

Towards Efficient Local Governments: A Systematic Review of Citizen Participation in Municipal Management

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Abstract - This systematic review addresses the problem of low citizen participation in municipal management, despite the existence of several legal instruments that empower organized civil society. The main objective is to analyze the progress of citizen participation in municipal management, identifying the degree of participation in different contexts. An exhaustive search was carried out in the SCOPUS database, using Boolean search strategies to identify relevant articles. Seventy documents were processed with R software and the Bibliometrix library; to analyze bibliometric data such as authors, affiliations, keywords and publication trends. Of which 30 documents were considered for use. The search for information provides different approaches in the research. The results show that there is dissatisfaction among the population, highlighting the need to continue to strengthen local democracy, improve the quality of local public policies, increase social inclusion and develop institutional and citizen capacities. In conclusion, although there are numerous studies on citizen participation and municipal management, there is still a need to institutionalize citizen participation with regulatory frameworks and permanent structures that guarantee participation beyond temporary political wills, develop participatory digital platforms, promote citizen training, evaluate the impact of participation and avoid political capture or manipulation. This would allow for teamwork between municipal authorities and organized civil society and thus improve the quality of life of the population.

Keywords: Municipal Management, Citizen Participation, Civil Society

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, citizen participation has gained a central place in the debate on local governance and municipal leadership. This phenomenon responds to the transformations between local government and society, which is facilitated by social requirements with greater accountability and co-creation of public policies; being crucial to ensure that policies respond effectively to public needs (Kübler & Rochat, 2024). In this context, municipal management is no longer conceived as an isolated technocratic practice, but as a dynamic process that requires constant interaction with citizens. Today, however, many citizens are frequently seen to express their dissatisfaction with a political system that only allows them to be involved in the tasks of government through periodic elections.

To overcome citizens' frustration and lack of participation and to respond to civil rights, cultural changes are necessary for interaction. For this, a good organizational structure, organizational culture, resources and a systemic governance approach can influence citizen participation and thus municipal management (Kurkela et al., 2024), however, citizen involvement would be most transcendental (Manaf et al., 2023), as they play a vital role in decision making and are instrumental in aligning their expectations with municipal service delivery (Mattei et al., 2022); It should be noted that citizen involvement modifies job characteristics, therefore, work attitudes (Islam et al., 2023), and as academic and political interest increases, its impact on public policy

remains important to assess its true contribution in democratization (Vrydagh, 2022), therefore, those who practice participatory or deliberative democracy have to engage with community to foster participation and inclusion in democratic assemblies (Kübler & Rochat, 2024), in addition to strengthening their skills and promoting the culture of citizens (Sánchez et al., 2024) taking into account that as representatives of civil society, they speak on behalf of the members of their community (Krick, 2022) .

Recent studies show that local government initiatives and strategies have a very limited effect on trust and no effect on real participation (Holum, 2023). The strategy of active public participation, faces low rates of citizen participation, affecting the decisions taken by local authorities (Ettliger & Michels, 2025), due to the fact that there are still formal and organized procedures that perpetuate the unequal representation of civil society in these environments Ocaña & i Muñoz, 2023) . Officials are increasingly expected engage citizens (Blijleven & van Hulst, 2022) , for which social movements are playing a crucial role, promoting participatory rights and confronting injustice, inequality and the interests of the powerful (Heinelt & Lima, 2023); leading to increased citizen activity in public consultation associated with initiatives in the pre-formulation phase of policy making (Nørbech, 2024), and expanding the geographical boundaries of deliberations, redefining the target groups for participation and evaluating participation (Glaas et al., 2022), bearing in mind that trust and transparency are important pillars in building participatory government (Zaazou, 2024)

In some cities, citizen participation lacks the appropriate technological tools and mechanisms to boost its emancipatory potential (Ahn et al., 2023), therefore, the advancement of technology and digital transformation is allowing institutions to use tools and methods to improve the relationship with citizens and enhance the benefits (Pislaru et al., 2024); This transformation allows citizens to participate online, leading in many cases to constructive debate, providing useful results and attracting people who have participated offline (Escher & Rottinghaus, 2024). The analysis highlights four factors that motivate young adults to participate online: cause orientation, the impact of social networks, selective attention versus information overload, and misinformation (van den Berg et al., 2024). However, using these types of technologies can bring negative consequences if there is no citizen control (Purwanti et al., 2022).

