

Creativity and Innovation in the Public Sector: A Global Perspective and Implications for Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the development of scientific literature related to creativity and innovation in the public sector over the past decade (2015–2024) using a bibliometric approach. Following a PRISMA-guided screening procedure, a final corpus of 244 articles was obtained from the Scopus database and analysed with VOSviewer software to map publication trends, the most frequently used keywords, the most productive authors and institutions, and patterns of international collaboration. The analysis results show a significant increase in the number of publications, primarily centred on e-government, digital innovation, and public service delivery. Authors and institutions from European countries, especially the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Denmark, lead scientific production in this field. The keyword analysis also reveals a shift in research focus from technological aspects to collaborative dimensions and innovative governance. In the Indonesian context, the results of this study demonstrate the importance of strengthening institutional capacity, bureaucratic leadership, and an adaptive innovation ecosystem to drive public sector transformation. This research makes a valuable contribution to the development of public innovation theory and provides an empirical basis for formulating evidence-based policies relevant to local and global needs.

A. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, creativity and innovation have become essential elements in the transformation of the public sector across various countries worldwide (Bekkers & Tummers, 2018; Locke et al., 2019; Moussa et al., 2018). Facing increasingly complex and dynamic challenges, governments must not only respond to the needs and aspirations of the community but also proactively design and implement innovative solutions to tackle diverse social, economic, and environmental issues.

Creativity, often defined as the ability to think outside the box, is essential for developing more effective and efficient public policies (Wukich & Siciliano, 2014). This includes the adoption of new technologies, the development of more inclusive service models, and the discovery of new ways to engage citizens in decision-making processes. Furthermore, innovation is not limited to the development of new products or services but also involves changes in the processes, structures, and culture of government organisations themselves (Amusan & Oyekunle, 2016; Moussa et al., 2018). In this context, both elements play a vital role in improving bureaucratic efficiency.

By adopting a more creative and innovative approach, governments can reduce bureaucratic red tape, expedite decision-making processes, and provide more responsive, high-quality public services. This, in turn, contributes to increased public satisfaction with the services they receive. Furthermore, creativity and innovation also play a role in building and strengthening public trust in government institutions (Obeidat, 2022; OECD, 2022). Thus, it is undeniable that creativity and innovation are key pillars of public sector transformation. Governments that incorporate these two elements into their strategies and operations will be better prepared to face future challenges and meet evolving societal expectations.

The study of innovation in the public sector has advanced considerably in recent years, aligning with a growing focus on key issues like the digitalisation of services, the adoption of e-government, citizen participation, and data-driven governance. Unlike private-sector innovation, which is primarily motivated by the pursuit of economic gains, public-sector innovation is more complex and diverse (Bekkers & Tummers, 2018; Demircioglu & Audretsch, 2017; Moussa et al., 2018). This complexity arises from the involvement of various stakeholders, differing policy goals, and public values that must be considered.

Public innovation involves more than just developing new technologies or enhancing service efficiency; it also includes changes in government-citizen interactions, policy formulation, and information management (Andhika, 2018; Janssen et al., 2017; OECD, 2022). Moreover, data-driven governance enables better-informed decision-making and greater responsiveness to public needs (Keller et al., 2017). Therefore, understanding the dynamics of creativity and innovation in the public sector is essential, both theoretically and practically. This understanding not only aids in devising more effective innovation strategies but also fosters an environment that encourages collaboration among government, citizens, and the private sector. Consequently, innovation in the public sector can help enhance the overall quality of life for the community.

Despite the growing number of publications on this topic, there remains limited research that systematically traces the development of the literature on public sector creativity and innovation worldwide. Bibliometric analysis can significantly contribute to identifying research trends, key scholars, leading institutions, and collaborative networks established over the past decade (García-Sánchez et al., 2020). By employing a quantitative approach to scholarly publication metadata, bibliometrics enables exploration of the field's growth, future directions, and existing gaps for further investigation (Zakiyyah et al., 2022). Consequently, bibliometric analysis can serve as an effective tool for understanding the evolution and prospects of research by highlighting new opportunities for further investigation. Although a number of bibliometric studies have already examined public sector innovation, most confine themselves to a single sub-domain—such as e-government, digital government, or public procurement—or to a particular region, and they rarely translate their global findings into the governance context of a specific developing country. This study seeks to advance that body of work in three respects: it treats creativity and innovation jointly as a single field of inquiry across the public sector rather than as isolated themes; it concentrates on the most recent decade (2015–2024), thereby capturing the marked post-pandemic surge in scholarly output; and it explicitly links the resulting global map to the practical and theoretical challenges of public sector reform in Indonesia. This combination distinguishes the present study from earlier, more narrowly scoped bibliometric reviews and frames its intended contribution.

