

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT RESEARCH IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: INSIGHTS FROM A BIBLIOMETRIC MAPPING

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Abstract

This study conducts a bibliometric analysis of scientific literature on strategic management in public organizations, covering the period 1982–2025 based on 98 documents retrieved from the Scopus database. Using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny, the analysis integrates performance evaluation and knowledge mapping techniques, including co-citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence networks, and thematic mapping. Findings reveal a significant growth in scientific production after 2010, peaking in 2017, with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden as the most prolific contributors. Moore's (1995) seminal work anchors the intellectual structure of the field, while Elbanna emerges as the most influential author in collaborative networks. Thematic analysis identifies strategy, public management, planning, and balanced scorecard as dominant motor themes, whereas strategic planning and public services represent emerging research directions. This study contributes to the literature by providing a systematic bibliometric mapping of strategic management research in public organizations, offering valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners in the field

Keywords: bibliometric analysis; strategic management; public organizations; public sector; knowledge mapping

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic management is an essential component of the functioning of modern public organizations. It is defined as a process of strategic planning, implementation, and continuous learning, designed to help public organizations achieve their key objectives and create public value (Ferlie & Ongaro, 2015). In the public sector, strategic management involves strengthening the long-term viability and effectiveness of organizations, both in terms of public policy and managerial capacity (Poister & Streib, 2018). Compared to the private sector, public strategic management involves formulating the organization's mission by taking external factors into account, developing a competitive strategy, and creating an efficient organizational structure (Alan et al., 1982).

Strategic management has become an increasingly used managerial approach in the public sector, as policymakers and public managers increasingly apply it to enhance the effectiveness of public policies and programs. In recent years, research on strategic management in the public sector has expanded, particularly focusing on its relationship with organizational performance (George et al., 2019; Poister, 2010), strategic planning (Bryson et al., 2017; George et al., 2016), and the use of strategic management tools (Höglund & Mårtensson, 2019). However, relatively few studies examine how public organizations apply strategic management in practice (Bryson et al., 2010; Höglund et al., 2018).

Interest in strategic management in the public sector has been strongly influenced by New Public Management (NPM)-style administrative reforms, which have introduced private-sector principles and tools into public organizations in order to improve efficiency and performance (Calogero, 2010). Academic discussions on the applicability of strategic management in various national contexts indicate that it extends beyond NPM reforms and can be understood as a broader approach to managing public organizations (Ferlie & Ongaro). However, research conducted to this point has focused primarily on the Anglo-Saxon world, and there is a need to broaden the perspective to include other institutional and cultural contexts.

Bibliometric analysis provides a useful approach for examining the state of knowledge in a given field, allowing the identification of research trends, key contributing authors and institutions, as well as emerging research directions. Although bibliometric studies have been conducted in the broader field of strategic management (Ferreira et al., 2016; Judijanto & Muiz, 2026) and in specific areas such as tourism (Kaya, 2024), the literature

on strategic management in public organizations relatively underexplored from this perspective, which justifies the necessity and originality of the present research endeavor.

This study aims to investigate the state of knowledge in the field of strategic management in public organizations through bibliometric analysis, offering a critical perspective on the evolution of research in the field and highlighting the main findings, trends, and future research directions. To this end, the following objectives have been formulated:

- Identifying the most relevant publications in the field of strategic management in public organizations;
- Analyzing the frequency of publications and the most important bibliographic sources;
- Identifying prolific authors, countries, and institutions with the greatest scientific contribution, as well as the collaborative relationships among them;
- Visualizing and analyzing the most important thematic clusters and future research directions in the field.

Given the stated objectives, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the evolution of scholarly output in the field of strategic management in public organizations?

RQ2: Which countries, institutions, and authors have made the greatest scholarly contributions to the field?

RQ3: What are the main thematic clusters and dominant themes in the literature on strategic management in public organizations?

RQ4: What are the future directions of research in the field of strategic management in public organizations?

The findings of this research will highlight the structure, evolution, main trends, and impact of research in the field of strategic management in public organizations, based on an examination of the scientific output, keywords contributions, and significant directions for future research in the field.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Data Sources and Research Period

In order to conduct the bibliometric analysis, it was decided to use the Scopus database due to its high degree of reliability, rigorous indexing, and broad coverage in the fields of economics, management, and the social sciences. The research period was set from the start of indexing to the present, specifically 1982–2025.

2.2. Search Strategy and Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Bibliographic data were collected exclusively from the Scopus database, selected for its broad coverage of peer-reviewed journals and the compatibility of its structured metadata with bibliometric tools. The search strategy was designed to capture scientific contributions addressing the intersection of strategic management within public organizations.

The search query was constructed using Boolean operators and applied to the TITLE field as follows: *TITLE* ("strategic management" OR "public strategic management" OR "strategic planning" OR "strategic decision making" OR "strategy formulation") AND "public sector" OR "public administration" OR "public institution" OR "public organization" OR "public service" OR "public governance" OR "public management"). To ensure disciplinary relevance and academic quality, the query was restricted to the fields of *Business, Management and Accounting; Social Sciences; Economics, Econometrics and Finance; Computer Science; Decision Sciences; and, Multidisciplinary*. Only articles and conference papers written in *English* were included. The initial search, without applying any additional filters, returned 156 results.

The inclusion criteria were defined as follows. First, the document had to explicitly address strategic management in the context of the public sector. Second, the publication had to be indexed in Scopus and classified in the selected fields. Third, the document type had to correspond to peer-reviewed journal articles or conference papers to ensure scientific rigor.

Exclusion criteria were also explicitly applied. Documents were excluded if they addressed strategic management in purely technical or engineering contexts, and if they focused exclusively on private-sector organizations. Editorials, book reviews, notes, and non-peer-reviewed materials were also excluded. Finally, duplicate records and documents with incomplete bibliographic metadata were removed during the data cleaning phase. After applying these criteria and conducting a manual review of the titles and abstracts to ensure thematic consistency, the final dataset consisted of 98 documents.

2.3. Data preprocessing and corpus construction

The bibliographic records were exported from Scopus in CSV format to ensure compatibility with the Bibliometrix package in R. The preprocessing stage was carried out using RStudio and followed a structured protocol designed to ensure data integrity and reproducibility. The CSV file was first converted into a harmonized data frame using the `convert2df` function of the Bibliometrix package. Subsequently, a cleaning procedure was implemented to remove duplicate entries and standardize metadata fields. Particular attention was paid to standardizing author names, institutional affiliations, and keywords to reduce fragmentation in network analyses. After cleaning and validation, the final corpus comprised 98 documents published in 65 sources, involving 204 distinct authors. The average number of co-authors per article was 2.4, and international collaborations accounted for 17.35% of all publications.

