

Collaborative Governance in the Public Service Sector: A Bibliometrics Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In the modern era, governance can no longer operate effectively through a purely hierarchical and top-down approach. The complexity of social, economic, and environmental challenges faced by society demands a more inclusive and responsive framework. In line with contemporary public service demands, it is imperative to examine collaborative governance in public services to understand how diverse stakeholders can synergize effectively to address intricate public issues, optimize service delivery, and enhance governmental legitimacy and responsiveness. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of numerous research projects concerning collaborative governance in public services. Using VOSViewer as an analytical tool, we present the findings of our bibliometric analysis. Based on data from the Scopus database, covering the period from 2004 to 2025, a total of 76 English-language articles were identified. The highest number of publications—11 papers—was recorded in 2025 (up to July). The most cited document received 145 citations, and the country producing the highest number of articles on collaborative governance in public services is the United States, with 22 publications and 708 citations.

Keywords: Collaborative Governance; Public Service; Bibliometric Analysis

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, governance can no longer operate effectively through a purely hierarchical and top-down approach. The complexity of social, economic, and environmental challenges faced by society demands a more inclusive and responsive approach (Hariram et al., 2023; Lapidot-Lefler, 2025). Collaboration between the government, the private sector, and civil society has become crucial in formulating and implementing effective public policies. Therefore, research on Collaborative Governance in the public service sector is highly relevant (Khan & Han, 2023; Lopes & Farias, 2022; Van Gestel & Grotenbreg, 2021).

The urgency of Collaborative Governance is at least evident from the improvement of public service effectiveness, where collaboration allows for the utilization of resources, knowledge, and expertise from various parties. The government can gain insights from the community about real needs, while the private sector can contribute innovation and efficiency (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2024; Ferraris et al., 2020; Thirawan, 2025). The result is public services that are more relevant and effective in meeting community needs. In addition, there is an improvement in accountability and transparency, where the involvement of various parties in decision-making and policy implementation encourages transparency. The public can monitor the process and outcomes of the services provided, while the government and its collaborative partners are held accountable for their actions (Guerzovich & Schommer, 2018; Lee & Ospina,

2022; Wilkins et al., 2016). This reduces the risk of corruption and increases public trust in the government.

The improvement of the quality of democracy is also an important urgency, as Collaborative Governance expands the space for public participation in the political process (Bartoletti & Faccioli, 2016; Clark, 2021; Fung, 2015; Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2015). By involving citizens in policy formulation, governance becomes more democratic, and the legitimacy of policies becomes stronger. This allows for the creation of more representative and responsive governance (Linde & Peters, 2020).

Although important, the implementation of Collaborative Governance in the public service sector is not without challenges. Some challenges that often arise include: (1) Power imbalance: Unequal collaboration between the government and other parties (such as the private sector or civil society groups) can lead to the domination of one party, thereby preventing the achievement of collaboration goals. (2) Coordination and communication: Managing collaboration among various parties with different backgrounds and interests requires effective coordination and communication mechanisms. The absence of such mechanisms can lead to conflicts and inefficiencies. (3) Resistance to change: Government bureaucracy is often accustomed to a hierarchical approach. The shift toward Collaborative Governance requires cultural and structural changes within organizations that may be difficult to adopt.

Research on Collaborative Governance in the public service sector is crucial for understanding how collaboration can be enhanced to address these challenges. Such research can identify success factors, measure the impact of collaboration on service quality, and develop a framework for effectively implementing Collaborative Governance. Thus, this research can make a significant contribution to governance reform and the improvement of community welfare.

Examining the trends in Collaborative Governance within public services is highly beneficial because it provides a deeper understanding of how cooperation among the government, the private sector, and civil society develops and contributes to solving complex public issues. This research is not only academically relevant but also yields significant practical benefits. It helps identify effective new ways to address public issues, improve service quality, and strengthen relationships between the government, society, and the private sector.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the following research questions: (1) What are the research trends in Collaborative Governance in public services? (2) Which authors are the most influential? (3) Which organizations and countries have the most influence? (4) What are the most common keywords in research on Collaborative Governance in public services? (5) Which articles and journals on Collaborative Governance in public services are the most significant and widely cited?