This study aims to map the global literature on creativity and innovation in the public sector over the past ten years (2015–2024) using Scopus data, analysed with VOSviewer, and to draw out the implications of this body of knowledge for administrative reform and public sector innovation in Indonesia. Addressing the gap identified above, the study is guided by four research questions: (1) How has the volume of scientific publications on public sector creativity and innovation developed between 2015 and 2024? (2) Which themes, as reflected in author keywords, dominate and how has the research focus shifted over time? (3) Who are the most productive authors and institutions, and how are countries positioned within international collaboration networks? (4) What practical and theoretical implications do these global patterns hold for strengthening public sector innovation in Indonesia? By answering these questions, the findings are expected to offer strategic insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to develop a more relevant and impactful research and innovation agenda for the public sector.

B. METHOD

This study employs a bibliometric approach, a quantitative method for analysing scientific publications to identify patterns, trends, and structures within a field of knowledge (Zakiyyah et al., 2022). This approach is appropriate for mapping the development of literature on creativity and innovation in the public sector globally over the past ten years (2015–2024).

Bibliometric data were collected from the Scopus database, one of the largest and most reputable scientific databases for international academic publications (Baas et al., 2020). The search strategy was designed to capture scientific articles relevant to creativity and innovation in the public sector. The literature search process was conducted by inputting the following search string into Scopus: (TITLE-ABS-KEY("public sector innovation" OR "public innovation" OR "creativity in public sector" OR "innovation in public administration")). The search results were then exported in CSV format, including metadata such as title, author, affiliated institution, year of publication, abstract, keywords, and references list.

As part of a systematic approach to document screening, this study adopted the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) method to ensure transparency and accountability in the literature selection process. A PRISMA diagram was utilised to illustrate several stages in the article selection process: identification, screening, eligibility, and final inclusion. The PRISMA approach enabled this study to maintain traceability of the literature selection process whilst increasing the validity and credibility of the analysis results (Page et al., 2021). Figure 1 above shows the PRISMA diagram compiled by the researchers in this study to illustrate the systematic process of obtaining the final data from the initial selection process. From the 1,074 records initially identified, articles were retained only if they were peer-reviewed journal articles written in English, published between 2015 and 2024, and available in open access. The open-access criterion was applied to guarantee that every analysed item could be retrieved and verified in full text by other researchers, thereby supporting the reproducibility of the review; its implications for representativeness are addressed in the limitations section. After excluding records that did not meet these criteria, 244 articles were included in the final analysis.

