

Literatures Screening and Eligibility (N=132)

Literatures Excluded (N=1)

Article Analysis (N=131)

1. Literature Identification

   The first stage involves Literature Identification. This study will utilize the Scopus database, which is widely recognized as a representative source for Public Administration and Public Management studies. Many leading academic journals in these fields, such as *Public Management Review*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, and *Public Administration Review*, reference this database as a key metric. Consequently, exploring this database is essential, as it encompasses top-tier academic journals in the field.

2. Literature Screening and Eligibility

   The second stage involves Literature Screening and Eligibility. After duplicates are removed, the metadata of the articles will be filtered based on the following criteria:

   a) Language: Only articles published in English will be included.

   b) Publication Status: Only journal publications will be considered, excluding proceedings, books, reports, or other types of publications.

   c) Publication Year: All publication years will be included in the consideration.

   d) Search Focus: Searches will be conducted on titles, abstracts, and keywords, focusing on concepts such as strategic management, strategic planning, or organizational strategy in the context of local government, including both urban and rural settings.

   e) Subject Area: The study will focus on research categorized under Social Sciences and Business, Management, and Economics.

   To ensure a comprehensive search, a query was conducted in the Scopus database on November 26, 2024. This approach aims to capture the most relevant and high-quality literature in the field.

TITLE (("strategic management" OR "strategic planning" OR "organizational strategy") AND ("local government" OR "municipality" OR "city" OR "rural" OR "urban")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBAREA , "BUSI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English"))

The query results identified 132 articles for analysis. After a thorough review, one duplicate article was found, reducing the final total to 131 articles included in the study. This final dataset will serve as the basis for the subsequent analysis.

3. In the final stage, the researcher conducts an Article Analysis on the 131 selected articles. After filtering all records, the analysis proceeds with a bibliometric analysis using the Bibliometrix library, which is implemented in the R programming language. Bibliometrix is a comprehensive tool designed for bibliometric and scientometric analysis, offering capabilities for detailed data exploration and visualization of the selected literature (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). This approach facilitates a systematic understanding of the research landscape, trends, and key contributions within the identified articles.

RESULT

MAIN INFORMATION

The analysis of the Scopus database on the topic of strategic management in local government reveals several key insights about the research landscape, its evolution, and collaboration trends (Table 1):

Table 1. Main Information

MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	1981:2024
Sources (Journals)	107
Documents	131
Annual Growth Rate %	4.63
Document Average Age	12
Average citations per doc	15.93
References	6006
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	492
Author's Keywords (DE)	375
AUTHORS	
Authors	322
Authors of single-authored docs	42
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	45
Co-Authors per Doc	2.5
International co-authorships %	14.5
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	131

Source: Scopus, 2024, Analyzed by Author using Bibliometrix

1. Main Information About Data

- Timespan (1981–2024): The dataset spans over four decades, indicating a long-standing academic interest in strategic management within local government contexts.

- Sources and Documents: With 107 journals contributing 131 documents, the topic has a broad yet focused representation, suggesting that strategic

management in local governance is covered across a wide range of academic sources but not excessively fragmented.

- Annual Growth Rate (4.63%): The steady annual growth rate reflects the increasing academic interest and relevance of strategic management in addressing local governance challenges over time.
- Document Age and Citations: An average document age of 12 years and 15.93 citations per document indicate a balanced mix of historical and influential research, as well as relatively robust academic engagement with each publication.
- References (6,006): The high number of references highlights the depth of the research and the extensive foundation upon which these studies build.

2. Document Contents

- Keywords Plus (492) and Author's Keywords (375): The high number of keywords suggests diverse perspectives and themes within the research, covering various aspects of strategic management, planning, and organizational strategies. This diversity reflects the multidisciplinary nature of the topic and its application in different governance contexts.

3. Authors

- Total Authors (322): A significant number of contributors demonstrates strong academic engagement, indicating the global relevance of strategic management in local government.
- Single-Authored Documents (42): Although a smaller proportion of studies are single-authored, this reflects the collaborative nature of research in this area, which benefits from multidisciplinary and collective expertise.

4. Author Collaboration

- Single-Authored Documents (45): Only about 34% of the documents are single-authored, while the majority involve collaborations, reinforcing the importance of diverse academic contributions in tackling the complex challenges of local governance.

- Co-Authors per Document (2.5): The average number of co-authors per document further supports the trend of collaboration, indicating an interdisciplinary approach to the topic.
- International Co-Authorships (14.5%): While international collaboration exists, the relatively modest percentage suggests that much of the research is conducted within specific regional or national contexts. This opens opportunities for further global collaborations to enhance the generalizability of findings.