METHOD

The Scopus database was chosen by the researchers to gather the data, as its credibility has been globally recognized. Many universities and research institutions use Scopus data to evaluate research performance, determine university rankings, and make strategic decisions related to research. This makes Scopus a reliable data source for large-scale bibliometric studies. It is often selected for its broader coverage and inclusiveness, particularly when

researchers seek a comprehensive understanding of a research topic without limiting their scope to journals with exceptionally high and selective impact factors.

In the Article Title, Abstract, & Keywords categories, we performed a Boolean search using the terms “Collaborative Governance” AND “Public Service.” The results showed 121 documents published between 2004 and 2025. For the purposes of this study, we selected documents categorized as “Article” and published in English, resulting in a total of 76 documents. We present the findings of our bibliometric analysis using the software tool VOSViewer.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What were the collaborative governance in public service research trends?

Figure 1 illustrates that the research publications about collaborative governance in public service, in the Scopus database from 2004 to 2025 show an up-and-down trend. Although it started in 2004, interest in this research theme began to emerge in 2018 and peaked in 2025 with a total of 11 publications by July 2025.

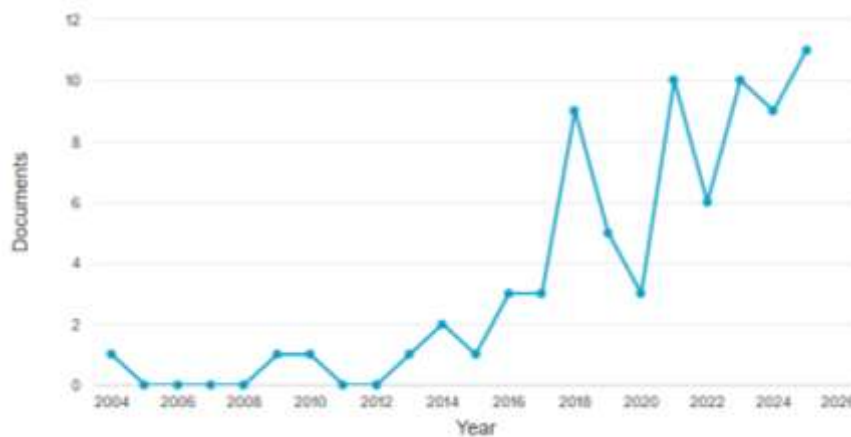


Figure. 1. Documents by Year

Which authors were most influential?

Using Authors as our unit of analysis, we examined co-authorship from 76 authors, that we present it in Figure 2 below:

