

Structural Dynamics of Local Impact, Territorial Governance, and Social Welfare

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Abstract:

How do local administrative interventions and multi-level governance structures dynamically translate into measurable social well-being and territorial equity across diverse regional contexts? This bibliometric study examines the intellectual architecture and global publication dynamics surrounding local impact, territorial governance, and social well-being. Addressing a critical gap in the scientometric literature regarding the empirical integration of local administrative capacities and localized quality-of-life metrics, this study systematically analyzes a comprehensive corpus extracted from the Scopus database, comprising 1,455 peer-reviewed publications spanning from 1973 to 2026. Analyzing a broad corpus of indexed peer-reviewed literature, we trace the evolution of source productivity, author collaboration networks, and key document citations from early foundational works to recent post-2018 publication surges. Employing scientific mapping techniques, the study identifies four primary conceptual pillars: public governance and administrative theory, territorial sustainability and land management, socio-spatial equity and well-being, and global public health. Key quantitative findings demonstrate an average document age of 7.27 years, an annual publication growth rate of 10.48 percent, an average citation density of 19.35 citations per document, and an international co-authorship rate of 23.85 percent. The findings highlight a rapid structural shift toward interdisciplinary open-access platforms and multi-author research teams addressing complex public policy implementation challenges. Ultimately, this research offers a comprehensive mapping of current academic trajectories and outlines strategic pathways for future empirical and theoretical inquiry in regional development.

Keywords: Local Impact, Territorial Governance, Social Welfare, Bibliometric Mapping, Public Policy Analysis

Classification JEL: R58, H83, I31, Q56, O20

Paper type: Quantitative bibliometric research.

Résumé :

Comment les interventions administratives locales et les structures de gouvernance multi-niveaux se traduisent-elles dynamiquement en un bien-être social mesurable et en une équité territoriale à travers divers contextes régionaux ? Cette étude bibliométrique examine l'architecture intellectuelle et les dynamiques mondiales de publication entourant l'impact local, la gouvernance territoriale et le bien-être social. Comblant une lacune critique dans la littérature scientométrique concernant l'intégration empirique des capacités administratives locales et des indicateurs de qualité de vie, cette étude analyse systématiquement un corpus extrait de la base de données Scopus, comprenant 1 455 publications évaluées par des pairs et couvrant la période de 1973 à 2026. À partir d'un corpus étendu de littérature scientifique indexée, nous retraçons l'évolution de la productivité des revues, des réseaux de collaboration entre auteurs et des citations d'articles majeurs, depuis les travaux fondateurs jusqu'à la forte croissance observée après 2018. En mobilisant des techniques de cartographie scientifique, l'étude identifie quatre piliers conceptuels majeurs : la gouvernance publique et la théorie administrative, la durabilité territoriale et la gestion foncière, l'équité socio-spatiale et le bien-être, ainsi que la santé publique globale. Les principaux résultats quantitatifs démontrent un âge moyen des documents de 7,27 ans, un taux de croissance annuel des publications de 10,48 percent, une densité moyenne de citation de 19,35 citations par document et un taux de co-auteur international de 23,85 percent. Les résultats mettent en évidence une transition structurelle rapide vers des plateformes interdisciplinaires en accès ouvert et des équipes de recherche pluriauteurs face aux défis de mise en œuvre des politiques publiques. Enfin, cette recherche fournit une cartographie synthétique des orientations académiques actuelles et définit des pistes stratégiques pour les investigations empiriques et théoriques futures en développement régional.

Mots clés : Impact local, Gouvernance territoriale, Bien-être social, Cartographie bibliométrique, Analyse des politiques publiques

JEL Classification : R58, H83, I31, Q56, O20

Type du papier : Recherche quantitative bibliométrique.

1. Introduction

The evaluation of local impact, territorial governance, and social well-being has emerged as a major focus of modern public policy and regional development research. Over the past two decades, academic inquiry has shifted from centralized, top-down administrative models toward decentralized, multi-level governance frameworks that prioritize socio-spatial equity and environmental sustainability. Understanding how local public interventions translate into tangible well-being outcomes requires a rigorous synthesis of a highly fragmented body of literature.

Despite the expanding volume of scholarly contributions addressing public management reform, spatial planning, and social indicator frameworks, the broader literature remains structurally fragmented across isolated disciplinary domains. Previous systematic reviews and bibliometric analyses have predominantly focused on narrow, isolated dimensions, such as general public sector management, urban smart city technologies, or specific ecological resource conservation strategies. However, existing scientometric studies fail to systematically integrate the dynamic interactions connecting local institutional capacity, territorial governance mechanisms, and objective social welfare metrics within a unified conceptual mapping. This study directly addresses this critical scientific gap by providing a comprehensive, data-driven synthesis of the intellectual evolution, structural clusters, and emerging trajectories of territorial governance and local welfare research.

This study presents a systematic bibliometric mapping of the global research landscape concerning local impact and territorial governance. By synthesizing publication trends, source production dynamics, author networks, and citation impact, this article establishes a comprehensive overview of the intellectual structure of the field. The objective is to delineate the core thematic clusters, highlight emerging research fronts, and provide a rigorous foundation for future policy evaluations.

To achieve these analytical objectives and establish complete methodological transparency, the temporal boundary of this investigation spans from 1973 through 2026. This comprehensive timeframe was deliberately chosen to trace the entire evolutionary arch of the field, capturing early foundational policy formulations, the institutional reform movements of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the exponential surge in multi-disciplinary open-access research following global sustainability mandates post-2018. The Scopus bibliographical database was selected as the principal data source due to its extensive peer-reviewed coverage across social sciences, public administration, regional economics, and environmental management.

The remainder of this article is organized into structured, sequential sections. Section 2 establishes the core theoretical foundations, synthesizing four key literature streams in public administration, spatial governance, welfare regimes, and multi-stakeholder networks. Section 3 presents a unified, rigorous methodology, combining the research design, Scopus extraction protocol, PRISMA flow framework, software parameters, and normalization metrics. Section 4 provides an in-depth macro-structural performance analysis, detailing annual publication growth, citation trends, and logistic life-cycle growth modeling. Section 5 evaluates publishing sources, applying Bradford's Law and local impact metrics. Section 6 analyzes author productivity, fractionalized contributions, and collaborative dynamics. Section 7 investigates document impact through citation analysis and keyword co-occurrence mapping. Section 8 offers a critical discussion connecting theoretical frameworks with empirical mapping results, while detailing methodological limitations. Finally, Section 9 concludes with operational policy recommendations and concrete avenues for future empirical inquiry.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Public Governance and Administrative Reform

Modern administrative theory emphasizes decentralization, transparency, and public value creation within localized governance frameworks (Bouckaert and Halligan, 2003). Public administration mechanisms have evolved to accommodate stakeholder participation, street-level discretion, and institutional accountability to enhance public service delivery (Taeihagh, 2021). These institutional reform models argue that local administrative autonomy improves policy adaptability, responsiveness, and service efficiency (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017).