5. Document Types

- Articles (131): All documents are categorized as journal articles, emphasizing the academic rigor and peer-reviewed nature of the contributions in this field.

TOP WORD

The table 2 and graph 2 presents the top 10 most frequently used words or terms in the research related to strategic management in local government. These terms provide insights into the thematic focus and recurring concepts within the body of literature. Here's an explanation of the key observations:

Table 2. Top 10 Most Freq Word

Terms	Frequency
strategic approach	38
urban planning	31
urban development	15
strategic planning	11
united states	9
human	7
sustainability	7
sustainable development	7
transportation planning	7
article	6

Graph 2. Word Cloud

Key Observations and Insights

1. Dominance of "Strategic Approach" (Frequency: 38):

   o The most frequently used term, "strategic approach," underscores the emphasis on methodologies and frameworks that local governments use to address planning, policy-making, and governance challenges.

   o This reflects the core of strategic management, which is about adopting systematic and forward-looking approaches to achieve goals in local governance.

2. Focus on Urban Governance:

   o Terms like "urban planning" (31) and "urban development" (15) highlight a significant focus on managing urban areas, reflecting the critical role of

strategic management in addressing the complexities of growing cities, including infrastructure, housing, and land use.

- o These terms suggest that much of the research addresses urban-centric challenges, such as population growth, resource management, and sustainability in cities.

3. Strategic Planning (Frequency: 11):

- o The frequent mention of "strategic planning" indicates its importance as a key tool for local governments to define goals, allocate resources, and anticipate future challenges.
- o This aligns with the broader topic of strategic management, where planning plays a fundamental role in achieving long-term objectives.

4. Regional and Context-Specific Focus ("United States," Frequency: 9):

- o The frequent mention of "United States" reflects the dominance of U.S.-based research in the field, as seen in previous tables. This indicates that many studies focus on the unique governance structures, policies, and strategic approaches of the U.S. local government system.

5. Sustainability and Sustainable Development (Frequency: 7 each):

- o The inclusion of "sustainability" and "sustainable development" highlights the growing integration of environmental and social sustainability goals into local government strategies.
- o This reflects a global trend where local governments are adopting strategic management to achieve environmentally sustainable growth, particularly in response to climate change and urbanization challenges.

6. Transportation Planning (Frequency: 7):

- o The focus on "transportation planning" indicates the significance of strategic management in designing and managing transportation systems in urban areas. Efficient transportation is a critical aspect of urban development and directly impacts economic activity, environmental sustainability, and quality of life.

7. Human and Article (Frequency: 7 and 6):
   - o "Human" likely refers to studies focusing on the human dimension of governance, such as community engagement, stakeholder participation, or human-centered planning approaches.
   - o The term "article" might reflect the format of the literature analyzed, serving as a general term within the academic context.

WORD NETWORK

The graph 3 visualizes the word network related to the topic of strategic management in local government, showing the relationships between frequently used terms in the literature. Here is an explanation of the graph and its components:

Graph 3. Word Network
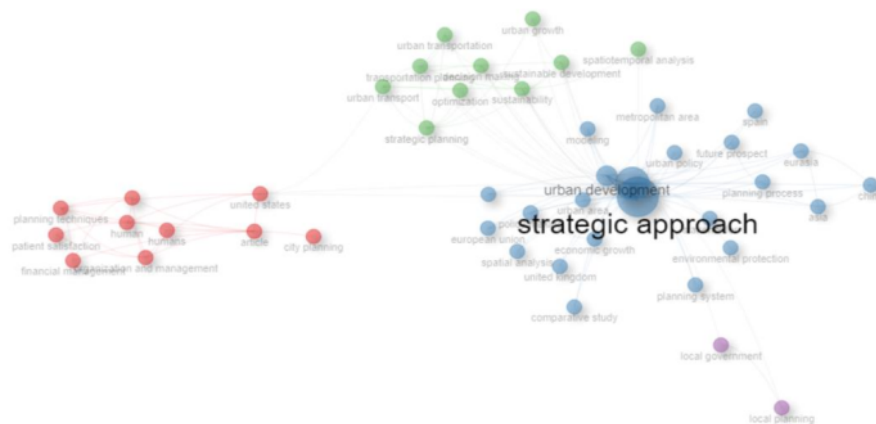
Source: Scopus, 2024, Analyzed by Author using Bibliometrix

Key Features of the Graph:

1. Central Nodes and Connectivity:

   o The terms "strategic approach," "urban development," and "urban planning" appear as central nodes in the network, reflecting their importance and frequent co-occurrence with other terms.

   o These terms are strongly interconnected, indicating that strategic management in local government is often discussed in the context of urban-related challenges and strategic methodologies.