2.4. Bibliometric Analysis Procedure

The bibliometric analysis was conducted using Biblioshiny, the web interface of the Bibliometrix software package. The analytical framework combined performance analysis and scientific mapping techniques to provide a comprehensive overview of the intellectual structure of the field.

The research involved conducting a review and bibliometric analysis through:

- a) descriptive statistics on annual scientific output, the most productive and relevant sources, and the most prolific authors; the distribution of scientific output by country and institution;
- b) performance analysis (focused on citation analysis);
- c) knowledge mapping, which included conceptual structure (word cloud, thematic map, and co-occurrence network of keywords); intellectual structure (co-citation analysis); and social structure (co-author analysis);

The third stage involved the evaluation and presentation of the research findings, specifically the analysis and assessment of the results obtained, the presentation and contextualization of the findings, and, on this basis, the identification of future research directions regarding strategic management in the public sector.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

3.1.1. Descriptive elements of the data set

The descriptive statistics of the dataset are presented in Table 1. The data cover a 43-year period, specifically 1982–2025. A total of 98 documents from 65 bibliographic sources were analyzed. Most of the analyzed documents (89 out of 98) were journal articles, followed by papers presented at scientific conferences.

TABLE 1 - DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE DATASET

Description	Results
Timespan	1982:2025
Sources (Journals, etc)	65
Documents	98
Annual Growth Rate %	3.81
Document Average Age	14.2
Authors	204
Authors of single-authored docs	27
Single-authored docs	27
Co-Authors per Doc	2.4
International co-authorships %	17.35
Author's Keywords (DE)	205
Average citations per doc	27.82
References	4103
Document types	
Article	89
Conference paper	9

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

The annual growth rate is relatively low (3.81%), and the average age of the documents (14.2 years) appears to indicate that the field is becoming established, with a substantial body of specialized literature that supports the need for a detailed analysis of the subject. The analyzed documents were co-authored (72.4%), and those with a single author account for a significant proportion (27.6%), demonstrating that the subject is also addressed from an individual perspective. The number of co-authors per document (nearly 3 authors per document) indicates a relatively high level of collaboration among authors in conducting research on strategic management in the public sector. Furthermore, the proportion of documents published as a result of international co-authorship (17.35%) seems to indicate that research on strategic management in public organizations is currently conducted at the national level, with real opportunities for expanding collaborations to the international level.

3.1.2. Annual Scientific Production

Annual scientific output is shown in Figure 1. The graph indicates that from the beginning of the study period until 2009, the number of articles remained relatively stable, ranging from approximately 1 to 3 articles per year. However, starting in 2010, a marked upward trend emerged, peaking at 10 articles in 2017. The results indicate that interest in this topic has grown considerably since 2010, with research becoming more substantial and academically influential. At the same time, recent years, particularly 2021–2023, have continued to show high levels of scientific productivity. The slight decline observed in 2025 should be interpreted with caution, as it likely reflects incomplete data collection for the current year.



FIGURE 1 - ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

As shown in the previous figure, the increase observed after 2020 can be attributed to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted public organizations to rethink their strategic approaches, thereby heightening the scientific community's interest in this field.

3.1.3. Most Productive and Relevant Sources

Figure 2 illustrates the application of Bradford's Law to identify the primary sources in the field. On the left side of the graph, within the gray rectangle, are the most productive sources, which account for the largest number of published articles, with productivity gradually decreasing as one moves toward the right.

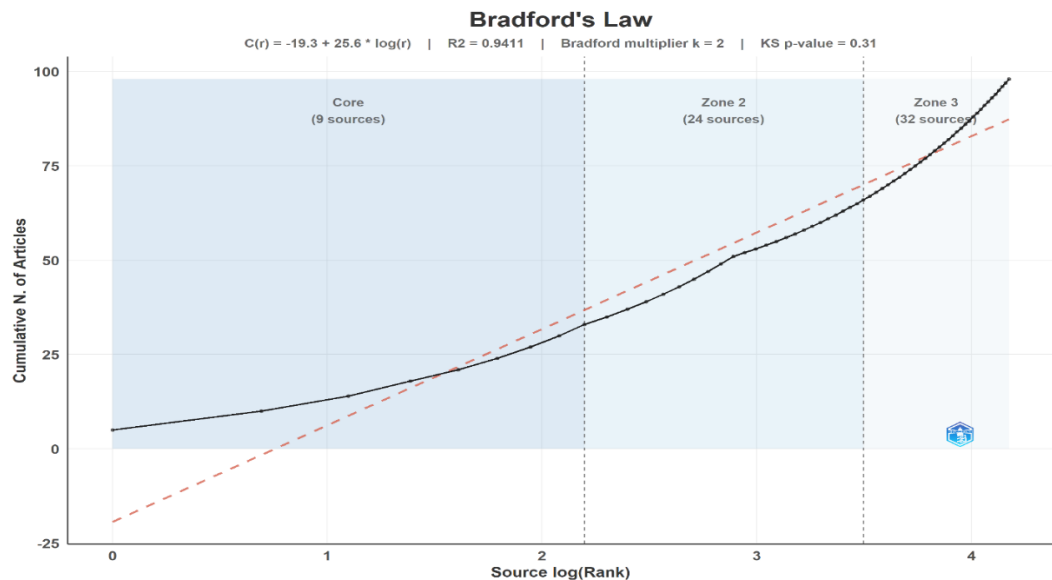


FIGURE 2 - CORE SOURCES BY BRADFORD'S LAW
 Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

According to Bradford's Law, the core of the specialized literature consists of nine journals that account for the largest number of articles published in the field under study, contributing more than the theoretical model predicts, while sources in the secondary zone (24 sources) show a contribution that deviates slightly from the model's requirements. The most relevant sources are the *International Journal of Public Administration* and the *Public Administration Review*, each with 5 published articles. These are followed by the *International Public Management Journal* and the *Public Management Review*, with 4 articles each. In addition, the *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, *Public Organization Review*, and *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences* complete the core set of primary sources, with three publications each.