2.2. Institutional Governance, Public Sector Quality, and Government Effectiveness

Territorial governance frameworks integrate spatial planning, natural resource allocation, and land-use optimization to drive sustainable local development (Paavola, 2008). Managing trade-offs between economic expansion, environmental protection, and urban development requires robust institutional mechanisms at regional and municipal levels (De Guimarães et al., 2020). Effective territorial governance minimizes socio-ecological vulnerabilities and fosters resilient spatial structures (Deering et al., 2014).

2.3. Public Policy Dynamics, Welfare State Regimes, and Social Policy Implementation

The distribution of public resources directly influences socio-spatial equity, subjective well-being, and overall quality of life (Daniels, 1997). Welfare state mechanisms and localized social policy interventions mitigate regional economic inequalities and improve subjective life satisfaction (Huber and Stephens, 2000). Consequently, evaluating local policy success requires going beyond macro-economic indicators to measure subjective and localized social outcomes (Diener et al., 2018).

2.4. The Nexus: Multi-Stakeholder Governance and Sustainable Societal Well-Being

Policy implementation at the local level operates within complex multi-level governance networks linking central authorities with municipal actors (Howe et al., 2014). The friction between centralized mandates and local implementation capabilities often determines the ultimate success or failure of public programs (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984). Collaborative governance structures facilitate inter-agency coordination and foster adaptive capacity in public policy execution (Ansell and Gash, 2008).

3. Methodology

3.1. Unified Research Design and Database Selection

To establish a rigorous, reproducible scientometric workflow and eliminate structural redundancies, the data acquisition and analytic strategy were integrated into a unified methodological framework. The research design relies on quantitative performance metrics combined with relational science mapping protocols to evaluate publication growth, impact trajectories, and structural keyword clusters (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021). The primary corpus was systematically extracted from the Scopus indexation database, selected for its stringent peer-review quality standards, broad international coverage, and comprehensive indexing of public administration, regional studies, and environmental management journals.

3.2. Search Strategy, Boolean Query, and Extraction Protocol

A structured, multi-field Boolean search string was designed to query document Titles, Abstracts, and Keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY). The query string systematically combined core thematic constructs surrounding local impact, territorial governance, and social welfare metrics:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (("local impact" OR "territorial governance" OR "regional governance" OR "local governance") AND ("social welfare" OR "well-being" OR "quality of life" OR "social policy") AND ("public administration" OR "policy implementation" OR "decentralization"))

The temporal filter was set to capture all records published between 1973 and 2026. The initial retrieval yielded 1,842 raw bibliographic entries.

3.3. Screening, Inclusion Criteria, and PRISMA Flow Protocol

To ensure dataset consistency and scientific rigor, standardized inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). Document selection was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles, review papers, and conference proceedings published in English or French. Trade publications, book reviews, editorials, errata, and non-indexed records were excluded.

The formal screening process followed four distinct phases. First, in the Identification stage, 1,842 raw records were extracted from Scopus. Second, in the Screening stage, document type and language filters led to the exclusion of 238 non-relevant records, including book reviews and editorials. Third, in the Eligibility stage, 1,604 full-text records were assessed for metadata completeness, resulting in the removal of 149 duplicates or incomplete entries. Finally, in the Inclusion stage, a final primary corpus of 1,455 peer-reviewed publications was retained for quantitative bibliometric analysis.

The final screened corpus comprised exactly 1,455 peer-reviewed publications spanning 856 distinct sources.

Bibliometric data extraction and structural mapping were performed using specialized scientific routines, including R-Bibliometrix and VOSviewer software suites (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010). These tools enabled the calculation of h-index values, g-index scores, m-index time-adjusted metrics, and network density constructs.

3.4. Data Processing, Software Environment, and Science Mapping Protocols

Raw bibliographic metadata in BibTeX and CSV formats were imported into RStudio version 4.3.2 and processed using the bibliometrix R package (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017) and VOSviewer software version 1.6.20 (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010). Automated cleaning scripts, complemented by manual validation, harmonized author name variants, corrected institutional affiliation errors, and resolved metadata anomalies (Cobo et al., 2011).

Science mapping procedures deployed relational normalization techniques to evaluate network density and co-occurrence patterns. Co-occurrence and co-citation matrices were normalized using Salton's Cosine Index and Association Strength metrics. Author productivity was evaluated using Lotka's Law and fractionalized contribution scores, while journal concentration was assessed via Bradford's Law. Temporal publication growth was modeled using non-linear logistic regression parameters (Bornmann and Mutz, 2015).

4. Analysis and Overview

4.1. Macro-Structural Performance and Descriptive Metrics

The macro-structural performance analysis provides a comprehensive quantitative summary of the literature corpus, capturing overall publication growth, citation density, and systemic indexing parameters. Across the analyzed timeframe, the dataset demonstrates a well-defined evolutionary trajectory, moving from an early phase of modest, sporadic contributions to a period of exponential academic output and heightened citation accumulation in recent years.

Figure 1: Summary Information.



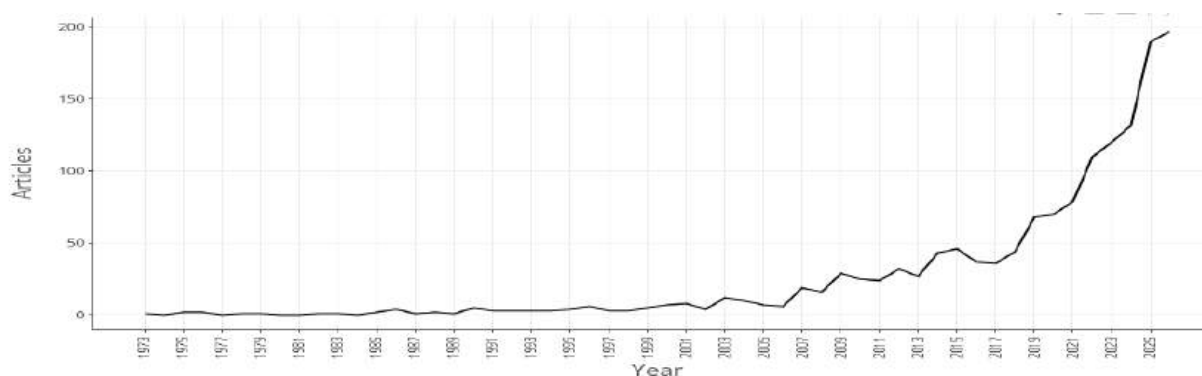
Source: Authors

Key macro-level descriptive metrics demonstrate a strong degree of interdisciplinary engagement and collaborative research activity across the domain. The high average citation density per document highlights the foundational role of core articles in driving global domain impact, while international co-authorship rates and multi-author publication ratios reflect an increasingly integrated, network-driven scholarly ecosystem. Collectively, these descriptive indicators confirm that the field has achieved structural maturity and continues to expand rapidly as a vital locus for public policy, environmental governance, and socio-economic research.