2. Clusters and Themes:

   o The graph contains multiple clusters, each representing a thematic grouping of terms. The color coding highlights these clusters, which can be interpreted as specific subtopics within the research field:

      ▪ Blue Cluster (Core Strategic Themes): Includes terms like "urban development," "urban area," "economic growth," and "planning process." This cluster represents strategic management's role in addressing urban governance and policy issues.

      ▪ Green Cluster (Sustainability and Transportation): Includes terms like "sustainable development," "urban transport," "optimization," and "transportation planning." This indicates a strong focus on sustainability and transportation as key areas of strategic planning in local governance.

      ▪ Red Cluster (Regional and Social Themes): Includes terms like "United States," "city planning," "human," and "financial management." This suggests a focus on regional studies, social dimensions, and economic aspects of local governance.

      ▪ Purple Cluster (Local Government Focus): Includes terms like "local government" and "local planning." This smaller cluster emphasizes the direct application of strategic management at the municipal level.

3. Prominent Terms and Relationships:

   o "Strategic Approach": Central to the network, it connects to various subtopics, underscoring its overarching relevance in managing urban and local government challenges.

   o "Urban Development" and "Urban Planning": Heavily linked to terms like "economic growth," "sustainability," and "urban transport," showing that urban development issues are key contexts for applying strategic management.

   o "Sustainability": Strongly connected to "transportation planning" and "optimization," reflecting its critical role in modern strategic governance.

4. Regional and Policy Focus:

   o Terms like "United States," "European Union," and "United Kingdom" highlight the regional and geopolitical dimensions of strategic management studies. These terms indicate where much of the research is concentrated or where policy applications are frequently discussed.

THEMATIC MAP

The graph 4 illustrates a thematic map for the topic of strategic management in local government, categorizing key themes based on their relevance degree (centrality) and development degree (density). The thematic map is divided into four quadrants, each representing a distinct type of theme. Here is a detailed explanation:

Graph 4. Thematic Map
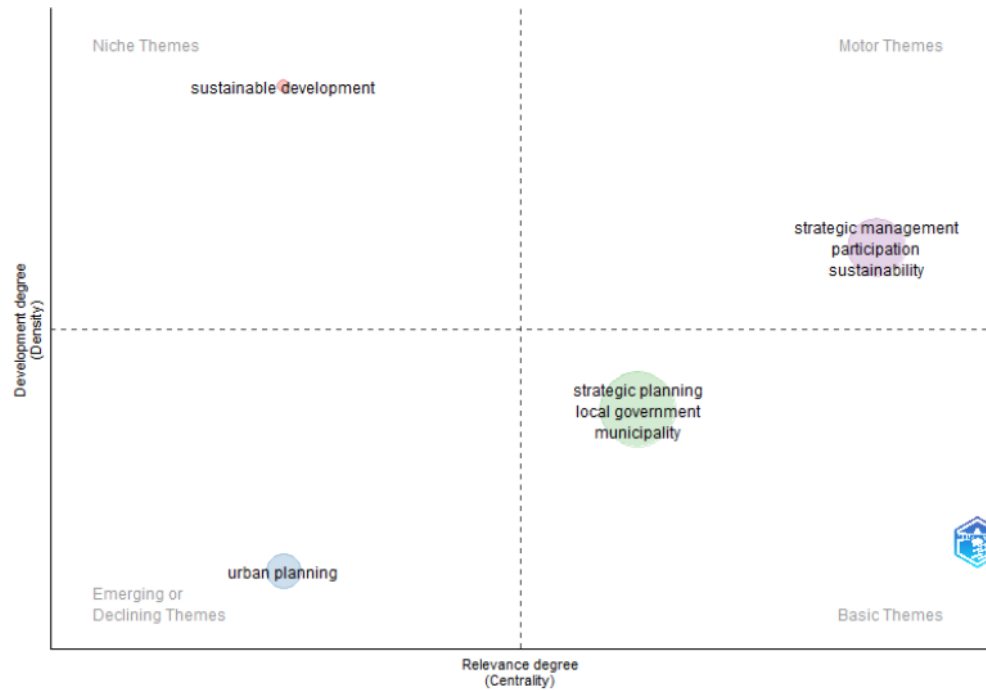
Source: Scopus, 2024, Analyzed by Author using Bibliometrix

1. Motor Themes (Upper Right Quadrant):

- Key Themes: "Strategic management," "participation," "sustainability"
- Characteristics: High centrality (high relevance) and high density (well-developed).
- Interpretation: These are the driving themes of the research field. They are both important and mature, indicating that strategic management, particularly in the context of sustainability and participatory approaches, is a central and thoroughly explored topic in local government.
- Significance: These themes serve as the foundation for further advancements and are likely areas where most practical applications and impactful research occur.