The objective of the systematic review article is to analyze the progress of citizen participation in municipal

management, identifying the degree of participation in different contexts. To analyze the information, the following question was considered: What are the advances of citizen participation in municipal management? It begins with the introduction where a general vision of citizen participation is described on the basis of the selected scientific articles. The R Study software and the Bibliometrix library were used to process the data. The results show bibliometric data such as most relevant affiliations, countries with scientific production, word cloud, relationship between author, affiliation and country, and the progress of citizen participation of various countries. The discussion analyzes the relationship. Finally, the discussion and conclusions sections address the findings of the study concerning citizen participation in municipal management.

II. METHOD

An exhaustive search was made in the SCOPUS database, using Boolean search strategies to identify the most relevant articles published between 2022 and 2025, from which 70 documents were selected. As a data collection method, we proceeded to use R Study with the Bibliometrix library; to analyze bibliometric data such as authors, affiliations and country, keywords and publication trends of 70 documents. Initially, searching only for "citizen participation" yielded 30,867 documents and "municipal management" 45,487 documents.

III. RESULTS

The systematic review research allowed us to find relevant data on the progress of citizen participation in municipal management, based on the behavior of the variables and the Boolean system.

The evaluated documents were published between 2022 and 2025 (presented in TABLE I). They are based on 70 sources, resulting in 55 documents. The annual growth rate is negative (-34.14%), indicating a decrease in document production. The documents are recent, because the average age is 1.56 years. Each document has an average of 6.06 citations. Regarding the content of the documents, there are 136 additional keywords (Keywords Plus) and 264 author keywords. There are 199 authors in total, with 12 authors of single-authored papers. The number of co-authors per paper is 2.99, and international collaborations account for 31.43%. All 70 papers are scientific articles.

TABLE I INFORMATION ON DOCUMENTS USED

Description	Results
Timespan	2022:2025
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	55
Documents	70
Annual Growth Rate % Annual Growth Rate	-34.14
Document Average Age	1.61
Average citations per doc	6.06
References	0
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	136
Author's Keywords (DE)	264
AUTHORS	
Authors	199
Authors of single-authored docs	12
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	12
Co-Authors per Doc	2.99
International co-authorships %.	31.43
DOCUMENT TYPES	
Article	70

Source: Data processed in R Study and its Bibliometrix package from publications extracted from SCOPUS.

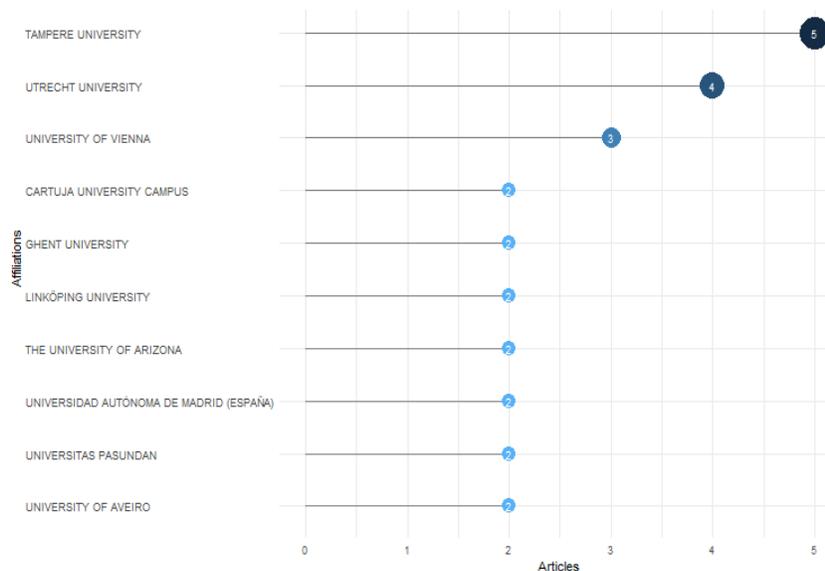


Fig. 1 Most Relevant Affiliations

Source: Data processed in R Study and its Bibliometrix package from publications extracted from SCOPUS.

The most relevant affiliations (Fig 1) are led by Tampere University (Finland) with 5 articles, Utrecht University (Netherlands) with 4 articles, University of Vienna (Austria) with 3 articles, followed by several universities with 2 articles including Cartuja University Campus (Spain),

Ghent University (Belgium), Linköping University (Sweden), The University Of Arizona (USA), Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain), Universitas Pasundan (Indonesia), University Of Aveiro (Portugal), University Of Johannesburg (South Africa), University Of Nebraska at Omaha (USA), University of Zurich (Switzerland). A large number of institutions (approximately 98) have an affiliation with a single article in the dataset.