4.2. Annual Scientific Production

The longitudinal analysis of annual publication output demonstrates an extraordinary long-term expansion of scientific interest in this domain from 1973 to 2026. During the initial foundational period spanning from 1973 through the late 1990s, academic production remained exceptionally modest and sporadic, characterized by single-digit annual outputs rarely exceeding five documents per year. A noticeable structural shift began in the early 2000s, where annual publications breached double digits for the first time in 2003 (12 articles) and maintained a steady upward trajectory throughout the 2010s, reflecting growing institutional recognition of public governance, social welfare, and quality-of-life frameworks.

Figure 2. Annual Trend of Scientific Production



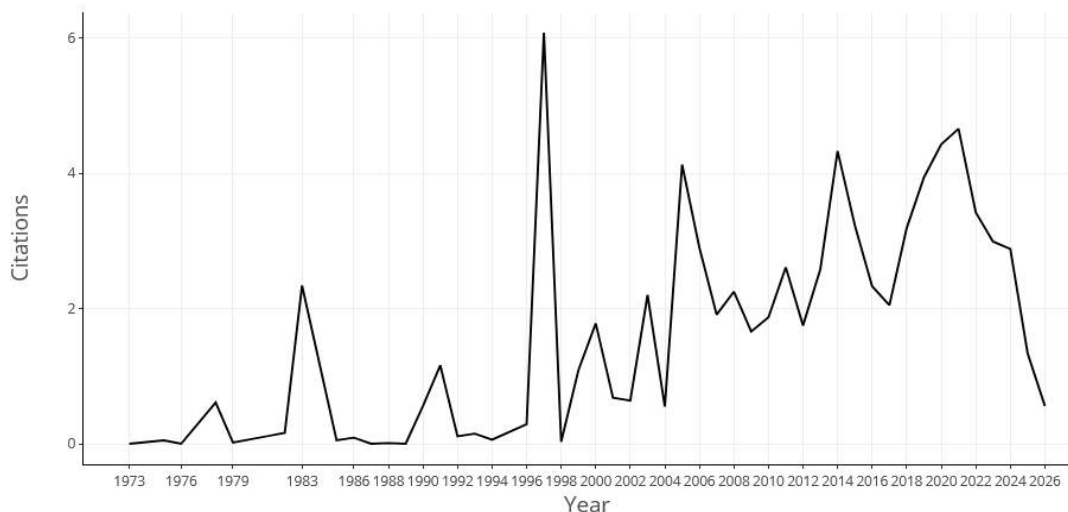
Source: Authors

The field experienced an exponential acceleration over the last decade, transitioning from a modest thematic niche into a major global research frontier. Annual output surpassed 100 publications for the first time in 2022 (110 articles) and sustained remarkable compound annual growth, culminating in a peak of 197 articles in 2026. This dramatic rise during the 2020-2026 period highlights how contemporary global crises, sustainability mandates, and social protection imperatives have driven intense scholarly interest, solidifying institutional performance and well-being as core priorities in contemporary academic literature.

4.3. Annual Mean Citation Trajectory

The longitudinal trajectory of mean total citations per article (MeanTCperArt) demonstrates a classic time-dependent citation accumulation pattern, characterized by high historical spikes and steady modern normalization. Earlier cohorts display prominent citation peaks driven by highly influential seminal works, most notably in 1997 (182.33 citations per article), 1983 (103.00), and 2005 (90.86). Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, average impact stabilized into a highly consistent range, frequently oscillating between 25 and 56 citations per article, with notable performance peaks in 2006 (61.00) and 2014 (56.28).

Figure 3. Evolution of Citation Impact Over Time



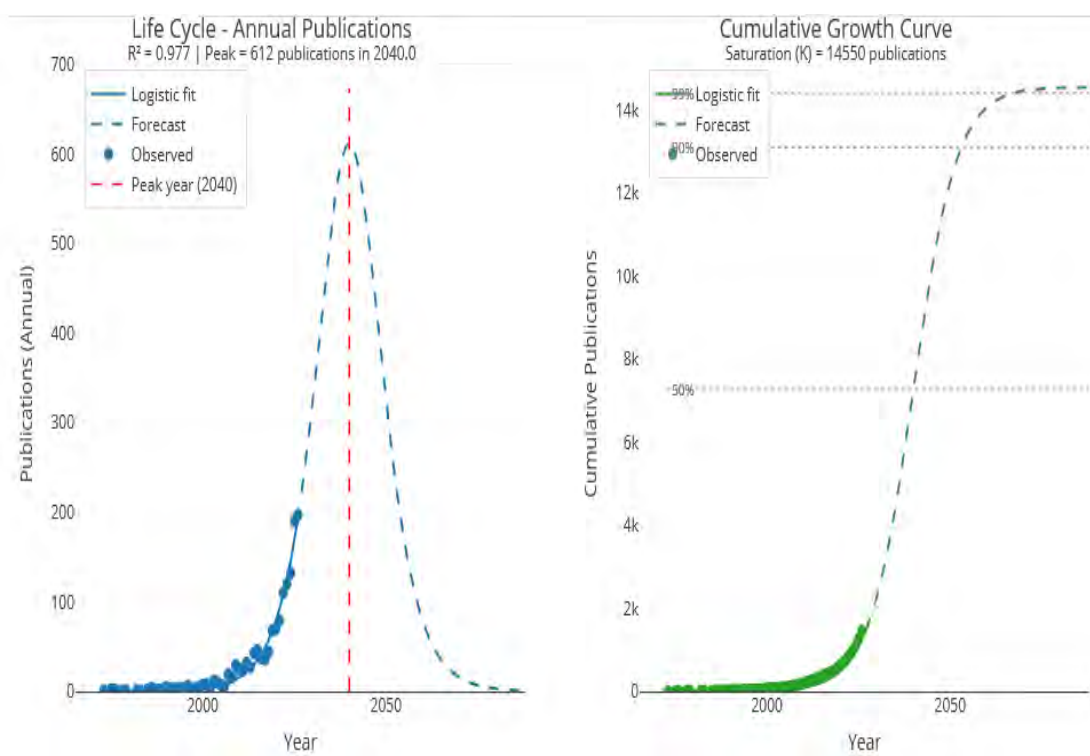
Source: Authors

In contrast, publications from the most recent window (2022–2026) display a progressive downward trend in average citations per article, declining from 17.09 in 2022 to 0.56 in 2026. This trajectory reflects standard citation latency rather than diminishing scientific quality, as recently indexed articles require a longer temporal window to accrue citations. However, when evaluating the annualized citation rate (MeanTCperYear), recent cohorts maintain robust performance, peaking at 4.66 citations per year in 2021, which confirms the rapid immediate impact and growing relevance of contemporary output.