The results highlight the fact that the literature is concentrated primarily in journals in the fields of public administration and public management, which have made the greatest contribution to the development of research in the area under analysis. Identifying these primary sources is useful for guiding future research and for selecting the most relevant journals in bibliometric analyses or systematic literature reviews.

3.1.4. Distribution of Scientific Knowledge

This section presents the findings that address the second research question regarding the authors, countries, regions, and research institutions involved in scholarly output on strategic management in the public sector.

The authors' contributions in the field of strategic management in public organizations were evaluated based on the total number of published articles and the authors' individual contributions to a set of published articles (fractional articles). The results indicate that Elbanna S. was the most productive author, with 5 documents and 2.08 fractional articles. Even though Ferlie E. published fewer articles, his fractional contribution (2.17) is higher

due to the smaller number of co-authors per article and has the longest author chronology, spanning from 1992 to 2022.

Author productivity based on the h-index indicates that Elbanna S. was the most productive author, with an h-index of 5, followed by Ferlie E., Höglund L., and Walker R.M., as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2 - AUTHORS' IMPACT BY H-INDEX

Author	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC (Total Citations)	NP (Number of Articles)	PY_start
Elbanna S.	5	5	0.357143	345	5	2013
Ferlie E.	4	4	0.114286	236	4	1992
Höglund L.	4	4	0.444444	120	4	2018
Walker R.M.	4	4	0.210526	425	4	2008
Boyne G.A.	3	3	0.157895	347	3	2008
Mårtensson M.	3	3	0.333333	116	3	2018
Pollanen R.	3	3	0.25	285	3	2015
Abdel-Maksoud A.	2	2	0.166667	133	2	2015
Al-Dhaafri H.	2	2	0.285714	34	2	2020
Andrews R.	2	2	0.133333	170	2	2012

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

Analyzing scholarly output at the country level is very important because it reveals the areas in which it is concentrated. Figure 3 shows the country's scientific output, with darker blue indicating high scientific output, lighter blue indicating moderate scientific output, and gray indicating limited or no scientific output in the field. The highest research productivity is found in Europe, North America, and parts of Asia. The lack of scientific output in this field in some countries may indicate problems related to research funding, limited access to publication indexing, or an insufficient number of research institutions. The top 5 countries with the highest scientific production are as follows: USA (33), UK (17), Sweden (14), Ukraine (13), United Arab Emirates (9).

Country Scientific Production

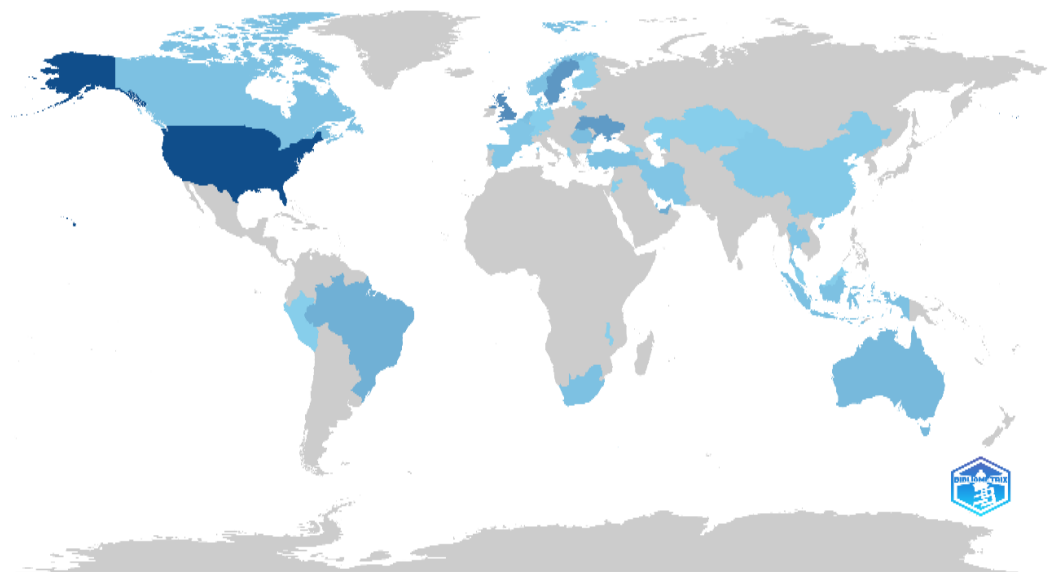


FIGURE 3 - COUNTRY SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

The most significant institutions (Figure 4), based on their contributions in terms of the number of articles, are Cardiff University and Stockholm University, which tie for first place with 5 articles and play a key role in strategic

management research within the public sector, closely followed by Qatar University and the United Arab Emirates University, with 4 articles each.

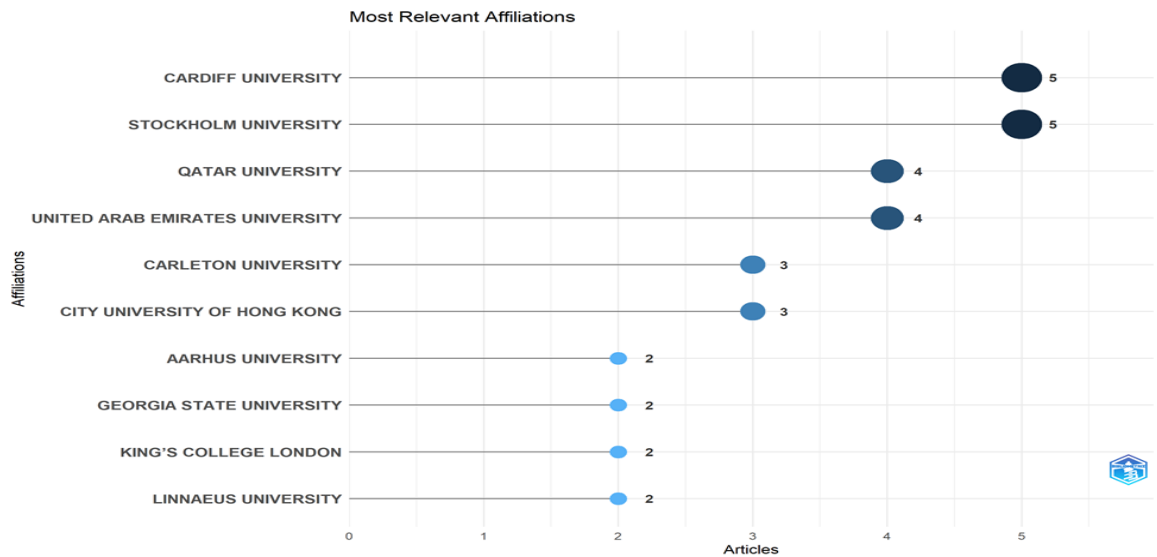


FIGURE 4 – MOST RELEVANT AFFILIATIONS

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

3.2. Performance Analysis

Regarding the evolution of citations, the number of publications fluctuated between 1982 and 2025. In the early years of the analyzed period, specifically between 1982 and 2000, there was a low number of publications and citations. However, certain periods showed a higher level of interest in the field. For example, 2001 had one of the highest average citation counts per article (71), and 2008 stood out for its high annual average citation rate (4.07).