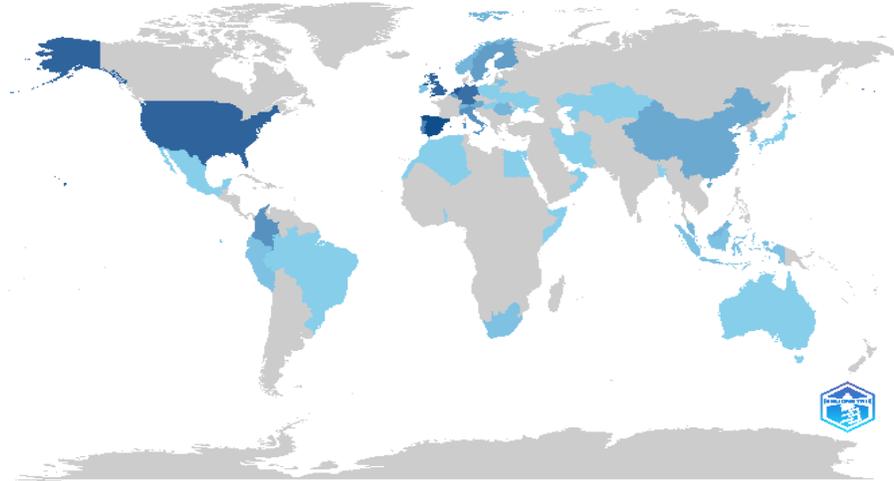


Fig. 2 Country With Scientific Production

Source: Data processed in R Study and its Bibliometrix package from publications extracted from SCOPUS.

The countries with the highest scientific production with scientific articles (Fig 2) are led by Spain with 12, the Netherlands with 11, the United Kingdom and the United States with 10, Germany with 9, Portugal with 7, Colombia and Italy with 6, Belgium, Finland and Sweden with 5,

Australia and China with 5, Malaysia, Norway, Romania and Switzerland with 3. Ecuador, Indonesia, Ireland, Lithuania, Peru, South Africa and South Korea with 2 and 18 other countries with 1. This trend indicates that Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany are working in this field and on the South American side Colombia, which could reflect their interest and financing.



Fig. 3 Word Cloud

Source: Data processed in R Study and its Bibliometrix package from publications extracted from SCOPUS.

The most used words in the selected research are Local participation (Fig 3) with 23 frequencies, representing 17% of the total, followed by governance approach with 8 frequencies representing 6% of the total, decision making with 8 frequencies representing 6% of the total and local government with 7 frequencies representing 5% of the total.

The Fig 4 shows the network of collaboration between universities, authors and countries. It reveals which universities and authors collaborate with specific countries. The largest representation is with Finland and Austria. The diagram helps to understand the landscape of research collaboration, highlighting the key institutions, individuals and countries involved.

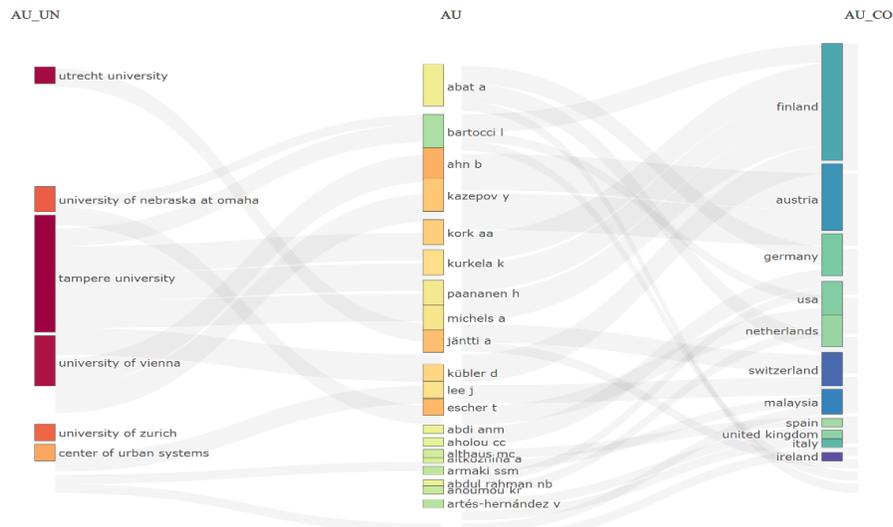


Fig. 4 Relationship Between Author, Affiliation and Country

Source: Data processed in R Study and its Bibliometrix package from publications extracted from SCOPUS.