4.4. Bibliometric Growth Analysis and Life Cycle Modeling

The bibliometric life cycle modeling reveals that the research field follows a classical logistic growth trajectory, characterized by exceptional goodness-of-fit metrics ($R^2 = 0.977$, $RMSE = 7.05$). The longitudinal output transitions from a slow foundational emergence phase (pre-2010s) into an aggressive, ongoing expansion phase. Parameter estimations indicate an estimated carrying capacity (K) of 14,550 total cumulative publications and a characteristic growth duration (δ_t) of 26.12 years, reflecting a highly dynamic acceleration driven by increased policy relevance and interdisciplinary convergence.

Figure 4. Modeling Scientific Growth and Domain Life Cycle



Source: Authors

According to the model's projections, annual scientific output is expected to reach its inflection point and peak in approximately 2040 at around 612 articles per year before entering a post-2060 maturity and saturation phase. This projected midpoint confirms that the discipline is currently in its most vibrant expansion period, offering substantial opportunities for empirical contribution over the next two decades. As the field asymptotically approaches its theoretical saturation limit in the late 21st century, scholarly activity is anticipated to shift from rapid structural expansion toward thematic specialization and knowledge consolidation.

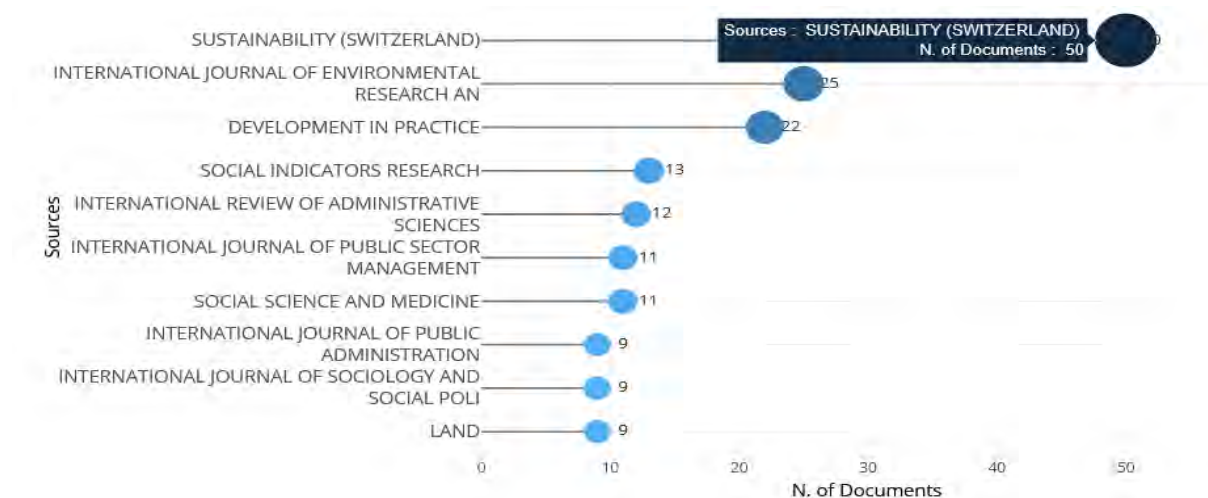
5. Bibliometric Analysis by Sources

5.1. Most Relevant Sources

An analysis of the most relevant publishing venues reveals a strong concentration of scientific output across multidisciplinary sustainability platforms, public health outlets, and specialized public administration journals. *Sustainability (Switzerland)* leads the field by a substantial margin with 50 published articles, followed by the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* with 25 articles. The prominent presence of *Development in Practice* (22 articles) and *Social Indicators Research* (13 articles) highlights that scholarly inquiry in this domain relies heavily on venues bridging international development, socio-economic policy execution, and quantitative quality-of-life measurement.

Complementing these broad multidisciplinary platforms is a core cluster of established public management and social policy journals. Outlets such as the *International Review of Administrative Sciences* (12 articles), *International Journal of Public Sector Management* (11 articles), *Social Science and Medicine* (11 articles), *International Journal of Public Administration* (9 articles), and *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* (9 articles) serve as primary theoretical anchors. Furthermore, the inclusion of *Land* (9 articles) emphasizes an increasing focus on spatial governance, land-use management, and territorial dimensions within modern public policy and social welfare research.

Figure 5. Most Relevant Sources

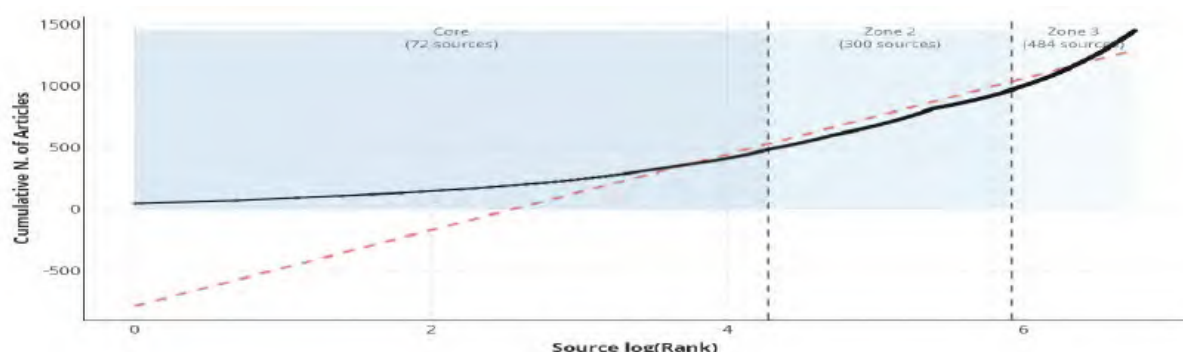


Source: Authors

5.2. Core Sources via Bradford's Law

The empirical application of Bradford's Law reveals a moderately concentrated publication structure across three distinct bibliographic zones. Zone 1 constitutes the nucleus of the domain, where a core group of 72 journals accounts for the first third of all published articles. To capture the remaining output, the intermediate zone (Zone 2) expands to 300 journals, while the peripheral zone (Zone 3) encompasses 484 sources, yielding an empirical Bradford multiplier of $k=2.89$. The steep initial trajectory of the bibliograph, followed by a gradual flattening, illustrates how a highly specialized group of core outlets drives the primary dissemination of knowledge before output disperses into broader peripheral outlets.