The period from 2010 to 2025 has received more attention from researchers, as evidenced by the increase in the number of publications and their impact. The year 2017 was the most productive in terms of the number of articles published (10 articles), while 2018 recorded the highest average number of citations per article (65) and the highest annual average number of citations (7.22). Furthermore, 2016 stood out for its significant impact, with an average of 66.8 citations per article and an annual average of 6.07 citations.

Performance analysis cannot be limited to the trend in the average number of citations per year during the period under review; rather, it must identify the most cited works on the topic of strategic management in public institutions. A summary of the most cited documents globally on the topic of strategic management in the public sector is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3 - MOST GLOBAL CITED DOCUMENTS

Paper	DOI	Total Citations	TC per Year
Poister, 2010	10.1111/j.1540-6210.2010.02284.x	260	15.3
Meier et al., 2008	10.1093/jopart/mul017	175	9.2
Boyne & Walker, 2010	10.1111/j.1540-6210.2010.02271.x	154	9.1
Elbanna et al., 2016	10.1080/14719037.2015.1051576	152	13.8
Poister et al., 2010	10.1177/0275074010370617	147	8.6
Bryson & Roering, 1987	10.1080/01944368708976631	124	3.1
Rosenberg Hansen & Ferlie, 2016	10.1080/14719037.2014.957339	117	10.6
Pollanen et al., 2017	10.1080/14719037.2016.1203013	110	11
Nutt & Backoff, 1993	10.1016/0149-2063(93)90056-S	79	2.3
Walker, 2013	10.1111/puar.12073	78	5.6

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

Table 2 shows that scientific papers published between 2008 and 2017 have been cited more frequently than more recent ones, which were authored by established experts in the field. Consequently, Poister (2010) ranks first with a total of 260 citations and also has the highest annual citation rate (15.3). However, the authors Elbanna et al. (2016) and Rosenberg Hansen & Ferlie (2016), have a promising number of citations per year, which could increase in the coming period.

The fact that, in the field of strategic management in public organizations, the most cited studies date from the previous decade, and that among the top 10 most cited works, we also find articles with seminal contributions to the field, such as Bryson & Roering (1987) and Nutt & Backoff (1993), confirms that the current literature is constantly influenced by the existence of a theoretical foundation regarding strategic management in public organizations.

Figure 5 shows the number of citations received by country, highlighting the most cited countries. Georgia and the United Kingdom lead in terms of the number of citations, with 407 and 309 citations, respectively, followed closely by the United States (224) and Qatar (214). Even though Georgia does not have a large scientific output at the national level, it has recorded a higher impact per scientific article than the countries ranked at the top in terms of overall production. The countries making the most significant contribution in terms of scholarly interest in the field are located in Europe and North America, regions with a long-standing tradition in research on strategic management in public organizations. In contrast, countries in the Middle East and Asia, such as Qatar (183), the United Arab Emirates (94), and Hong Kong (78), also show a notable presence, suggesting a growing interest in the field in these regions.

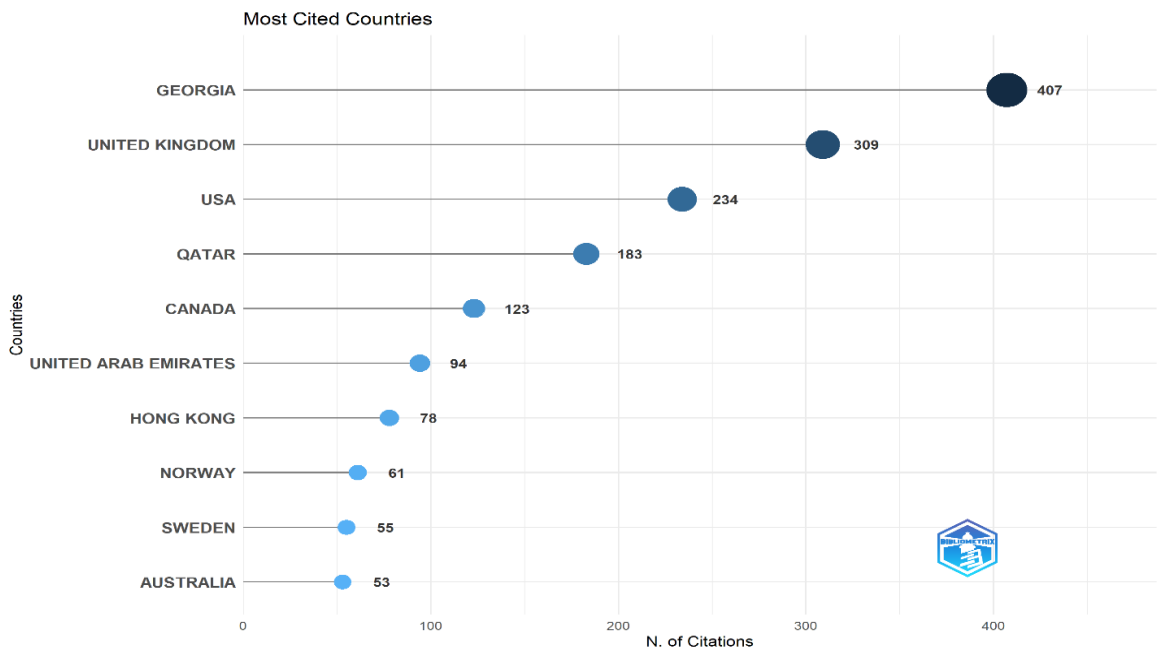


FIGURE 5 – MOST CITED COUNTRIES

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

3.3. Knowledge Mapping

3.3.1. Conceptual Structure

Figure 6 presents the word cloud, generated based on the most frequent keywords. At its center are the keywords *strategic management* and *strategic planning*, followed by other relevant themes such as *public sector*, *public administration*, and *New Public Management*. Additional trending topics include: *decision making*, *public organizations*, *strategy*, *balanced scorecard*, and *information systems*. The association of keywords demonstrates that research in this field addresses strategic management from the perspective of the public sector as well as performance evaluation tools. The presence of the term "balanced scorecard" is also notable, underscoring the interest in performance measurement tools in the public sector.