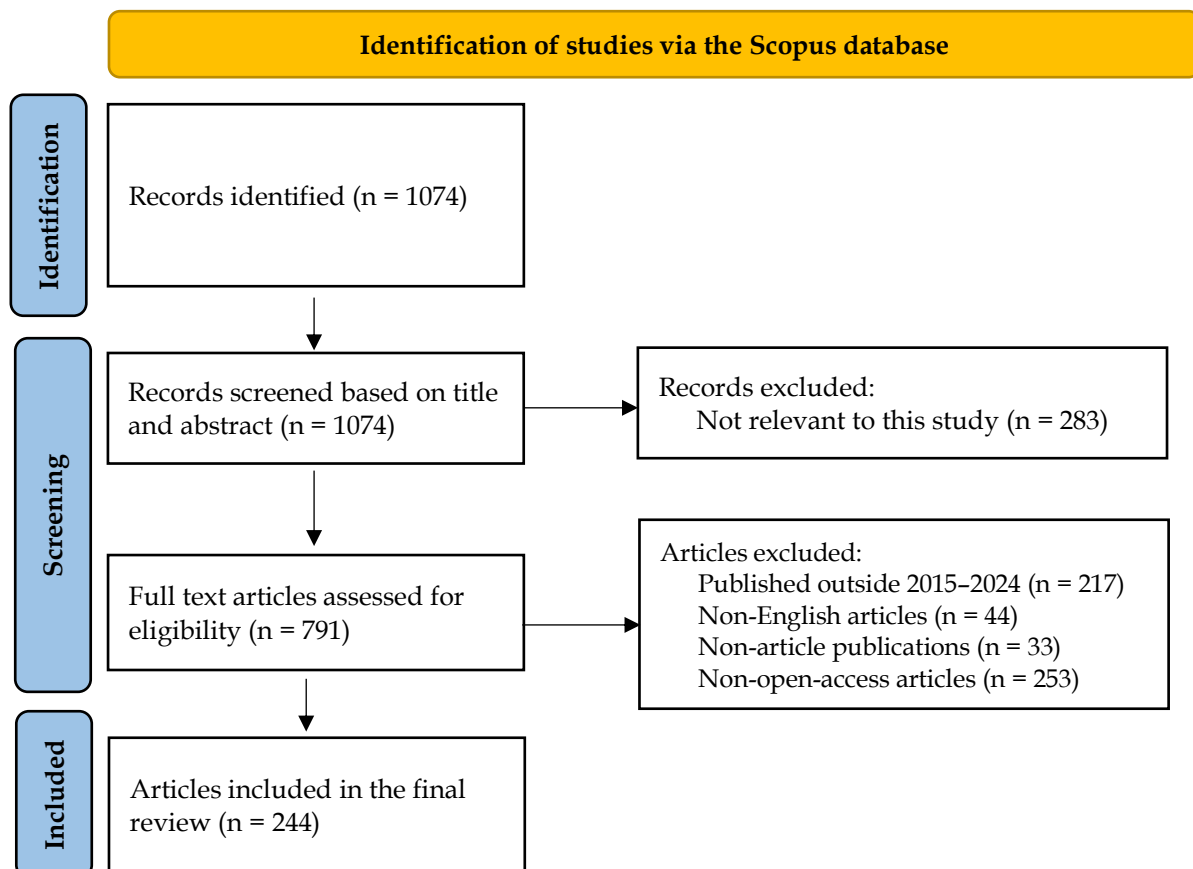


Figure 1. PRISMA in this research

To ensure reproducibility, the search and export process was completed in a single session in May 2025, thereby minimising discrepancies that may arise from periodic updates to the Scopus database. The exported bibliometric records were analysed using VOSviewer, which visualises scientific networks based on relationships among bibliographic elements. The analysis covered publication trends by year, keyword co-occurrence, author and institutional productivity, co-authorship patterns, and international collaboration by country affiliation.

The network maps were generated using the full counting method and association-strength normalisation. For each network, minimum-threshold criteria were applied to retain only the most salient items, including a minimum number of keyword occurrences for the thematic map and a minimum number of documents for authors, institutions, and countries in the productivity and collaboration maps. The resulting clusters were differentiated by colour, while each node's size reflected the frequency, productivity, or strength of the corresponding item.

The visualisations were then interpreted qualitatively to examine the intellectual structure of the field and the patterns of scientific collaboration within it. This interpretative approach enabled the study to identify dominant themes, key contributors, patterns of institutional and national collaboration, and broader dynamics that shape knowledge production in the field. By explicitly reporting the data source, retrieval period, software, counting method, normalisation technique, and threshold criteria, the study enhances the transparency and reproducibility of the analytical procedure.

C. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Publication Trends per Year

Analysis of publication trends demonstrates that interest in research on creativity and innovation in the public sector has steadily grown over the past decade (2015–2024). Of the 244 articles examined, notable growth was particularly evident since 2020. Peaks in publication activity occurred in 2023 and 2024, highlighting a growing global focus on the significance of innovation in public services, especially amid digital disruption and post-pandemic challenges. Figure 2 presents a graph depicting this publication trend surge:

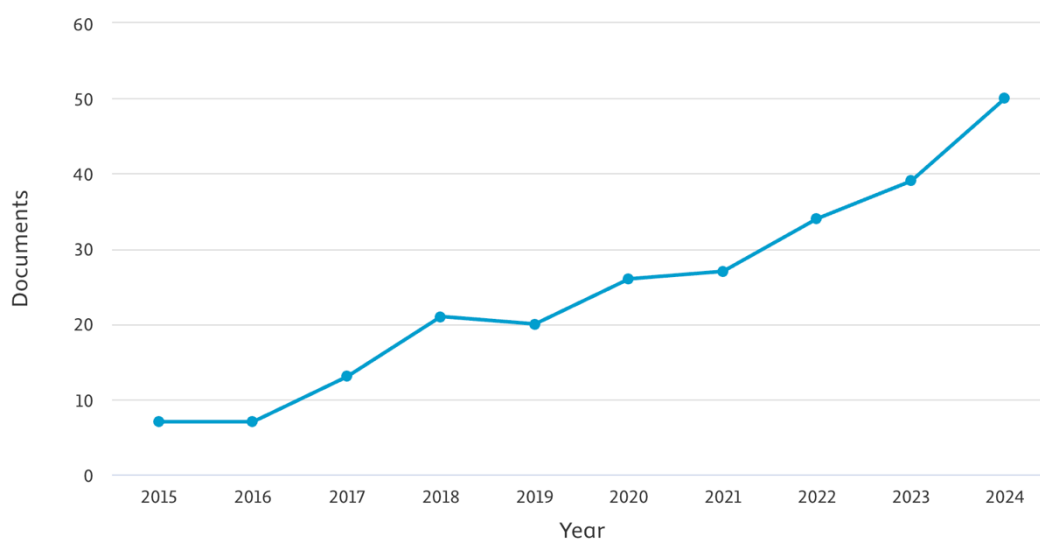


Figure 2. Publication trends per year

This trend highlights the growing need for governments across various countries to respond to social change and technological progress with solutions that are both innovative and sustainable. In this context, governments worldwide are increasingly recognising the importance of adapting and innovating their policies and public services to meet society's evolving expectations.

The factors contributing to this trend are varied. One is the development of e-government, which allows governments to improve efficiency and transparency in public services through information and communication technology. Digital transformation also plays a vital role by enabling

Mehmood, 2016). Moreover, the human resource element is equally vital, as successful innovation often relies on the skills and abilities of the individuals involved (Chowhan et al., 2017; Lattuch, 2021; Stachova et al., 2017). Therefore, understanding the various factors influencing innovation in the public sector as a whole is essential for developing effective and sustainable policy solutions.

On the other hand, the presence of keywords such as sustainable development, performance, and COVID-19 emphasises that the study of innovation in the public sector is now closely connected to the global challenges faced by different countries. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, has compelled governments to adapt and enhance public services more effectively and responsively (Moser-Plautz & Schmidhuber, 2023; Prusty & Mahapatra, 2021; Zardo et al., 2023). In this context, sustainability becomes a key focus, with innovation evaluated not only for efficiency and effectiveness but also for its long-term impact on society and the environment. Therefore, efforts to improve public service performance must be capable of addressing these challenges holistically and sustainably.

These findings emphasise the crucial importance of a cross-disciplinary approach in research on innovation in the public sector. This approach not only enriches our understanding of the dynamics involved but also opens up opportunities to incorporate diverse perspectives and expertise. Moreover, the results of this study highlight the urgent need to further explore and understand the complex relationships among technology, policy, and public values. In this context, designing adaptive and innovative governance becomes increasingly vital, as it can offer more effective responses to societal challenges. Therefore, collaboration across disciplines and between the public and private sectors is essential for developing solutions that are not only relevant but also sustainable amid rapid, dynamic change.