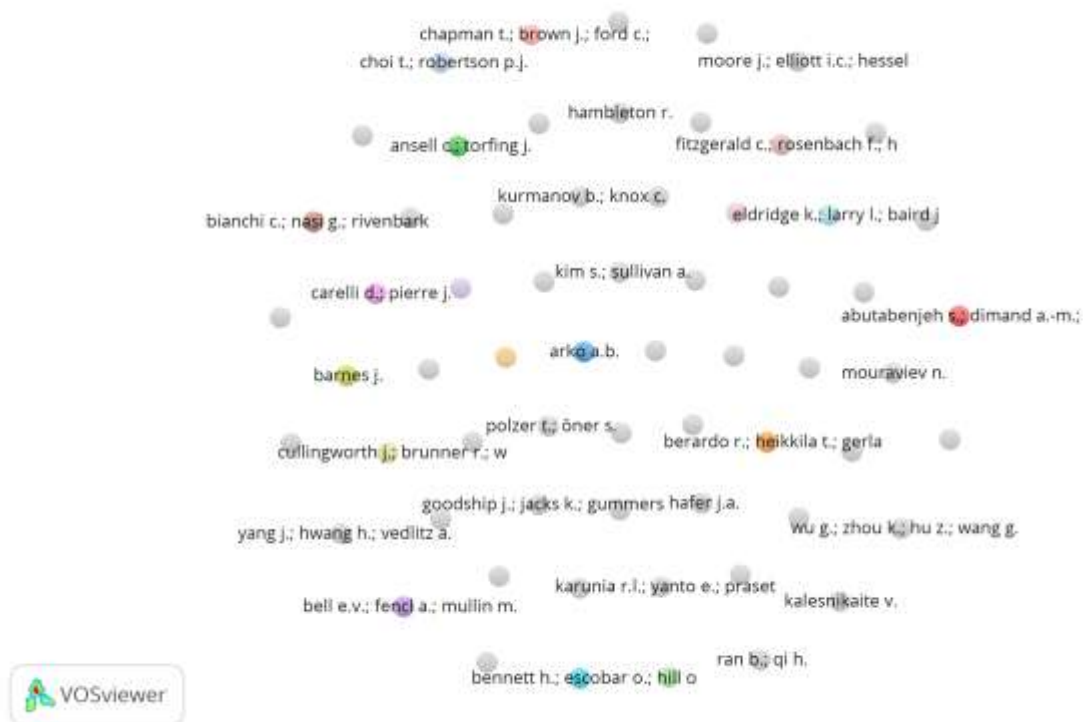


Figure. 2. Co-Authorship Analysis by Author

With a total of two publications published on Scopus, we also found that Khan, N. U; Ran, B; Torfing, J; and Wang, H. have become the most productive authors (Figure 3).

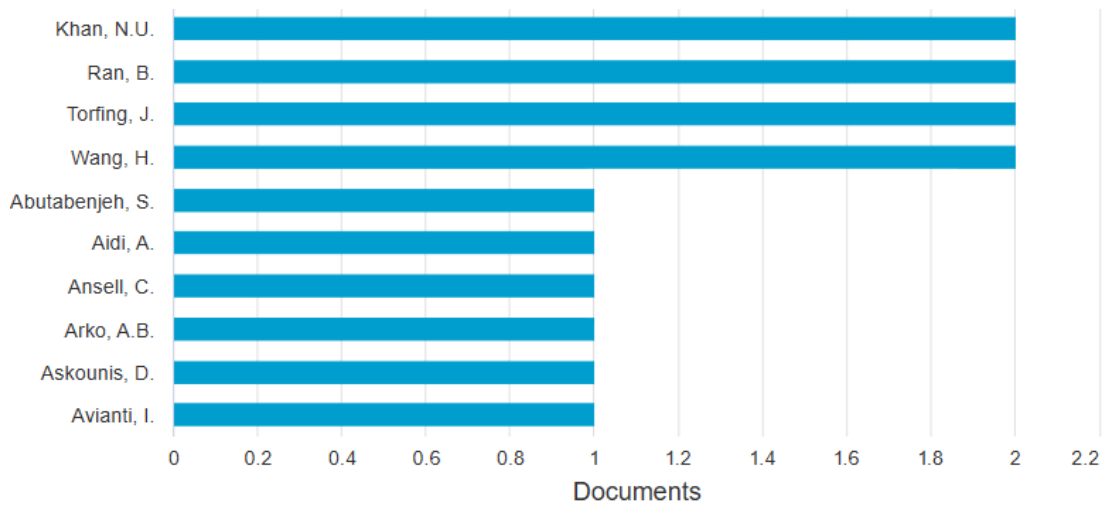


Figure. 3. Documents by Author

Using Authors as our unit of analysis, we examined citation. The minimum number of document of an author is 1, and the minimum number of citations of an author is 2. As a result, out of 76 authors, 55 satisfy the requirements. We present it in Figure 4.



Figure. 4. Citation by Author

The most influenced author is Bianchi, C., Nasi, G., and Riverbank W.C. with 145 citations. The rest of the author in the top five, that also give high influence, we present in the Tabel 1 below:

Table 1. Author(s) Documents & Citations.