2. Niche Themes (Upper Left Quadrant):

- Key Theme: "Sustainable development"
- Characteristics: Low centrality (limited relevance) but high density (well-developed).
- Interpretation: These themes are specialized or niche areas of research. While sustainable development is a well-explored topic, it is not as central to the overall body of research on strategic management in local government.
- Significance: These themes are critical for specific subfields and could gain more centrality as their importance grows in addressing global challenges like climate change and resource management.

3. Basic Themes (Lower Right Quadrant):

- Key Themes: "Strategic planning," "local government," "municipality"
- Characteristics: High centrality (high relevance) but low density (less-developed).
- Interpretation: These are fundamental themes that are highly relevant to the research field but are not as thoroughly developed or explored as motor themes.
- Significance: These themes are foundational to the study of strategic management in local government and represent areas with significant potential for further research and development.

4. Emerging or Declining Themes (Lower Left Quadrant):

- Key Theme: "Urban planning"
- Characteristics: Low centrality (limited relevance) and low density (underdeveloped).
- Interpretation: These themes are either emerging areas of interest or declining in relevance. The position of "urban planning" suggests that its connection to strategic management in local government is still developing but not yet a major focus.

- Significance: Future research could either revitalize this theme or integrate it into other more central and dense themes like sustainability and strategic management.

THEMATIC EVOLUTION

The graph 5 illustrates the thematic evolution of research topics related to strategic management in local government, showing the transition and focus of themes between two time periods: 1981–2017 and 2018–2024. Here is a detailed explanation of the thematic flow and its significance

Graph 5. Thematic Evolution

Source: Scopus, 2024, Analyzed by Author using Bibliometrix

Key Themes and Their Evolution:
1. Strategic Management:

- o 1981–2017: Strategic management appears as a significant theme early on, focusing on methodologies and frameworks for improving governance at the local level.
- o 2018–2024: It remains a key focus but evolves to integrate broader concepts like sustainability and participatory governance. The consistent presence across both time periods highlights its central importance to the field.

2. Strategic Planning:
- o 1981–2017: Strategic planning is an important foundational theme, emphasizing long-term goal setting and resource allocation in local governance.
- o 2018–2024: It remains prominent, indicating that strategic planning continues to be a critical aspect of governance, evolving to align with modern challenges such as climate change and urban resilience.

3. Urban Planning:
- o 1981–2017: Urban planning was a notable theme in the earlier period, focusing on the management of urban spaces and resources as local governments navigated urbanization.
- o 2018–2024: Urban planning does not appear as a key theme in the later period, suggesting that it has been integrated into broader discussions like strategic planning and sustainability or is no longer a primary focus of research on its own.

4. Sustainable Development:
- o 1981–2017: Sustainable development appears toward the end of this period, reflecting the growing awareness of environmental and social challenges in local governance.
- o 2018–2024: It emerges as a major theme in the more recent period, signaling its increased relevance and integration with strategic management practices. This shift aligns with the global emphasis on sustainability as a governance priority.

Insights and Observations:

1. Integration of Sustainability:
   o The prominence of "sustainable development" in the 2018–2024 period suggests a paradigm shift where local governments are increasingly adopting sustainability principles in their strategic management practices.
   o This reflects the alignment of local governance with global initiatives like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. Decline of Urban Planning:
   o The absence of "urban planning" as a distinct theme in the later period indicates its integration into broader strategic or sustainable governance approaches, rather than being studied as a standalone topic.

3. Consistency of Strategic Themes:
   o The enduring importance of "strategic management" and "strategic planning" underscores their foundational role in the research field. These themes serve as the backbone of local governance studies and evolve to incorporate modern challenges and methodologies.

4. Emerging Focus on Sustainability:
   o The growth of sustainable development as a key theme highlights a forward-looking trend in research, reflecting how local governments are shifting their priorities to address environmental, social, and economic sustainability challenges.