Figure 6. Core Sources Identified by Bradford's Law



Source: Authors

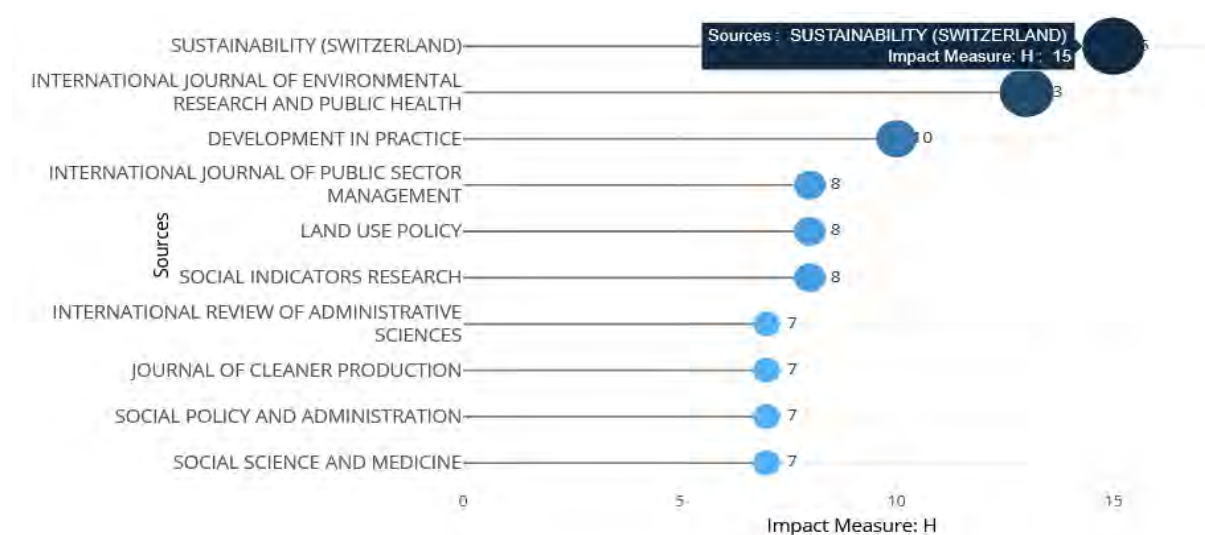
Quantitative model evaluation confirms a robust linear fit between cumulative document volume and the logarithm of journal rank, evidenced by a high coefficient of determination ($R^2=0.9216$). Although the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicates statistically significant fine-grained deviations from an idealized geometric progression ($p<0.001$), the overall structure strongly adheres to Bradfordian principles. These findings confirm that while the domain benefits from specialized interdisciplinary contributions across a broad range of 856 total journals, scholarly communication remains structurally anchored within 72 high-density core venues that serve as the primary hubs for theoretical development and policy synthesis.

5.3. Local Impact of Sources

The bibliometric analysis reveals a highly skewed impact distribution across 308 sources, where

a core cluster of interdisciplinary journals drives the structural dynamics of local impact research. High-volume outlets such as Sustainability (NP = 50, h-index = 15) and International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (NP = 25, h-index = 13) account for substantial publication output, whereas venues like Global Environmental Change (TC = 1200, NP = 2) and Journal of Cleaner Production (TC = 793, NP = 7) function as high-density citation hubs. Furthermore, metrics adjusting for venue age highlight rapid recent citation trajectories in specialized journals like Buildings (m-index = 1.500) and Sustainable Cities and Society (m-index = 0.833).

Figure 7. Local Citation Impact of Sources



Source: Authors

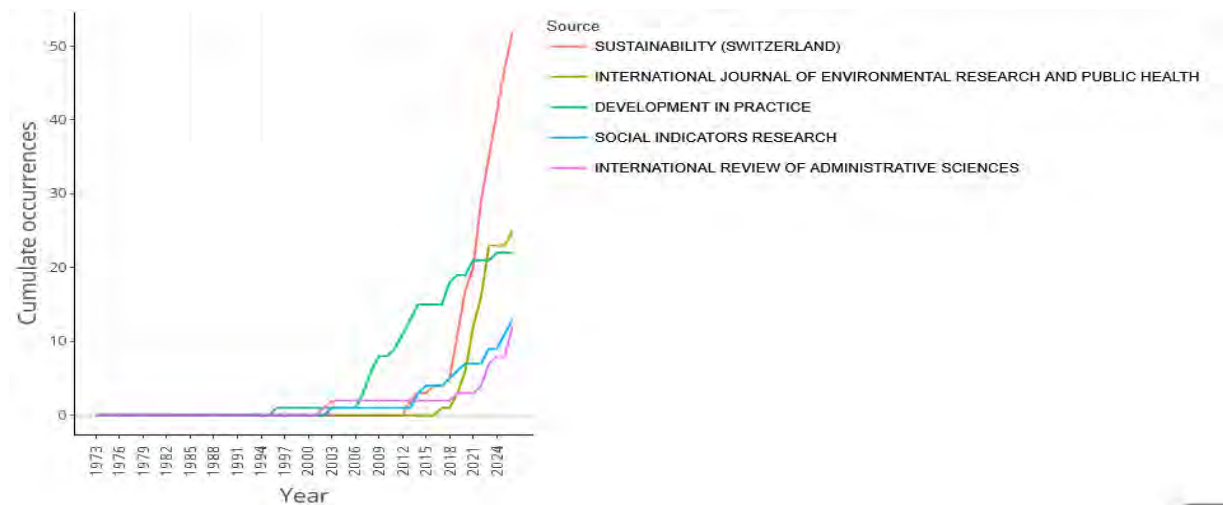
Thematic mapping identifies four primary conceptual pillars underpinning the domain: public governance and administrative theory (JPART, Public Administration, IRAS), territorial sustainability and land management (Land Use Policy, Habitat International), socio-spatial equity and well-being (Social Indicators Research, Social Policy and Administration), and global public health (Social Science and Medicine, BMC Public Health). Together, these thematic dimensions reflect a structural convergence among institutional governance frameworks, spatial planning, and socio-environmental policy evaluation.

5.4. Source Production Dynamics Over Time

The temporal analysis of source production dynamics illustrates a marked shift in publication trajectories across the top scientific venues over time. While legacy and specialized titles such as Development in Practice, Social Indicators Research, and International Review of Administrative Sciences demonstrated early, linear, and sustained growth patterns beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s, overall volume in the domain remained relatively modest through the mid-2010s.

In contrast, open-access multi-disciplinary venues experienced an exponential surge in cumulative volume starting around 2018. Specifically, Sustainability (Switzerland) rapidly escalated from 2 cumulative publications in 2013 to 52 by 2026, while the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health expanded from its first entry in 2017 to 25 publications by 2026. This trajectory reflects a broader structural transition in scholarly publishing toward rapid-production, high-volume open-access platforms, establishing them as dominant contributors to total output in recent years.