No	Author (s)	Citations
1	Bianchi, C., Nasi, G., and Riverbank W.C.	145
2	Ansell, C., and Torfing, J.	126
3	Berardo, R., Heikkila, T., and Gerlak, A. K.	56
4	Chen, Y. C., and Lee, J.	53
5	Torfing, J., Cristofoli, D., Gloor P. A., Meijer, A. J., Trivellato, B.	51

What were the most influential organization and country?

Using organization as our unit of analysis, we examined co-authorship. The Minimum number of documents of an organization is 1, and minimum number of citation of an organization is also 1. As a result, out of 160 organization, 134 meet the thresholds. Unfortunately, some of the items in this network are not connected to each other. The largest set of connected items consist of 6 items that we present it in Figure 5.

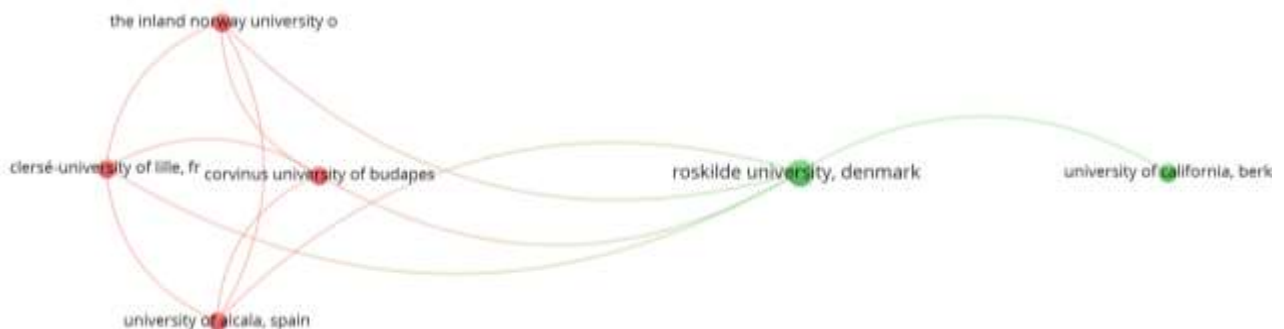


Figure. 5. Co-authorship by Organization

Using organization as our unit of analysis, we also examined citation. The Minimum number of documents of an organization is 1, and a minimum number of citations of an organizations is 20. As a result, out of 160 organization, 42 meet the thresholds. We present it in Figure 6.