3. Most prolific authors, leading institutions, and international collaborations

Analysis of the author data indicates that several individuals have made significant contributions to research on innovation and creativity in the public sector. The authors with the most publications in this dataset are Emre Cinar and Christopher Don Simms, each with seven publications, followed by Glenn Houtgraaf with 6 publications. Then, they are followed by six other authors who have contributed four articles each, and one author has contributed three articles. Further details can be seen in Figure 4:

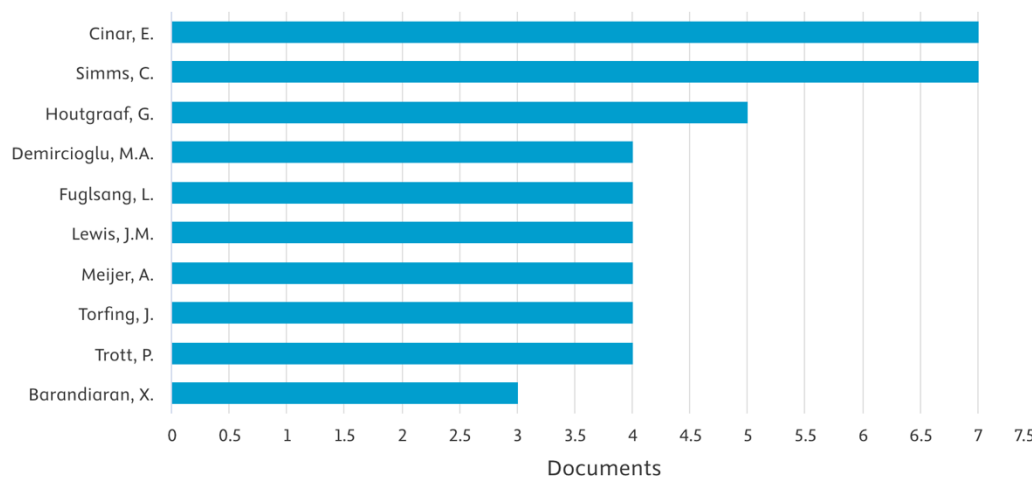


Figure 4. Prolific authors

These authors are generally actively involved in a variety of themes related to public policy innovation, collaborative efforts, multi-actor approaches, and so on. Their ongoing contributions to the literature highlight the existence of a strong and growing research community in this field. This community includes contributions from different countries and disciplines, forming a rich and varied body of knowledge. Consequently, they contribute not only to the development of theory and practice but also to promoting international collaboration, which can broaden perspectives and solutions to the challenges encountered in implementing public policy in the digital age.

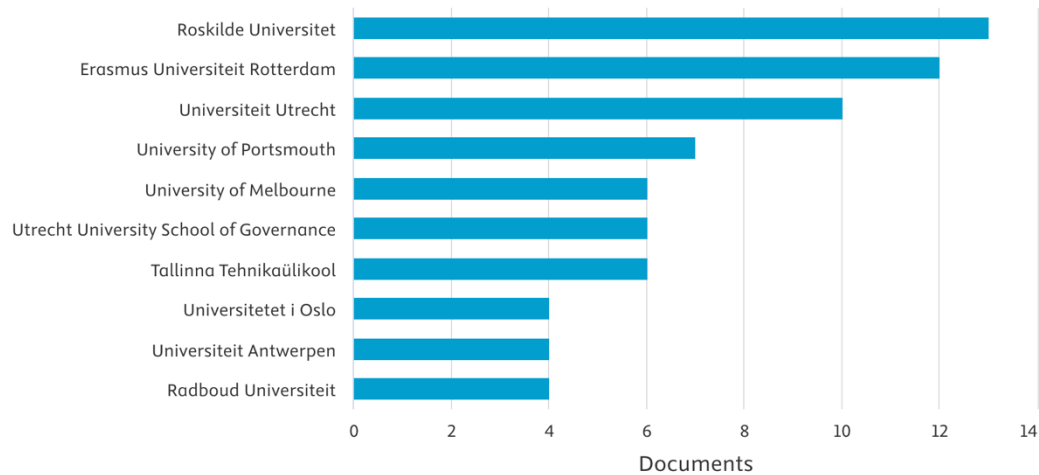


Figure 5. Leading institutions

Figure 5 above shows that the institution contributing the most to this literature, with more than 10 documents, is Roskilde University (Denmark) with 13 publications, followed by Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands) with 12, and Utrecht University (Netherlands) with 10. Except for the University of Melbourne (Australia), European institutions dominate, indicating that the continent is a key centre for the development of public-sector innovation studies. Many of these institutions have strong centres for governance or public policy studies and are involved in international collaborative projects that advance the government innovation agenda.