FIGURE 6 – WORD CLOUD

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

The thematic map, shown in Figure 7, classifies research themes based on their level of development and relevance. Core themes are characterized by high centrality and low density and include those that provide the theoretical foundation necessary for broader research, such as the following: *public sector*, *public organizations*, *public administration*, and *decision making*. Emerging themes are characterized by low centrality and low density and include themes that are not particularly relevant, which may require further research to gain relevance or which may fade from researchers' attention, such as: *value creation*, *strategic planning*, *new public management*, *public services*, and *strategy assessment*.

Niche topics are characterized by low centrality and high density and include topics that have been well-developed in the literature, but focus on specific aspects of strategic management within the context of public organizations, such as: *strategic management*, *public organizations*, *organizational culture*, *strategy implementation*, *information systems*, *government*, and *qualitative approaches*. Core themes are characterized by high centrality and high density and represent the research areas with the greatest potential for development, serving as the active core of the field. These include: *strategy*, *strategic approach*, *public management*, *planning*, *public institutions*, and *balanced scorecard*.

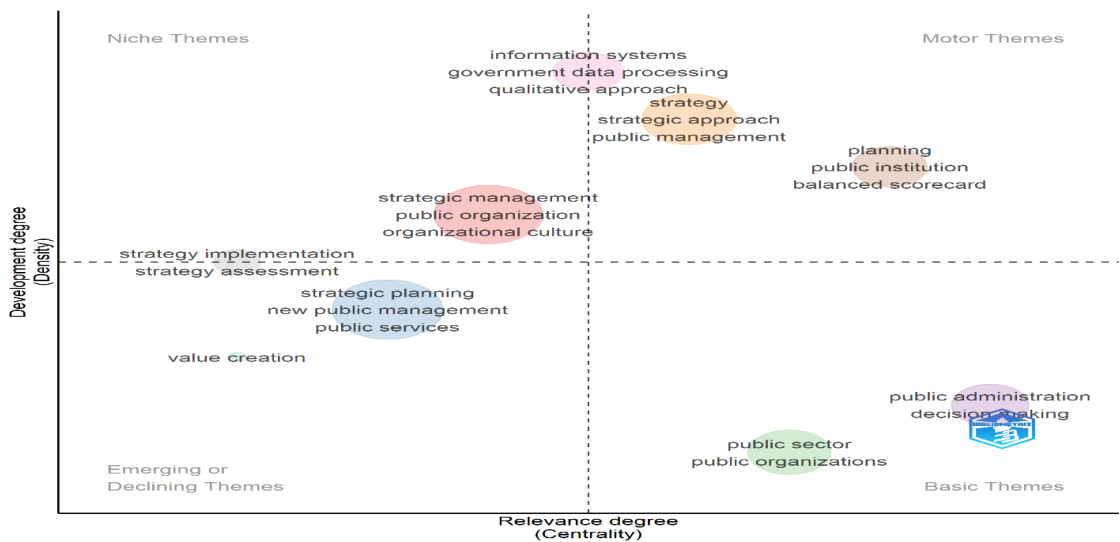


FIGURE 7 – THEMATIC MAP

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

In the context of strategic management in the public sector, the most relevant research areas are *strategy*, *public management*, and the *balanced scorecard*. The presence of core themes focusing on the *public sector*, *public organizations*, *public administration*, and *decision-making* indicates that these form the conceptual foundations upon which the driving themes are anchored. It is worth noting that the terms *strategic management* and *public organization* fall within the niche themes quadrant, a classification that characterizes them as well-developed themes but approached from specialized perspectives. However, the positioning of the niche themes cluster near the boundary of the motor themes indicates a possible increase in relevance within the specialized literature and, at the same time, a possible transition toward them.

The co-occurrence network reveals the relationships between various topics, taking into account their frequency of occurrence. Figure 8 shows six clusters, each represented by a different color; larger nodes indicate higher frequency, and thicker lines indicate the strength of the connection. Strategic management și strategic planning își mențin poziția anterioară ca subiecte principale. *Strategic management* has the strongest connection to *strategic planning*, as well as to the *public sector*, *strategy*, *public organizations*, *administrative reform*, *planning*, *public institutions*, *public services*, *sustainable development*, *leadership*, *new public management*, and *organizational culture*. This suggests that these keywords are closely interconnected within the literature.



FIGURE 8 – CO-OCCURRENCE NETWORK

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

The clusters focus on general strategic management (Red Cluster), public administration and performance (Blue Cluster), information systems and performance (Green Cluster), governance and reform (Purple Cluster), strategy implementation (Orange Cluster), and organizational excellence (Brown Cluster).

3.3.2. Intellectual and Social Structure

The co-citation map (Figure 9) shows the frequency with which authors are cited together and consists of 40 elements and 7 clusters. The first group (in red) consists of 10 documents focused on the analysis of strategic management in public organizations. The largest node is represented by Moore's (1995) paper, which has the highest betweenness centrality, demonstrating an important role as an intermediary between various articles that are not directly linked. The position of this node can be explained by the fact that the paper is a landmark study in the field of public management, synthesizing a broad collection of case studies aimed at improving public performance and providing a conceptual framework for public sector decision-makers.

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The second group (in blue) contains 10 documents that primarily address issues related to the strategic planning process and its implementation in public institutions, with an emphasis on performance and decision-making processes. The work of Johnsen (2016) is noteworthy, comprising a study that evaluates the impact of strategic planning in municipalities, concluding that adequate financial resources and stakeholder engagement are the most relevant factors for the successful implementation of strategy in the public sector.

The third group (highlighted in green) consists of seven studies that examine the content of strategy in the public sector and analyze the relationship between the type of strategy adopted and organizational performance. The topics studied within this cluster focus on: developing a strategic content matrix tailored to public institutions (Boyne & Walker, 2004), identifying the interdependent relationship between planned change and the success of strategy implementation (Nutt & Backoff, 1993), and the influence of strategic positioning on organizational performance (Andrews et al., 2006).