Analysis of the Progress of Citizen Participation In Municipal Administration

In South African municipalities there is little citizen participation, which has led to protests due to the lack of adequate service delivery causing human insecurity and deterioration in human growth, which could be improved if artificial intelligence is used (Niyitunga & Modibedi, 2024). In Asia, specifically in Turkestan-Kazakhstan the low level of citizen participation in budget management and others is due to lack of information, transparency, bureaucratic complexity and distrust in local leaders (Ismailova et al., 2023). In Europe, specifically in Finland in the city of Helsinki, they highlight the importance of citizen participation as part of governance and administration, and that intentional management efforts are required. Three essential elements for good citizen participation are reflected: organizational structures, organizational culture and appropriate resources. Also, that there must be good management as an essential element. (Kurkela et al., 2024). In Spain, Portugal and Poland, it was determined that participatory budgeting as a planning and policy instrument at the municipal level improves and enriches community interaction. Likewise, the media and social networks have increased political influence and are essential for participatory budgeting (Costa et al., 2024).

In Ecuador, despite good practices in social participation, the results offer a scenario of weak democracy (Paño-Yáñez et al., 2023). Brazil, the first country in Latin America to work on citizen participation through participatory budgeting, has had significant achievements obtaining favorable socioeconomic results, among which stand out the reduction of infant mortality, the increase in literacy rates, the strengthening of essential social infrastructures in the communities and the promotion of national cohesion, but, still has problems, due to the lack of technical experience of

neighborhood committees to contribute to participatory budget projects (Mugano, 2024). In Colombia there are institutionalized barriers, supported by a legal framework, that prevent communities from effectively participating in the decision-making processes in the Development Programs with a Territorial Approach, and it is urgent to strengthen the mechanisms for participation and dialogue (Calderón-Suaza et al., 2024). Likewise, the population does not participate in territorial planning instruments and the commitments of participatory democracy do not find a space to materialize in the logics of territorial organization (Olarte et al., 2023). In Peru, people are not actively involved in the process of making decisions on public administration; political groups use these systems to benefit their personal interests, which causes society to feel ineffective in its involvement in community issues (Palumbo Pinto et al., 2022). Likewise, it was determined that the figure of the community leader acts as a reflection of the emotions of the people, and that the relevance of community organization as a means for citizen participation is essential to progress towards a robust and popular democracy (Mamani-Flores et al., 2024) and that good management characterized by efficiency, transparency, control of corruption and citizen participation lead to the optimization of the results of public spending (Reyna et al., 2024).

The researchers who have worked on citizen participation and municipal management have used qualitative, quantitative and mixed approaches, using documentary sources and information extracted from interviews and focus groups with politicians, technicians and citizens.

The bibliometric analysis reveals a sustained increase in scientific interest in understanding the role played by digital platforms and social networks in the dynamics of citizen participation in municipal management. The data derived from the analysis of the 70 articles indexed in Scopus show that, although digital technologies have opened up new spaces for dialogue and interaction between citizens and local

authorities, their effective use continues to be conditioned by structural and institutional limitations. The most recent studies emphasize that social media are active platforms for expressing social unrest and demanding transparency; however, their transformative potential does not always

translate into a real impact on public policy-making processes. This highlights a significant gap between symbolic participation—mediated by digital environments—and effective participation that contributes to decision-making at the local level (see TABLE II)

TABLE II ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Thematic Dimension	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Main Research Focus
Digital platforms for municipal interaction	18	25.7	Studies addressing online portals and participatory e-government tools enabling citizen feedback and service requests.
Social media and civic engagement	21	30.0	Analyses examining the role of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and X in mobilizing participation and shaping public opinion.
Technological innovation and governance transparency	12	17.1	Works focusing on open data initiatives, ICT adoption, and transparency mechanisms in local governance.
Institutional and structural barriers to digital participation	10	14.3	Research emphasizing administrative capacity, digital literacy, and inequality in access to participation mechanisms.
Symbolic vs. effective participation in policy outcomes	9	12.9	Critical studies contrasting expressive participation on social networks with concrete influence on municipal decision-making.