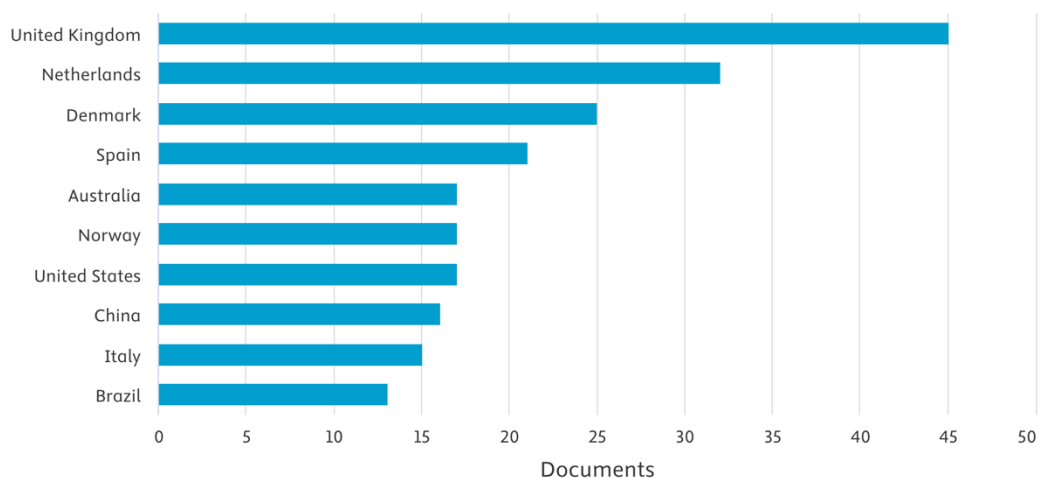


Figure 6. Distribution of countries

Regarding the geographical distribution shown in Figure 6 above, the top four countries with the highest publication contributions are: the United Kingdom (46 publications), the Netherlands (32), Denmark (25), and Spain (21). There are three countries in the next rank with similar numbers (17): Australia, Norway, and the United States. European countries, including Italy (15), lead in terms of the number of publications and scientific collaborations. However, the presence of China (16) and Brazil (13) indicates that interest in public-sector innovation is also growing in developing nations and major economies across Asia and Latin America.

Indonesia, although not ranking among the top 10 countries in research output in this field, still demonstrates significant and active engagement in scholarly activities. This archipelago nation has contributed as many as 11 research studies, reflecting a growing commitment to advancing knowledge and understanding in this area. This level of involvement highlights Indonesia's emerging role as a contributor to global research efforts, signalling potential for further growth and development.

Intensive cross-national collaboration is evident in the large number of articles authored by researchers from various international affiliations, demonstrating that public sector innovation is global and transcends policy boundaries. A deeper understanding of international collaboration can enrich

innovation practices in the public sector, fostering the exchange of valuable ideas and experiences (Cinar et al., 2022; Merlin-Brogniart et al., 2022; Torfing, 2019). The analysis shows that international collaboration in public sector innovation research is increasing, creating mutually beneficial knowledge networks across countries and disciplines. This collaboration not only strengthens the knowledge base but also encourages the implementation of innovative solutions that can be adapted to various contexts and global issues and challenges.

Beyond describing these rankings, it is worth asking why scientific production is so heavily concentrated in a small group of Northern and Western European countries. Several mutually reinforcing explanations are plausible. First, the region has a long and institutionally embedded tradition of public administration and governance scholarship; many of the most productive authors and institutions in this dataset—particularly those associated with the collaborative-governance and co-creation schools centred in the Netherlands, Denmark, and the United Kingdom—are sustained by dedicated research centres and doctoral programmes that have cultivated this agenda over decades. Second, sustained public investment in research, including European funding schemes that have explicitly supported public-sector reform and social innovation, has financed the multi-country consortia that bibliometric collaboration maps are designed to capture, thereby reinforcing the visibility of European authorship. Third, and more critically, part of this apparent dominance is an artefact of the data source itself: Scopus indexes predominantly English-language journals, thereby structurally advantaging countries that publish in English while underrepresenting scholarship from Asia, Latin America, and Africa, which is frequently disseminated in national languages and non-indexed outlets. The European lead, therefore, reflects not only genuine research strength but also a measurement bias, and the rankings should be read as a map of indexed, English-language activity rather than as a complete account of global engagement. This distinction matters for the present study, because it cautions against treating the relative scarcity of Indonesian output as evidence of low innovation activity rather than of limited international indexing and visibility.