COUNTRY COLLABORATION

The graph 6 visualizes country collaboration networks related to research on strategic management in local government. Each node represents a country, and the connections between nodes illustrate collaborative research efforts between countries. The size of the nodes and the thickness of the links provide additional insights into the intensity of research output and collaboration. Here is an explanation of the graph:

Graph 6. Country Collaboration
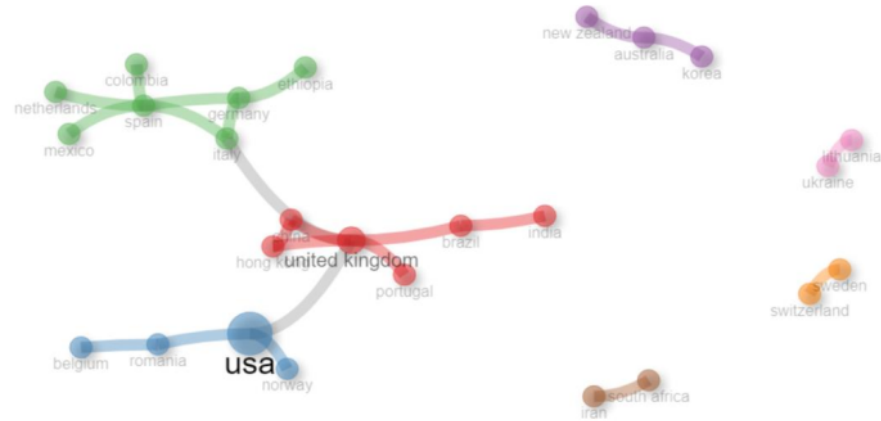
Source: Scopus, 2024, Analyzed by Author using Bibliometrix

Key Features of the Graph:

1. Dominant Countries (Central Nodes):
   o USA: The USA is the largest node, indicating it has the highest research output and is a key player in collaborations related to this topic. It connects with several countries, reflecting its central role in global research networks.
   o United Kingdom (UK): The UK is another central hub, collaborating with countries like China, Brazil, Portugal, and India. This indicates the UK's strong influence and active participation in strategic management research.
2. Clusters of Collaboration:
   o Blue Cluster (USA-led):

- Includes countries such as Belgium, Romania, and Norway. This cluster highlights the USA's strong collaboration with European countries.
  - Red Cluster (UK-led):
    - Features countries such as China, India, Portugal, and Brazil. The UK's partnerships span diverse regions, suggesting a global reach in strategic management research.
  - Green Cluster (Europe-centric):
    - Includes countries like Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, and Ethiopia. This cluster emphasizes regional collaboration within Europe, with some extensions to non-European countries like Ethiopia.
  - Purple Cluster (Asia-Pacific):
    - Features collaborations between New Zealand, Australia, and Korea, indicating a regional focus in the Asia-Pacific area.
  - Isolated Pairs:
    - Countries like Sweden-Switzerland, Lithuania-Ukraine, and South Africa-Iran form isolated clusters with limited connections to the main network, suggesting more localized or bilateral collaborations.

3. Strength of Connections:
   - The thickness of the lines connecting nodes indicates the strength and frequency of collaborations. For instance, the connection between the USA and the UK is strong, reflecting frequent joint research efforts.
   - Other countries, such as Germany and Spain, also show strong collaboration links, particularly within the European context.

Insights and Observations:

1. Global Leadership of USA and UK:
   o The USA and the UK are the most prominent players in the field, serving as hubs for international collaboration. Their wide-ranging connections suggest that they drive much of the global research on strategic management in local government.

2. Regional Collaborations:
   o European countries tend to collaborate within their region, as seen in the green cluster. This reflects the influence of shared governance structures and regional challenges, particularly within the EU context.
   o The Asia-Pacific cluster shows that regional collaborations are also prominent in this part of the world, though they are less integrated with other global clusters.

3. Emerging and Isolated Collaborations:
   o Countries like South Africa, Iran, Lithuania, and Ukraine show limited connections to the main network, suggesting that their contributions are either emerging or focused on local challenges with less international collaboration.

4. Multinational Influence:
   o Countries like Brazil, India, and China are part of broader collaboration networks, reflecting their growing role in contributing to global research on local governance and strategic management.