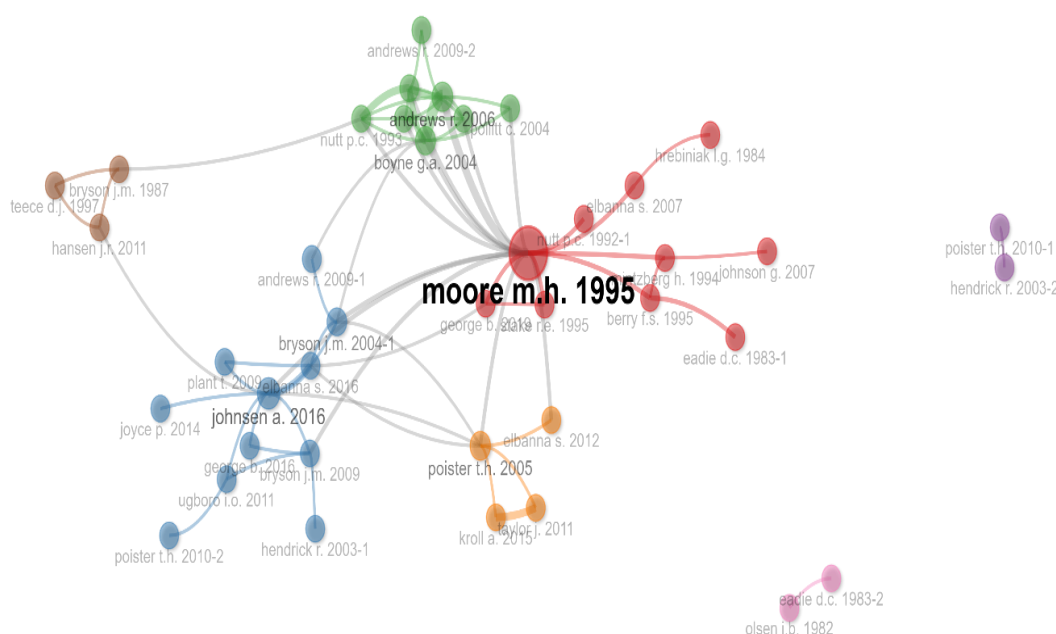


FIGURE 9 – CO-CITATION MAP

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

Two papers (Hendrick, 2003; Poister, 2010) form the fourth group (in purple), focusing on the link between strategic management and performance. The same theme is also addressed in the fifth cluster (highlighted in orange), including representative works of authors Elbanna (2012) and Kroll (2015). The sixth cluster (shown in brown) is characterized by the theme of transferring strategic instruments from the private sector to the public sector. It comprises three papers, in which Bryson & Roering (1987) assess the applicability of strategic planning models in the public sector, Hansen (2011) examines the use of strategic tools following New Public Management (NPM) reforms, while Teece et al. (1997) establish the concept of dynamic capabilities as a source of organizational competitive advantage. And the last cluster (in pink) consists of two landmark studies in the field of strategic planning within the public sector. It can be said that the field under study is an autonomous one that has reached maturity, given that a high degree of thematic coherence is observed, stemming from the predominant citation of research within the field of strategic management in public organizations.

In the author network (Figure 10), Elbanna S. from Qatar University has the highest interdependence centrality; he also has the most co-authored publications, some of which are with Pollanen R. (Carleton University), Mahama H. (United Arab Emirates University), and Abdel-Maksoud A. (United Arab Emirates University). Another prominent author in the field of strategic management in the public sector who stands out in the network

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is Höglund L. (Mälardalen University), who forms a well-established cluster with Mårtensson M. (Stockholm University) and Holmgren Caicedo M. (Stockholm University). It is worth mentioning the position of the author, Andrews R., who acts as a bridge between the two clusters (purple and red), suggesting an overlap in collaboration between the two research groups.

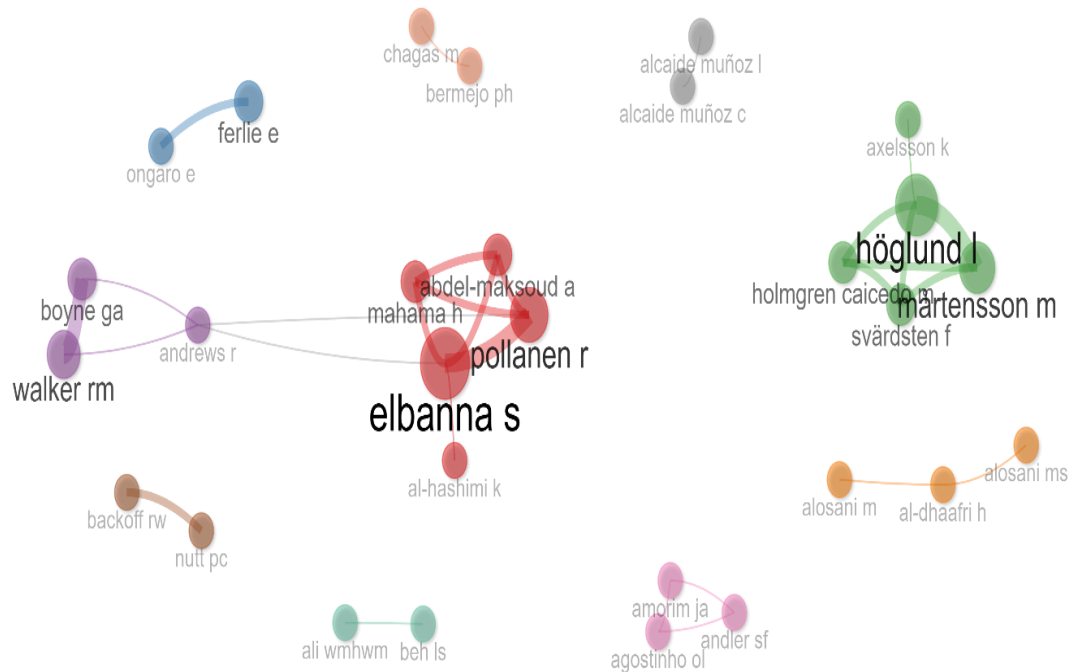


FIGURE 10 – COLLABORATION NETWORK

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

The network of international collaborations (Figure 11) illustrates the international research collaborations in the field under analysis. There are modest international partnerships between Qatar and Canada, with three joint collaborations. Qatar also has collaborations with the United Kingdom (2) and the United Arab Emirates (2), representing the central hub of the scientific collaboration network in the field of strategic management in public organizations. Scientific partnerships are also observed between the United Kingdom and Hong Kong, as well as between Canada and the United Arab Emirates.