4. Practical and theoretical implications in Indonesia

The global patterns identified above provide the analytical lens for examining the Indonesian context. The keyword analysis showed that the field's centre of gravity has shifted away from purely technological concerns towards leadership, collaborative governance, organisational culture, and co-creation, while the collaboration map revealed a field organised around dense international networks in which Indonesia remains relatively peripheral. The Indonesian cases discussed below were therefore selected deliberately because they instantiate precisely these globally salient, non-technological enabling factors—transformational leadership and socio-organisational readiness—at the local level, allowing the abstract global map to be tested against concrete domestic experience. In this sense, creativity and innovation in the Indonesian public sector have increasingly significant implications, both practical and theoretical.

Practically, studies show that innovations undertaken by local governments can drive more inclusive and sustainable economic development (Dovitiis et al., 2017; Pulkkinen et al., 2024). These innovations not only improve service efficiency but also contribute to per capita economic growth and an increase in the regional development index. These findings reinforce the role of public-sector innovation as a development instrument, rather than merely a discourse on bureaucratic reform (Hijal-Moghrabi et al., 2020; Matei & Bujac, 2016). Therefore, innovation must be an integral part of national development strategies to ensure sustainability and relevance amid evolving global challenges.

Evidence from Indonesian local governments—for instance, studies of public hospitals in North Sumatra—indicates that the success of public sector innovations depends heavily on transformational leadership (Bahagia et al., 2024). Transformational leadership not only encourages active participation from civil servants but also fosters an environment that supports collaboration and community engagement (Awang et al., 2020). Leaders who adopt a transformational approach dare to overhaul rigid bureaucratic work patterns, making them more adaptable and responsive to community needs and aspirations (Bush, 2018). The transformations undertaken reflect a commitment to building a better, more sustainable society and to improving the quality of life for all citizens.

The process of implementing and replicating innovation in bureaucratic environments shows that internal organisational readiness is a key factor for success (Larsen, 2015). Organisational structure, work-culture readiness, and leadership quality are essential foundations for sustaining innovation (Pradana et al., 2022). Another interesting example is the success of policy innovation implementation

in the local government of Garut regency; the authors stated that successful adoption of this technological innovation depends not only on technical advantages but also on socio-organisational support, such as collaborations, leadership, policy support, and organisational culture (Pratiwi et al., 2024). This example illustrates that innovation is not only technology-based but also involves social, political, and cultural processes within the public bureaucracy.

The theoretical implications of these findings are significant for enriching the literature on public sector innovation, especially in developing countries and decentralised governance systems such as Indonesia. Conceptually, this study supports organisational innovation theory, which highlights the importance of culture, structure, and leadership in fostering innovation. Furthermore, the presence of several key actors, such as universities, the government, the private sector, community groups, and media, creates opportunities to develop a Penta Helix-based theoretical approach to explain the dynamics of public innovation. Although this framework has not been widely applied explicitly in Indonesian studies, the increasing trend of cross-sector collaboration, including through research institutions like BRIN, enhances the relevance of this approach for further exploration studies.

Thus, creativity and innovation in Indonesia's public sector are not merely policy objectives but also an epistemic call to deepen theoretical understanding of how bureaucracies innovate amid local values, political dynamics, and global pressures. This study highlights the need for further, more detailed and contextual research to develop an analytical framework that examines not only outcomes but also the processes and social relations involved in them.

5. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting its findings. First, the analysis relied on a single database, Scopus. Although Scopus offers broad and high-quality coverage, the exclusion of other databases, including Web of Science, Dimensions, and regional indices such as SINTA or Garuda, may have omitted relevant publications. Second, the corpus was restricted to English-language, open-access journal articles. This restriction improves consistency and accessibility but inevitably introduces selection bias against non-English scholarship and subscription-based research, which may lead to an underestimation of the contributions of non-English-speaking countries, where much of the work is published in national journals.