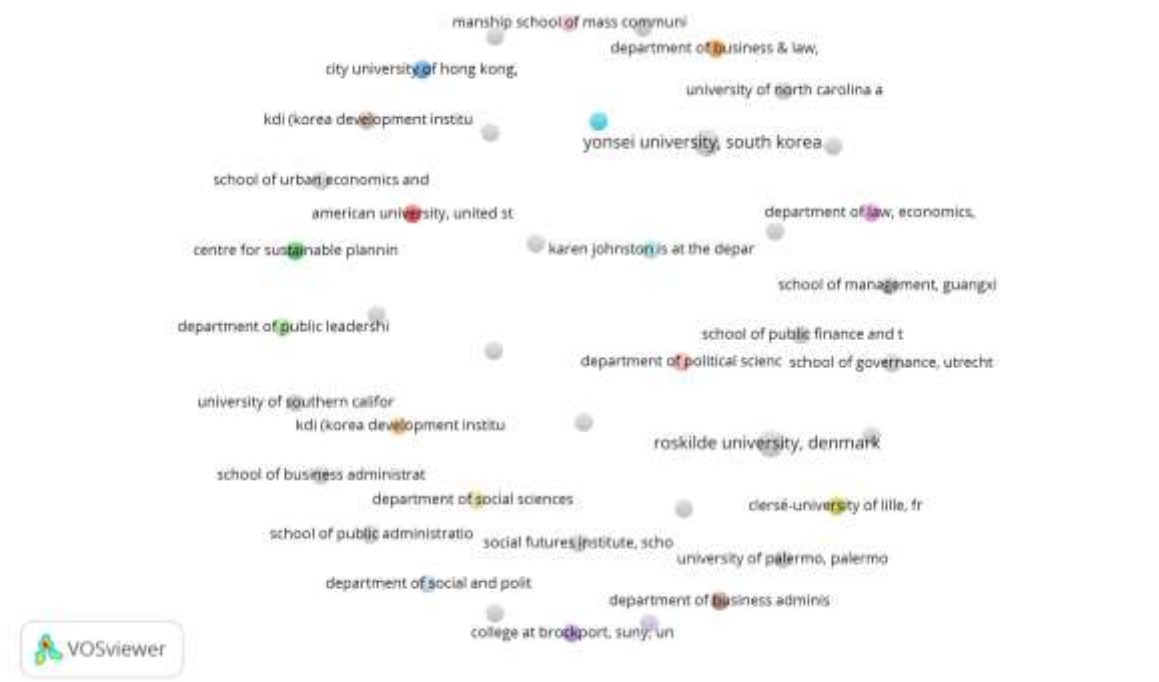


Figure. 6. Citation by Organization

The list of the top five of organizations can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Organization Documents & Citations.

No	Organization	Document	Citation
1	Roskilde University, Denmark	2	150
2	Department of Social Science and Political Sciences, Bocconi University, Milan, Italy	1	145
3	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, United States	1	145
4	University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy	1	145
5	University of California, Berkeley, United States	1	126

Using countries as our unit of analysis, we examined co-authorship. A minimum number of document of a country is 1 and the minimum number of citations of country is 1. As a result, out of 33 countries, 26 meet the thresholds. Of the 26 objects in this network, several are not related to one another. Figure 7 shows 18 items in the greatest group of related items.

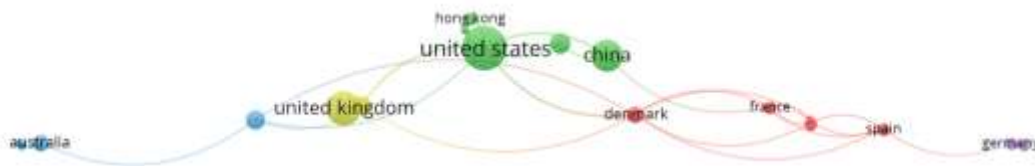


Figure 7. Co-authorship by Countries

We present the list of the top five countries in Table 3.

Table 3. Countries Documents & Citations.

No	Country	Document	Citation
1	United States	22	708
2	United Kingdom	13	194
3	Italy	4	219
4	Denmark	3	201
5	South Korea	5	145

What was the most common keyword in the research on collaborative governance in public service?

Using All keyword as our unit of analysis, we examined Co-Occurance. A minimum number of occurrence of a keyword is 3. As a result, out of 362 keywords, 19 meet the thresholds. We present it in Figure 8.