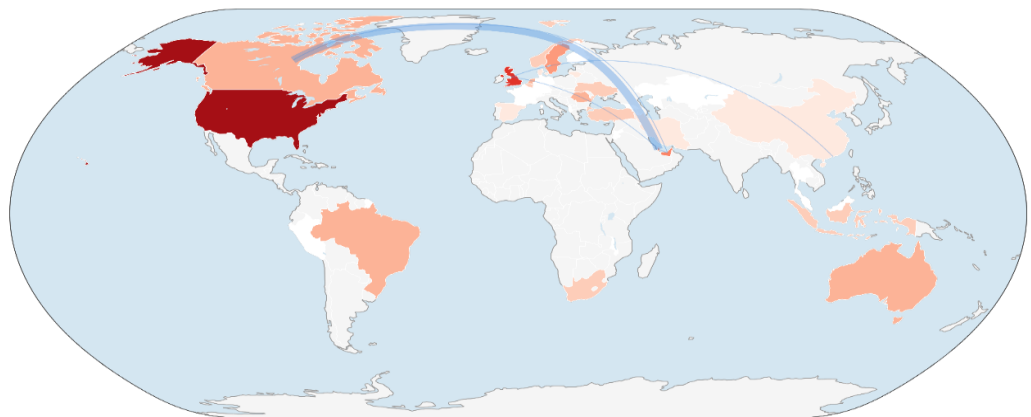


FIGURE 11 – COUNTRIES' COLLABORATION WORLD MAP

Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

3.4. Trend Topics and Future Research Directions

Figure 12 shows a three-panel graph illustrating the relationships among three different indicators: cited references (CR), authors (AU), and topics (DE). This tool is designed to identify the main references, authors, and topics in the field, with strong relationships between authors and topics suggesting the primary areas of research. The first column contains the most frequently cited references, highlighting the key research works in the field that focus on: the structure and process of organizational strategy, the creation of public value in government, the elements of strategy in public organizations, public management reform, and organizational performance.

The middle column shows the leading authors in the field; for example, the first three authors—Walker R. M., Elbanna S., and Boyne G.A.—have multiple connections, indicating a strong influence in the field. The last column on the right shows the topics, ranging from dominant to emerging. Emerging topics highlight the latest trends in the field; in our case, these topics are *public institutions*, *strategic approaches*, and *business excellence*. The topic of strategic management in the public sector and strategic planning remains a central focus for researchers, but in recent years the emphasis has shifted toward emerging themes related to business excellence, public institutions, and strategic approaches—topics that may become increasingly relevant in scientific research in the future.

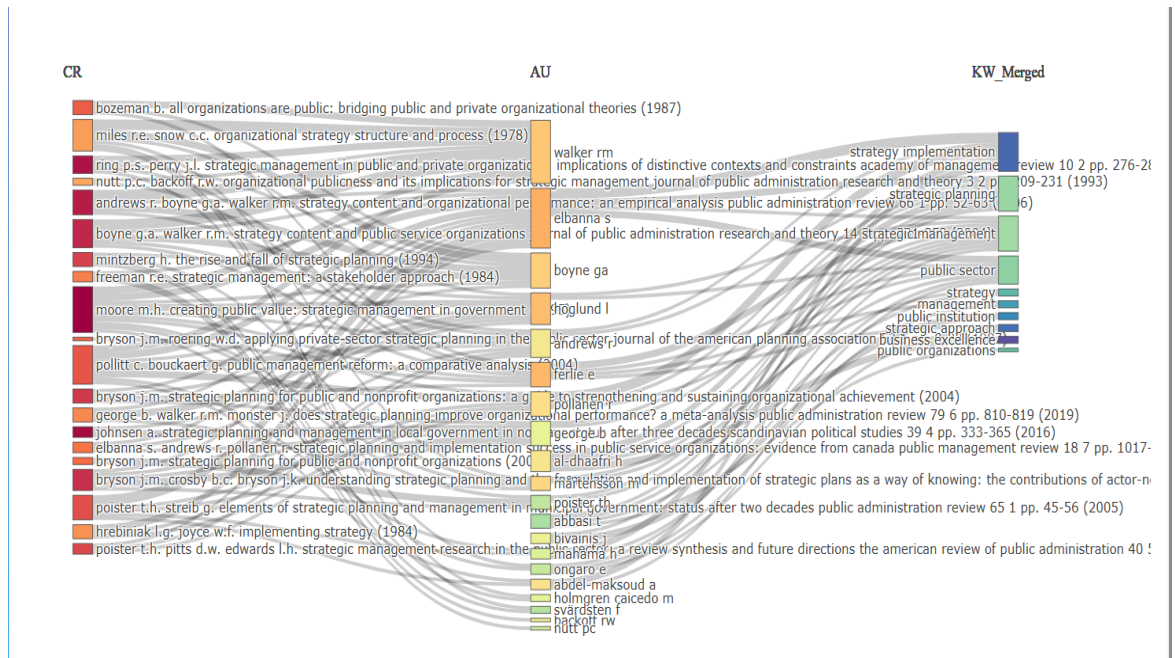


FIGURE 12 – THREE FIELD PLOT
Source: authors, using Scopus Database Analyse tool and Biblioshiny from Bibliometrix R package

4. DISCUSSIONS

In recent years, as confirmed by the results of the research conducted, there has been a rise in scientific interest in strategic management within the public sector, marked by an increase in the frequency of scientific publications in this field, which constitutes a positive response to the first research question. Thus, while there was a relatively stable trend until 2010, with a low frequency of publication, an upward trend was observed after 2010, peaking in 2017, intensifying during the COVID-19 pandemic, and continuing into the post-pandemic period. An analysis of the results regarding annual scientific output appears to confirm some of the earlier studies that highlighted the role of the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst for scientific interest in adapting strategies to the new economic reality (Mulyono & Zainrossalamia, 2025). It is important to note that the literature on the intersection between strategic management and public organizations remains scarce, in contrast to the large body of research that addresses them separately; however, the increase in the number of publications since 2010 is evident.