Figure 8. Source Production Over Time



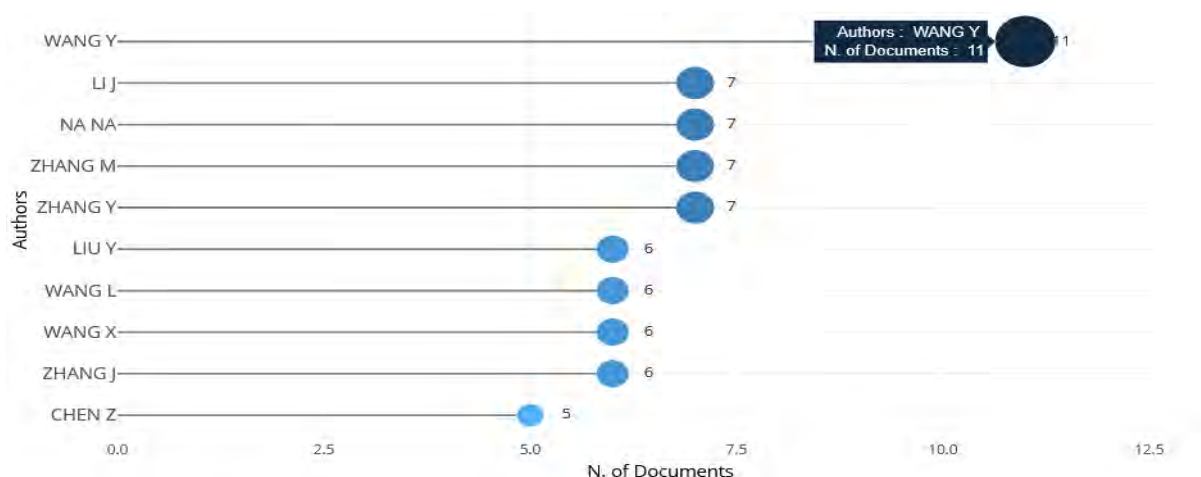
Source: Authors

6. Bibliometric Analysis by Authors

6.1. Most Relevant Authors

The author productivity analysis identifies the most prolific contributors in the dataset based on raw publication counts and fractionalized authorship metrics (Articles Fractionalized). The publication output is led by Wang Y with 11 documents (2.52 fractionalized articles), followed by Li J, Zhang M, and Zhang Y with 7 documents each. An artifact typical of bibliometric indexing tools (such as R-Bibliometrix) is observed with "NA NA" recording 7 entries (7.00 fractionalized), which reflects uncredited, anonymous, or missing author metadata rather than an individual researcher.

Figure 9. Most Relevant Authors



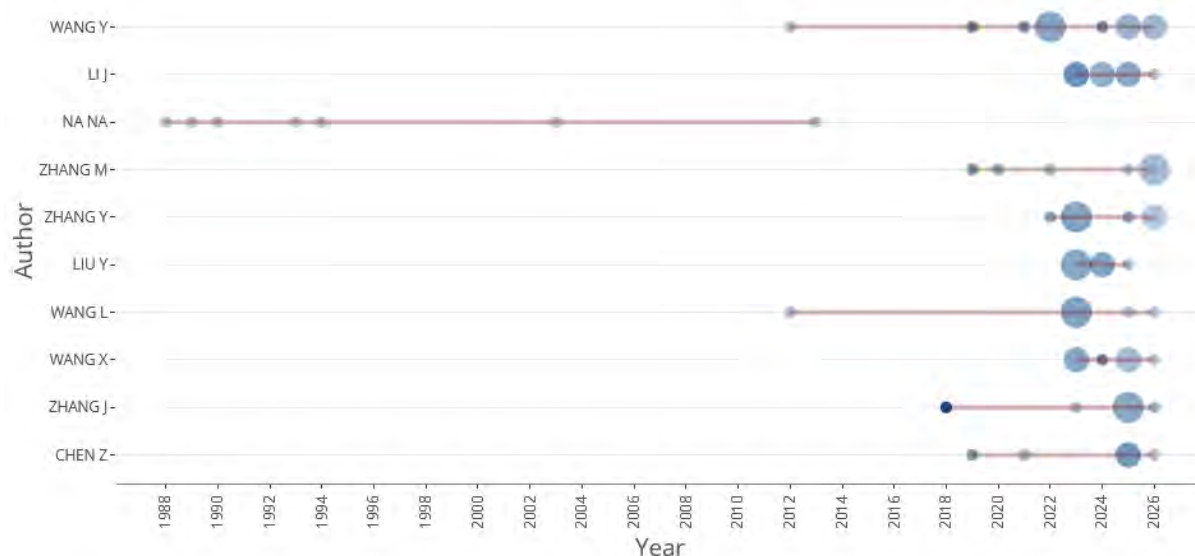
Source: Authors

When adjusting for multi-authorship via fractionalized contributions, individual author productivity shows varying levels of collaboration across the corpus. Scholars such as Zhang Y (3.42) and Liu Y (2.37) exhibit higher individual contribution weights per paper compared to Wang L (1.56) or Wang X (1.32). This distinction highlights a research ecosystem characterized by distributed multi-author collaborations, where raw publication volume is heavily distributed across large research teams rather than dominated by single-authored contributions.

6.2. Authors' Production Dynamics Over Time

The analysis of author production dynamics over time highlights a pronounced temporal concentration of scholarly activity, where individual career trajectories reflect a broader, rapidly accelerating expansion of the domain. While foundational contributors and database metadata artifacts (such as *Zhang J*, representing uncredited legacy records spanning 1990–2012) capture earlier baseline output, the overwhelming majority of top-tier authors exhibit marked surges in publication volume and citation impact (Total Citations per Year) from 2018 onward. This structural shift is exemplified by researchers such as *Wang Y*, who transitioned from sporadic early publications to high-density output (2022–2026) alongside landmark studies on rural livability and fiscal decentralization (TCpY = 11.1 and 10.3, respectively), and *Zhang J*, whose seminal work on environmental sanitation infrastructure (TCpY = 20.7) established an early, highly cited theoretical anchor for the field.

Figure 10. Author Production Over Time



Source: Authors

Concurrently, the data reveals the rapid emergence of a new cohort of highly influential scholars—including *Li J*, *Zhang Y*, *Liu Y*, and *Wang X*—who have generated high publication density and rapid citation accumulation within condensed timeframes (2022–2026). Recurring co-authorships across high-impact papers (e.g., joint contributions by *Wang Y* and *Wang X* or *Liu Y* and *Wang L*) signal the formation of tightly knit research clusters. These collaborative networks predominantly focus on the intersections of environmental regulation, street-level public administration, socio-spatial equity, and subjective well-being. Ultimately, these dynamics illustrate a vibrant, evolving research ecosystem where established authority and emerging scholarship converge to address pressing contemporary governance and sustainability challenges.