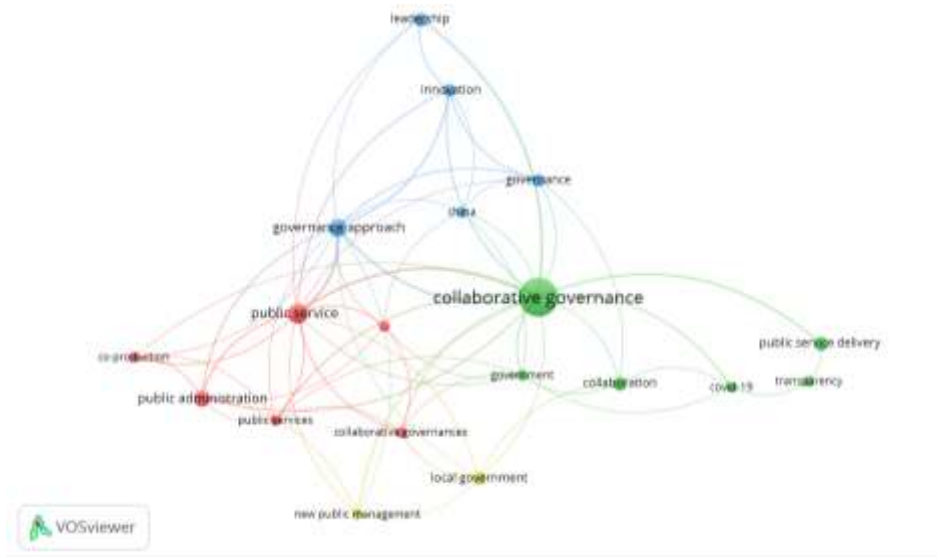


Figure 8. Co-occurrence by All Keyword

Using Author keyword as our unit of analysis, we also examined Co-Occurance. A minimum number of occurrence of a keyword is 3. As a result, out of 260 keywords, 12 meet the thresholds. We present the result in Figure 9.

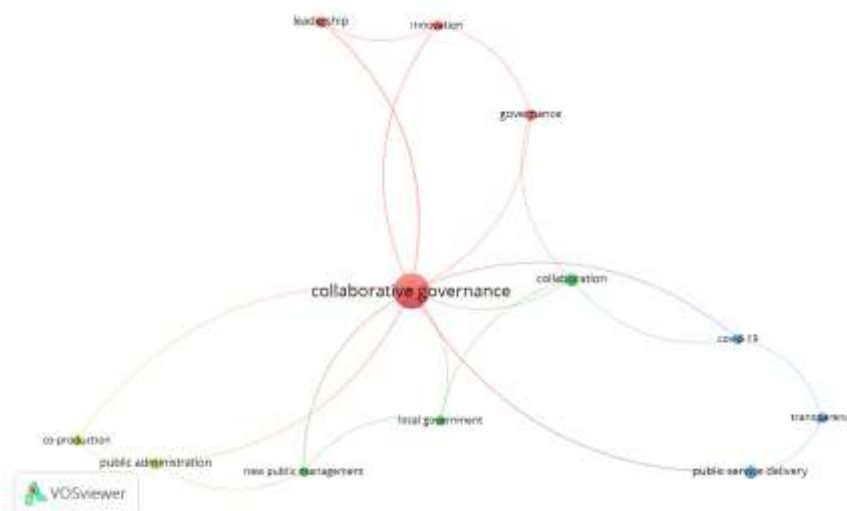


Figure 9. Co-occurrence by Author Keyword

Furthermore, by using Index keyword as our unit of analysis, we examined Co-Occurance. A minimum number of occurrence of a keyword is 3. As a result, out of 121 keywords, 6 meet the thresholds, as we present it in Figure 10.

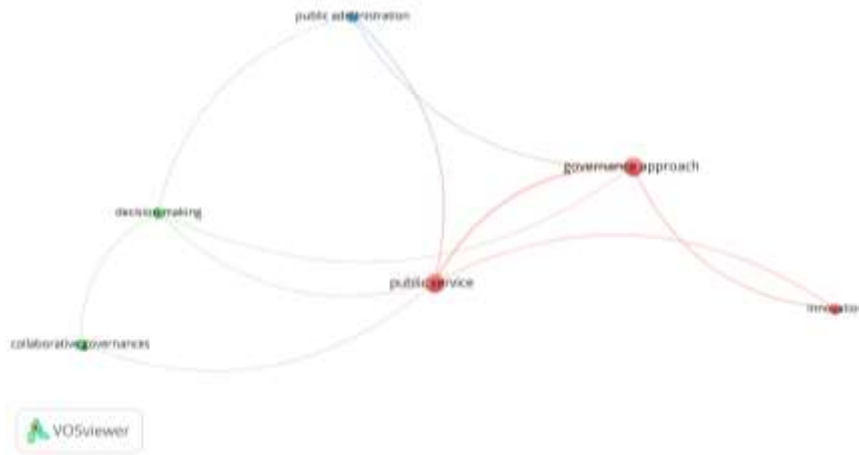


Figure 10. Co-occurrence by Index Keyword

Which articles and journals about collaborative governance in public service were the most significant and popular?

Using documents as our unit of analysis, we examined citation. A minimum number of citation of a document is 1. As a result, out of 76 documents, 63 meet the thresholds. We present it in Figure 11.