The authors who have made the greatest scientific contributions to the field of strategic management in the public sector are Elbanna S. of Qatar University, Ferlie E. of King's College London, Höglund L. of Mälardalen University, and Walker R. M. of Lingnan University. The most prolific countries in the field of publications on strategic management in public organizations are the United States (33), the United Kingdom (17), Sweden (14), Ukraine (13), and the United Arab Emirates (9). Thus, it can be observed that the ranking of the most productive countries has a diverse distribution, being dominated by countries from the Anglo-Saxon and European regions such as the USA, the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Australia. Notably, Romania is also present in the top 10, indicating a significant contribution in this field.

It can also be observed that the countries with the most prolific authors are also the most scientifically productive, which is one of the study's key conclusions, addressing the second research question. The same relationship does not hold at the institutional level, however, with the top spots occupied by Cardiff University and Stockholm University, neither of which is affiliated with the most prolific authors. However, the third position is held by Qatar University, the institution to which the author with the greatest scientific contribution in the field, Elbanna S., is affiliated.

As the performance analysis shows, the average number of citations per year closely mirrors the trend in annual scientific output. The growing interest in strategic management in the public sector was followed, during the period analyzed, by an increase in citations on this topic; however, the most cited works date from the previous decade, indicating that current research is informed by a well-established theoretical foundation. The most cited authors, Poister (2010) with 260 citations and Meier et al. (2008) with 175, serve as essential reference landmarks, while Elbanna et al. (2016) and Rosenberg Hansen & Ferlie (2016) show promising annual citation rates, with the potential for growth in the coming period. The countries producing the most-cited works—Georgia and the United Kingdom—do not rank first in terms of scientific output, but the United Kingdom ranks second. Noteworthy is the case of Georgia, which, although not among the top countries in terms of scientific output, has the highest number of citations (407), indicating a significantly higher impact per article than countries with higher output.

The following analysis addresses the third research question. According to the keyword analysis, six clusters were identified. The first cluster focuses on general strategic management (the most representative keywords being: strategic management, strategic planning, public sector, new public management, public organizations), the second cluster on public administration and performance (the main keywords being: public administration, decision making, balanced scorecard), and information systems and performance are part of the third cluster (the keywords being: information systems, government data processing, qualitative approach, societies and institutions). Governance and reform characterize the next cluster (with main keywords such as: management, strategic approach, governance approach, public service); strategy implementation represents cluster five (with keywords such as: strategy implementation, strategy assessment); and organizational excellence constitutes the final cluster in the co-occurrence network (with only two keywords: business excellence, structural equation modeling). A strong link can be observed between the first and second clusters, suggesting that research in this field primarily addresses strategic management through the lens of its impact on the performance of public organizations. An analysis of the thematic map shows that “strategy” and “public management” are the driving themes of the strategic field in the public sector, and also the themes with the greatest potential for growth. Furthermore, the classification of the terms “strategic planning” and “new public management” as emerging themes highlights, on the one hand, the need for a redefinition or further investigation, given that both are classic concepts in the field.

Finally, the analysis of the three-field diagram reveals a convergence among the key works, leading authors, and dominant topics in the field, confirming that strategic management and strategic planning remain at the center of researchers' concerns, supported by the theoretical contributions of authors such as Walker R. M., Elbanna S., and Boyne G.A. Future research directions, as indicated by the three-field diagram, focus on emerging topics related to public institutions, strategic approaches, and business excellence. Overall, these findings address the fourth research question.

Compared to bibliometric studies conducted in the field of strategic management in general—Ferreira et al. (2016), which analyzed 43 years of publications in the private sector, identifying six clusters focused on competitive resources and capabilities, and Judijanto & Muiz (2026), which highlighted the growing orientation

of research toward sustainability and digital transformation — or in specific sectors such as tourism (Kaya, 2023), the present study makes an original contribution by focusing exclusively on strategic management in public organizations, offering the first systematic bibliometric mapping of the intellectual, conceptual, and social structure of this specific field.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The research presented in this study aimed to investigate the state of knowledge in the field of strategic management in public organizations through bibliometric analysis, providing a critical perspective on the evolution of research in the field and highlighting the main results, trends, and future research directions. The research was designed to address four research questions regarding the evolution of scientific production in the field, the countries, institutions, and authors with the greatest scientific contribution, the main thematic clusters and dominant themes in the specialized literature, and future directions of research in strategic management in public organizations.

The bibliometric analysis results revealed an increase in scientific interest in strategic management within public organizations, especially after 2010, with 2017 being the most prolific year. The authors who made significant contributions to the increase in scientific production are Elbanna S. affiliated with Qatar University, Ferlie E. from King's College London, Höglund L. affiliated with Mälardalen University and Walker R. M. from Lingnan University. However, the contribution of institutions cannot be fully associated with the individual contribution of the authors occupying the top positions in the ranking, which are represented by Cardiff University and Stockholm University. In contrast, in terms of the contribution of countries, a correlation can be made with the scientific production of the authors, these coming from the USA, United Kingdom, Sweden, and United Arab Emirates. According to the performance analysis, the evolution of citations closely followed the trend of scientific production, with the most cited authors being Poister (2010) and Meier et al. (2008). In terms of countries, Georgia occupies the first position in the ranking, surpassing countries with considerably higher scientific contributions.

The conceptual analysis highlights, through the co-occurrence network of keywords, that strategic management and strategic planning occupy a dominant position in the body of literature on strategic management in public organizations. In addition, the connection of the cluster to which these words belong with Cluster 2 focused on public administration and performance suggests that research in the field predominantly treats strategic management through the lens of its impact on the performance of public organizations. The thematic map shows that planning, public institution, and balanced scorecard constitute the driving themes of the field, while strategic planning appears as an emerging theme, suggesting that this classic concept is being redefined in the specialized literature. From the perspective of intellectual structure, the co-citation analysis identified seven clusters, with Moore's (1995) work standing out as the founding contribution of the field, with the highest centrality of intermediation, confirming the constant influence of the concept of public value on the specialized literature. The social structure through the analysis of the collaboration network between authors reveals that Elbanna S. occupies a dominant position, with extensive links to researchers from the Middle East and Europe, while international collaborations between countries remain modest, with Qatar representing the central node of the network.

This research presents certain limitations, deriving from the exclusive use of the Scopus database, as well as from the dynamics of publications still in the review process during 2024-2025, without these constituting an impediment to the validity of the results obtained. The aforementioned limitations, together with the emerging themes identified in the bibliometric analysis — business excellence, public institutions, and strategic approaches — outline directions for future research. These could aim to deepen the role of performance assessment tools in public organizations, expand the analysis by including additional databases, and conduct comparative studies between different institutional and cultural contexts

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