IV. DISCUSSION

From the documents published between 2022 and 2025, selected for this systematic review, we found that there is a negative annual growth rate (-34.14%) on the publication of scientific articles related to citizen participation in municipal management. Also, the countries with the highest production of scientific articles are led by Spain with 12, the Netherlands with 11, the United Kingdom and the United States with 10. On the other hand, it can be observed that the most relevant affiliations are led by Tampere University (Finland) with 5 articles, followed by Utrecht University (Netherlands) with 4 articles and the University of Vienna (Austria) with 3 articles. Regarding the collaboration network between universities, authors and countries, it was possible to determine which universities and authors collaborate with specific countries, with Finland and Austria being the most represented. The most used words in the selected research are local participation with 23 frequencies, representing 17% of the total, followed by governance approach with 8 frequencies representing 6% of the total and decision making with 8 frequencies representing 6% of the total. As a result of the analysis, we can say that there is little scientific production in Latin American countries regarding the research topic. Likewise, there is little collaboration between authors, universities and research networks, despite the fact that several of these countries are currently going through very serious problems related to citizen security, basic sanitation services, land use planning, environmental sanitation, etc. and are the responsibility of local governments, in which civil society is a protagonist in these major changes.

This study reveals that management is a key element to promote effective citizen participation, being necessary to work on three elements that directly influence such as organizational structures, organizational culture, and adequate resources of local governments with a systemic governance approach, being management an essential element (Kurkela et al., 2024); having to be characterized by efficiency, transparency and control of corruption, which would allow the optimization of the results of public spending (Reyna et al., 2024). In addition, citizen involvement would be the most transcendental (Manaf et al., 2023), as they play a vital role in decision making and are fundamental to align their expectations with the provision of municipal services (Mattei et al., 2022).

The most outstanding aspect of citizen participation in local governments are participatory budgets. Many countries have approved policies and norms where it is clearly defined that they are spaces for consultation between the State and Civil Society, with the objective of determining the interventions of the State oriented to the solution of priority problems of the local government, in order to guarantee the greatest participation of the representatives of civil society and local public actors in order to know their expectations and needs regarding their locality, and that together they make the best decisions that generate development and therefore improve their quality of life.

In Spain, Portugal and Poland, it was determined that participatory budgeting as a planning and policy instrument at the municipal level improves and enriches community interaction. Likewise, the media and social networks are essential, as they increase the influence of this policy (Costa et al., 2024). This differs from countries in Asia, specifically

in Turkestan-Kazakhstan because there is little citizen participation in budget management, due to lack of information, transparency, bureaucratic complexity and distrust in local leaders (Ismailova et al., 2023). Likewise, in Latin American countries such as Peru, where people are not actively involved and political groups use these systems to benefit their personal interests, which causes a feeling of inefficiency in society (Palumbo Pinto et al., 2022). Also in Colombia where there are institutionalized barriers, supported by a legal framework, that prevent communities from effectively participating in decision-making processes in the Development Programs with a Territorial Approach (Calderón-Suaza et al., 2024). In Brazil, due to the lack of technical expertise of neighborhood committees to contribute to participatory budgeting projects (Mugano, 2024).

Bibliometrics showed a decline in scientific output on citizen participation in municipal management, with a negative growth rate (-34.14%). As a result, research focuses mainly on Europe, specifically Spain, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, while in Latin America, output is fragmented and limited. This disparity indicates a gap in knowledge generation and the ability of countries in the region to position their local realities on the academic and international political agenda.

In terms of the impact on public management, research shows mixed results. While in Europe participatory budgets and public institution structures have been shown to strengthen public trust and improve the quality of public services, in Brazil concrete social impacts have been observed, such as a reduction in child mortality and an increase in literacy rates. In contrast, in countries such as Peru and Colombia, lack of transparency, co-optation, and legal barriers limit the potential of citizen participation to optimize public spending and generate tangible changes in communities.

Finally, cross-cutting challenges were identified, such as institutional weaknesses, lack of citizen training, and unequal access to technology, all of which hinder the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms. In addition, new opportunities are emerging that are linked to the use of artificial intelligence and digital platforms, although these require rigorous impact assessments. In summary, citizen participation remains a major challenge for each of the different levels of government, especially local government, and therefore requires comparative and collaborative studies aimed at creating more effective and sustainable models of democratic governance.

V. CONCLUSION

Citizen participation is fundamental in municipal management and requires a systematic review of ideals and operability. Authorities, officials and administrative solutions through legal instruments should strengthen this involvement with civil society, beyond the focus on specific processes.

The management of citizen participation encompasses legal, administrative and operational aspects, focusing on facilitating citizen involvement. Public managers, such as mayors and political leaders, play a crucial role in this process. The research highlights that proper management is essential to foster effective citizen participation, influenced by the structure, culture and resources of local government organizations.

Future research should explore the interconnectedness of these elements through comparative methods. The findings underline the importance of management in participatory systems, suggesting the need for further study on how managers organize citizen participation to improve local public services and policies.

Conflict of interest

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The authors have no conflict of interest, and all of them participated in the research.

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