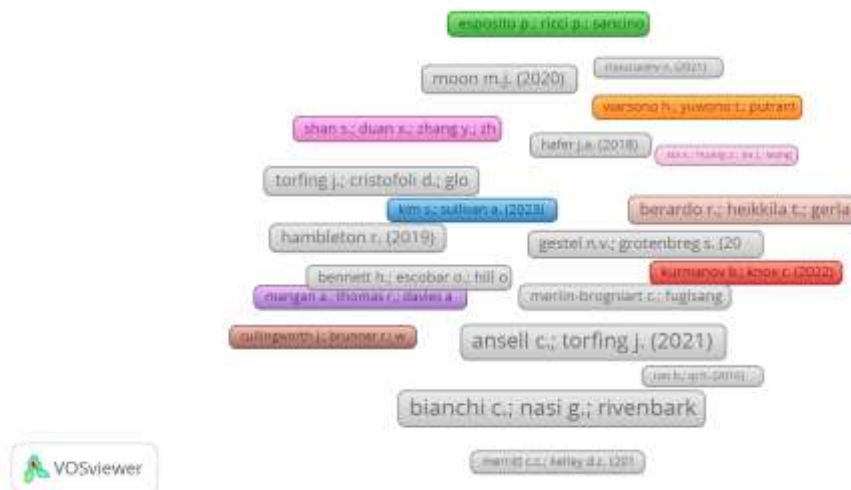


Figure 11. Citation by Document

We present Table 4 and Table 5 to show the most significant and popular articles and journals about collaborative governance in public service.

Table 4. Popular and Significant Articles

No	Author	Article Title	Citation	Source
1	Bianchi, C., Nasi, G., and Riverbank W.C.	Implementing collaborative governance: models, experiences, and challenges	145	[8]
2	Ansell, C., and Torfing, J.	Co-creation: the new kid on the block in public governance	126	[9]
3	Berardo, R., Heikkila, T., and Gerlak, A. K.	Interorganizational Engagement in Collaborative Environmental Management: Evidence from the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force	56	[10]
4	Chen, Y. C., and Lee, J.	Collaborative data networks for public service: governance, management, and performance	53	[11]
5	Torfing, J., Cristofoli, D., Gloor P. A., Meijer, A. J., Trivellato, B.	Taming the snake in paradise: combining institutional design and leadership to enhance collaborative innovation	51	[12]

Table 5. Popular and Significant Journals

No	Article Title	Journal	Publisher	Reputation
1	Implementing collaborative governance: models, experiences, and challenges	Public Management Review	Taylor & Francis Group	Q1
2	Co-creation: the new kid on the block in public governance	Policy & Politics	Policy Press	Q1
3	Interorganizational Engagement in Collaborative Environmental Management: Evidence from the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force	Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory	Oxford University Press	Q1
4	Collaborative data networks for public service: governance, management, and performance	Public Management Review	Taylor & Francis Group	Q1
5	Taming the snake in paradise: combining institutional design and leadership to enhance collaborative innovation	Policy & Society	Taylor & Francis Group	Q1

CONCLUSION

Starting in 2004, the highest number of publications was recorded in 2025, with a total of 11 documents (as of July). Although Khan, N. U., Ran, B., Torfing, J., and Wang, H. have been the most productive authors on Scopus with two publications each, Bianchi, C., Nasi, G., and Riverbank, W. C. have received the most citations, totaling 145. Roskilde University, Denmark, was identified as the most influential organization, with 150 citations from two documents. Meanwhile, the United States emerged as the most influential country, with 22 publications and 708 citations. The term Collaborative Governance has gained significant popularity in two categories—all keywords and author keywords—while Public Service appears most frequently in index keywords. The most significant and widely cited article and journal on collaborative governance and public services is *Implementing Collaborative Governance: Models, Experiences, and Challenges*, written by Bianchi, C., Nasi, G., and Riverbank, W. C. (2021), and published in *Public Management Review* (Q1). This article has received a total of 145 citations.

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