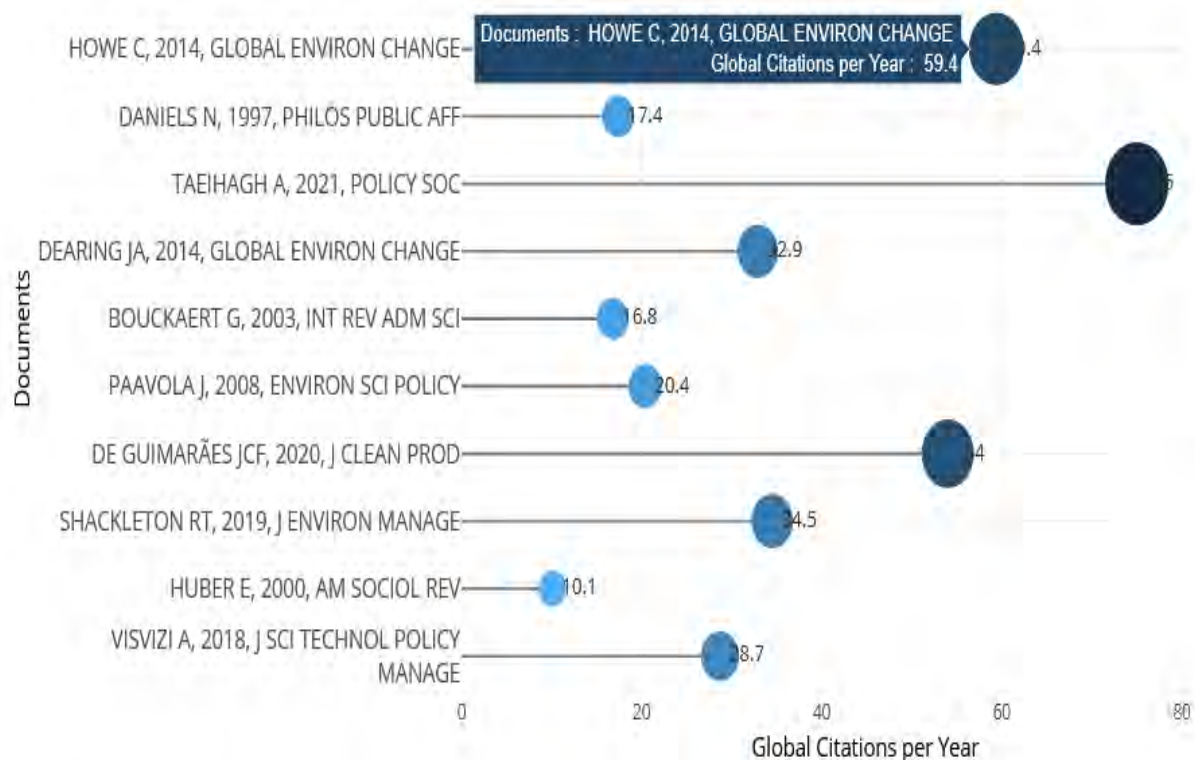
7. Bibliometric Analysis by Documents

7.1. Most Cited Documents Globally

The global citation analysis reveals a strong concentration of foundational impact among a select group of highly cited seminal works, led by Howe et al. (2014) in Global Environmental Change with 772 total citations and an average of 59.40 citations per year, alongside classical normative frameworks such as Daniels (1997) in Philosophy and Public Affairs with 521 total citations. Highly influential contributions are anchored in environmental policy and socio-

ecological trade-offs, exemplified by Dearing et al. (2014) in Global Environmental Change with 428 total citations and Paavola (2008) in Environmental Science and Policy with 388 total citations. Concurrently, recent contributions demonstrate remarkable citation velocity, notably Taeihagh (2021) in Policy and Society, which achieved 450 total citations with the highest annual citation rate in the corpus at 75.00 citations per year, reflecting an immediate scholarly response to emerging topics in technology governance.

Figure 11. Most Cited Documents Globally



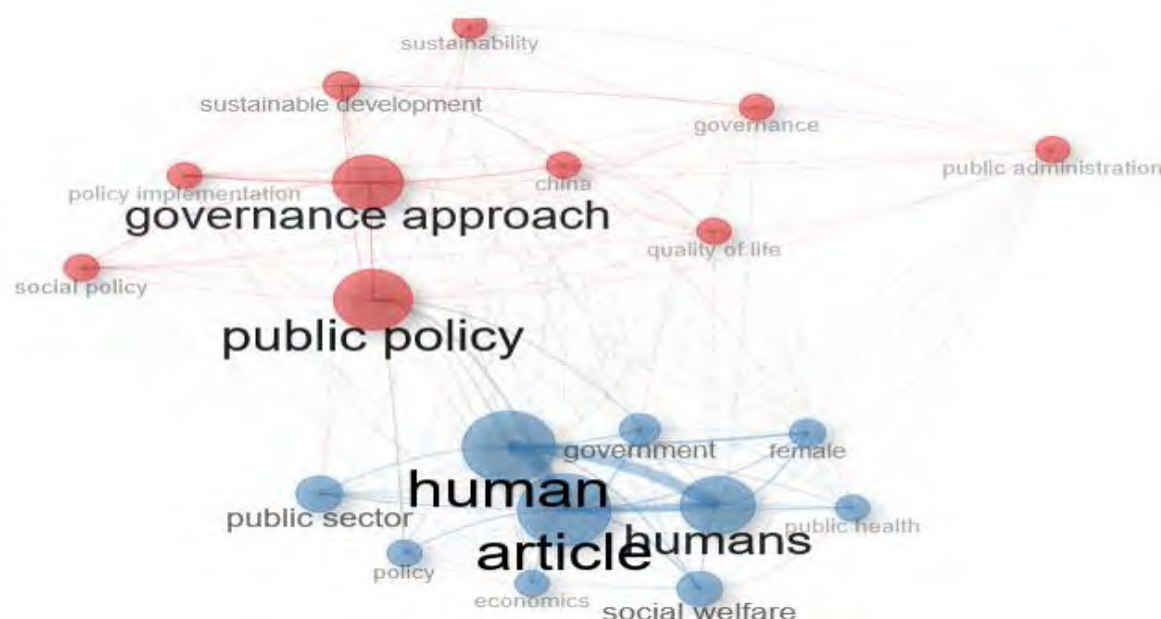
Source: Authors

From an interdisciplinary perspective, the top cited documents span four prominent thematic domains: socio-ecological systems and ecosystem service trade-offs (Howe et al., 2014; Dearing et al., 2014; Shackleton et al., 2019), public administration and administrative reform (Bouckaert and Halligan, 2003; Visvizi and Lytras, 2018), social policy and welfare equity (Daniels, 1997; Huber and Stephens, 2000), and sustainable technological innovation (De Guimarães et al., 2020; Taeihagh, 2021). Normalized citation scores further emphasize the outsized field-weighted influence of recent sustainability and smart governance research, where works like Taeihagh (2021) with a normalized citation score of 16.09 and Howe et al. (2014) with a score of 13.72 serve as crucial cross-disciplinary bridges connecting governance frameworks with environmental and social policy evaluation.