DISCUSSION

MAIN INFORMATION: RESEARCH GROWTH AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Strategic management has grown from a theoretical concept into a critical practical tool for addressing governance challenges in local government. The increase in publications on this topic indicates its rising importance in fostering innovation, adaptability, and accountability within decentralized governance structures (Bryson,

2010). Local governments, operating closer to citizens, are uniquely positioned to experiment with strategic frameworks, tailoring solutions to local challenges and needs. However, the field still faces gaps in global integration, as evidenced by the relatively low percentage of international co-authorship (14.5%) (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006). Addressing this gap could allow researchers to leverage diverse perspectives and governance experiences, enhancing both theory and practice.

The growing focus on strategic management also highlights the interconnectedness between local governance and global trends. For instance, as urbanization accelerates and sustainability becomes a global priority, strategic frameworks must integrate environmental goals, participatory governance, and cross-sector collaboration (Andrews & Boyne, 2010). This alignment is particularly relevant in developing countries, where resource constraints and rapid urban growth create unique challenges for local governments. Future studies should explore how strategic management frameworks can be adapted to these contexts while maintaining alignment with global efficiency goals (Osborne et al., 2013; Rumbach, 2016).

WORD NETWORK AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The prominence of terms like "urban development" and "strategic planning" in the word network highlights their centrality to the field. This focus reflects the importance of addressing urban challenges through systematic and strategic methodologies (Healey, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 1998). Meanwhile, the integration of sustainability with transportation planning indicates a growing emphasis on climate resilience and mobility in local governance (Harvey, 2003). Future studies should explore how participatory governance and digital technologies can be incorporated into these frameworks to enhance inclusivity and adaptability. For example, Salet and Gualini (2006) emphasize the importance of collaborative approaches in addressing complex governance challenges, aligning with broader trends in strategic management.

THEMATIC EVOLUTION AND MAPPING

The thematic evolution map illustrates the growing integration of sustainability and strategic approaches, aligning with global priorities such as climate action and participatory governance (Geels, 2019; Scott, 1998). Basic themes like strategic planning remain foundational but require further development to address emerging challenges such as digital transformation and social equity (Faludi, 2000). Niche themes like sustainable development offer opportunities for deeper exploration, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Davoudi and Strange (2009) highlight the importance of integrating spatial and environmental considerations into governance frameworks. Future research should focus on operationalizing these themes to enhance local governments' capacity to address contemporary challenges effectively.

COUNTRY COLLABORATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The dominance of the USA and the UK in country collaboration networks reflects their leadership in global research on strategic management. These countries serve as hubs for knowledge exchange and capacity building, fostering partnerships that advance governance practices (Bardhan, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2003). However, isolated clusters such as South Africa-Iran and Sweden-Switzerland suggest opportunities for greater integration into global research networks. Strengthening these networks could enhance the diversity of perspectives in strategic management research. For example, Keast et al. (2007) emphasize the importance of collaborative governance in addressing complex, transboundary challenges. Partnering with underrepresented regions, particularly in Africa and Asia, could enrich the field by addressing region-specific governance challenges such as urbanization, resource scarcity, and climate vulnerability (Denters & Rose, 2005; Sharma, 2005).

CONCLUSION

Research on strategic management in local government has evolved into a dynamic and multidisciplinary field, addressing pressing governance challenges such as decentralization, urban development, and sustainability. The steady growth in scholarly output underscores its significance, but the relatively low international collaboration rates reveal opportunities to expand cross-regional partnerships. By fostering greater global integration, researchers can bridge gaps in governance approaches and create more universally applicable frameworks, particularly for regions with unique governance contexts.

The field's progression from niche interest to a critical area of study reflects its adaptability to global trends like climate resilience, digital transformation, and participatory governance. Foundational themes, such as strategic planning and public sector efficiency, remain vital, but emerging topics like sustainable development, smart cities, and equity-driven governance highlight the field's responsiveness to contemporary challenges. While established journals and authors provide theoretical depth, newer contributors and publications are shaping the future of the field by introducing innovative methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches.

Institutional contributions from both developed and developing regions highlight the universal relevance of strategic management principles. However, enhancing global partnerships between these regions could foster knowledge exchange and expand the practical applications of strategic management. Furthermore, country collaboration networks reveal the need to strengthen ties with isolated contributors and underrepresented regions to diversify the field's perspectives and insights.

Ultimately, strategic management in local government provides a vital framework for addressing urbanization, resource allocation, and environmental sustainability. Future research should prioritize integrating digital tools, participatory frameworks, and equity-driven approaches to enhance local governments' capacity to tackle complex and rapidly changing challenges. By addressing these gaps and leveraging interdisciplinary methodologies, strategic management can continue to evolve as a critical tool for improving governance and fostering sustainable development worldwide.

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