Third, the study is descriptive and performance-based: it maps publication patterns, keywords, and collaboration networks but does not incorporate citation impact, full-text content analysis, or qualitative appraisal of methodological quality. Consequently, the findings should be read as a map of the research landscape rather than an assessment of the substantive merit of individual studies. Future research could address these limitations by combining multiple databases, integrating citation and altmetric indicators, and complementing the bibliometric map with a systematic content review. In the Indonesian context, empirical and comparative case studies—ideally drawing on the Penta Helix framework and examining bureaucratic leadership, institutional readiness, and cross-sector collaboration—would help translate these global patterns into actionable, context-sensitive strategies for public sector innovation.

D. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

This study offers a bibliometric analysis of the global scientific literature on creativity and innovation in the public sector over the past decade (2015–2024). The analysis indicates that academic interest in this field has steadily grown, highlighting the urgency and importance of innovation in tackling increasingly complex public governance challenges. Keyword mapping revealed that the predominant topics were public service innovation, digital transformation, open government, collaborative governance, and so on. Additionally, the writing trend was led by several authors and institutions from Europe, particularly the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Spain, demonstrating that the region remains a significant hub for the development of public-sector innovation theory and practice.

Another key finding is the rise of increasingly intensive scholarly collaboration across countries and disciplines, reflecting the transnational character of public innovation issues. The most prolific authors and leading institutions are from universities and research centres that actively promote academic engagement in public policy and administration reform. In the Indonesian context, this study highlights the importance of understanding local dynamics when designing and implementing

sustainable public sector innovation. Successful innovation practices at local levels often rely on transformative leadership, adaptable organisational cultures, and systemic support from broader policy frameworks and ecosystems.

Overall, this research makes a theoretical contribution to deepening our understanding of the public-sector innovation landscape and provides an empirical foundation for policymakers and academics to develop more effective strategies to foster bureaucratic change. This study also creates avenues for further contextual, comparative, and interdisciplinary research to examine the dynamics of innovation at different levels of government, especially in developing countries like Indonesia.

Recommendation

Based on the results of this bibliometric analysis, several recommendations can be drawn directly from the observed patterns. Because bibliometric evidence reflects the direction of scholarly attention rather than the proven effectiveness of specific interventions, these recommendations are framed as priorities for Indonesia's research and innovation agenda rather than as guaranteed solutions. Firstly, the keyword analysis shows that the most dynamic frontier of the field has shifted from technology adoption towards collaborative governance, co-creation, leadership, and organisational culture. Accordingly, Indonesia's public sector reform should not equate innovation with digitalisation alone, but should invest equally in the softer, organisational enablers that the global literature now treats as central—institutional space for experimentation, incentives for creative civil servants, and structured mechanisms for cross-sector and cross-regional collaboration and learning.

Secondly, the collaboration and country maps show that knowledge production is concentrated in dense European networks—led by institutions in Denmark, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom—from which Indonesia is largely absent. This finding provides a direct, evidence-based rationale for Indonesian universities and research institutions to form targeted partnerships with the specific leading centres identified in this study, such as Roskilde University, Erasmus University Rotterdam, and Utrecht University, rather than pursuing international collaboration only in the abstract. Linking domestic scholarship to these established hubs would broaden academic perspectives and accelerate the contextual adaptation of global best practices to Indonesian governance.

Thirdly, the relatively small and internationally low-visibility Indonesian output identified here points to the need for a more contextualised, evidence-based research agenda that also improves the indexing and dissemination of domestic work. Researchers should examine more deeply the factors that drive and hinder innovation in the Indonesian context—organisational culture, institutional structures, leadership, and community participation—and publish these findings in internationally indexed outlets. Doing so would strengthen the domestic evidence base while raising Indonesia's visibility within the global knowledge networks mapped in this study, helping to ensure that the resulting policies and strategies are more responsive, inclusive, and durable in their impact on the quality of public governance in Indonesia.

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