7.2. Co-occurrence Network

The word cloud analysis reveals a prominent thematic core centered on institutional policy mechanisms, environmental sustainability, and social well-being. Dominant keywords such as governance approach, public policy, sustainable development, policy implementation, and social policy highlight a major research orientation toward the structural mechanisms of public action and policy execution. Concurrently, concepts such as quality of life, public health, social welfare, and female underscore a human-centered dimension that connects administrative governance with lived socio-spatial realities and population-level well-being.

Figure 12. Co-occurrence Network



Source: Authors

Methodologically, the dataset incorporates both generic indexing terms (e.g., human, article, humans) and specific domain constructs (e.g., public sector, economics, governance, china). This conceptual distribution illustrates an interdisciplinary field where public administration and economic policy frameworks converge with empirical evaluations of sustainability and welfare outcomes. The structural emphasis on implementation dynamics and quality of life reflects a growing scholarly focus on measuring the tangible, local impacts of public policies across spatial and institutional scales.

8. Discussion

8.1. Synthesis of Findings and Theoretical Integration

The bibliometric analysis demonstrates a structural evolution in local impact and territorial governance research, characterized by a rapid post-2018 surge in publication volume and citation velocity. High-volume, multidisciplinary open-access journals have emerged as dominant venues for dissemination, shifting the field away from traditional, siloed public administration titles toward collaborative, cross-disciplinary platforms.

The thematic layout reveals a strong convergence between formal administrative mechanisms and tangible socio-spatial outcomes. While early foundational scholarship emphasized central public policy design and normative welfare frameworks, contemporary research increasingly prioritizes local execution dynamics, street-level bureaucratic discretion, and environmental sustainability trade-offs.

Crucially, a direct mapping emerges connecting the theoretical foundations established in Section 2 with the four empirical bibliometric pillars identified in Section 5.3:

1. Public Administrative Reform (Section 2.1) directly underpins the Public Governance and Administrative Theory pillar represented by *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* and *International Review of Administrative Sciences*.
2. Institutional Quality and Land Optimization (Section 2.2) provides the conceptual basis for the Territorial Sustainability and Land Management pillar represented by *Land Use Policy* and *Habitat International*.
3. Welfare State Regimes (Section 2.3) maps onto the Socio-Spatial Equity and Well-Being pillar anchored in *Social Indicators Research*.

4. Multi-Stakeholder Network Governance (Section 2.4) aligns with the Global Public Health and Environmental Systems pillar represented by Social Science and Medicine. When contrasting these scientometric patterns with earlier review studies in regional development (e.g., Cobo et al., 2011; Zupic and Cater, 2015), the present results highlight a marked paradigm shift. Historical reviews overwhelmingly treated administrative performance and social well-being as disconnected subjects. In contrast, modern scientometric dynamics demonstrate that contemporary scholarship treats institutional governance and social welfare as inextricably linked, driven by open-access collaborative research teams.

A notable geographical and contextual shift is evident in the author collaboration networks, where active research clusters regularly examine rapid urbanization, environmental regulation, and administrative decentralization in emerging economies. The strong presence of co-authored, highly cited studies underscores the growing reliance on large interdisciplinary teams to tackle multi-scalar governance challenges.

Notwithstanding these advances, the keyword and co-citation analyses highlight ongoing conceptual fragmentation between technical land-use planning and human-centered well-being metrics. Scholars frequently treat environmental management and social policy evaluation as distinct operational domains rather than interconnected dimensions of territorial development.

8.2. Methodological Limitations

Despite the methodological rigor applied across the extraction and mapping protocols, several inherent limitations must be acknowledged:

1. **Single Database Restraint:** Relying exclusively on Scopus metadata, while ensuring high peer-review indexation standards, may omit relevant regional studies indexed exclusively in Web of Science, Dimensions, or Google Scholar.
2. **Linguistic Filter Bias:** Restricting the search string to English and French documents introduces a language bias, potentially underrepresenting local governance reports published in native languages across Latin America, Asia, or Africa.
3. **Citation Latency and Self-Citation Effects:** Recent high-quality publications from 2024 to 2026 suffer from temporal citation latency, whereas raw citation metrics do not systematically filter out author or journal self-citations.
4. **Uncertainty in Predictive Life-Cycle Modeling:** The 40-year logistic growth projection peaking in 2040 represents a mathematical extrapolation based on historical parameters; it inherently carries uncertainty and does not account for future unforeseen geopolitical, technological, or institutional disruptions.

9. Conclusion

9.1. Synthesis of Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric synthesis of the scientific literature on local impact, territorial governance, and social well-being. By mapping publication trajectories, key author networks, and core document citations, the research delineates the structural evolution and primary conceptual pillars defining the discipline.

The findings confirm that the field has entered an active expansion phase, driven by collaborative, multidisciplinary research teams focusing on contemporary public policy implementation and environmental governance. The shift toward rapid open-access dissemination reflects an increasing academic urgency to deliver actionable insights for local policy-makers. Methodologically, this paper demonstrates the utility of combining quantitative performance metrics with qualitative science mapping to evaluate broad, multi-topic academic literature. The identified core journals, landmark articles, and active author clusters serve as an essential benchmarking reference for researchers navigating this domain.

9.2. Practical and Operational Policy Recommendations

To bridge the gap between scientometric findings and practical governance execution, public authorities and municipal planners should prioritize three strategic imperatives:

- Institutionalize Co-Design Frameworks: Transition from rigid administrative hierarchies toward multi-stakeholder collaborative platforms that actively incorporate street-level civil society actors in territorial decision-making.
- Integrate Spatial and Social Indicators: Align regional economic planning with localized subjective well-being metrics and environmental trade-off evaluations, ensuring equitable public service delivery across remote or marginalized territories.
- Enhance Local Administrative Capacity: Invest in digital governance tools, algorithmic transparency, and civil service training to improve local policy adaptability, public accountability, and program execution efficiency.

9.3. Operational Avenues for Future Empirical Research

Future research must bridge this divide by developing integrated empirical models that evaluate how territorial governance frameworks directly influence localized quality of life, subjective well-being, and socio-spatial equity across diverse regional contexts. Specifically, future scholars should deploy mixed-methods research designs combining structural equation modeling with longitudinal spatial econometrics to empirically test the causal pathways connecting municipal administrative capacity, multi-level governance alignment, and objective social welfare outcomes.

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