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Neighbourhood Governance, Public Steering and Local Cultural Intermediaries: A Bibliometric Mapping and Thematic Review

Abstract:

Objectives: This article maps the development and conceptual structure of neighbourhood governance research and synthesises how public steering and local cultural intermediaries support neighbourhood-level public value creation.

Research Design & Methods: A hybrid review combines bibliometric mapping of 850 Scopus-indexed publications (2012–2026) with a focused thematic synthesis of 33 culture-related publications selected from an independently retrieved corpus of 61 Scopus records.

Findings: The bibliometric analysis maps a growing interdisciplinary field in which participation, collaborative governance, co-production, urban governance and social innovation are prominent. The thematic review identifies variation in the depth of community agency: cases reporting more substantive resident influence were commonly characterised by place-based legitimacy, relative autonomy, sustained resourcing and enabling forms of public steering.

Implications / Recommendations: Public authorities should design funding, partnership and accountability arrangements that provide local cultural actors with sustained resources and give residents real influence over decisions, while avoiding their reduction to instruments of service delivery or symbolic participation.

Contribution / Value Added: The article links neighbourhood governance to public steering, accountability and cultural intermediation. It distinguishes four overlapping governance functions of local cultural intermediation and identifies recurrent contextual features associated with more substantive resident influence, while retaining attention to tokenistic, project-based and co-opted participation.

Keywords: neighbourhood governance; public governance; collaborative governance; public steering; public value; cultural intermediaries; bibliometric analysis

Article classification: Theoretical article - Original literature review

JEL codes: H83; R58; Z18

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1. Introduction

The Contemporary public governance is shaped by a mismatch between the scale at which public problems are produced and the local settings in which they are experienced (Marin et al., 2024). Inequality, demographic change, climate adaptation, migration, declining trust and pressure on public services become tangible in everyday neighbourhood contexts, where public authorities, residents, civil society organisations and local institutions encounter one another and negotiate collective action.

Neighbourhood governance has been conceptualised as empowerment, partnership, service coordination, community development and neighbourhood management (Durose & Lowndes, 2010; Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008). These rationales often coexist rather than forming a single model.

This plurality matters because neighbourhood governance is neither merely a spatial-administrative category nor simply a democratic ideal. Participation, co-production and empowerment may coexist with service coordination, resource allocation, performance management and institutional control (Griggs & Roberts, 2012; Yi & Qiu, 2025).

Urban and cultural policy research increasingly attributes important local roles to libraries, museums, theatres, cultural centres and community arts organisations. Such actors may provide spaces for representation, social connection, participation and dialogue, as illustrated by studies of neighbourhood libraries, community arts and intercultural cultural projects (Beauregard et al., 2020; Humm Delgado, 2024; Trivic et al., 2020).

These contributions are not automatic. Cultural institutions can mediate local interests, but they may also reproduce social selectivity, gentrification, branding or externally defined regeneration agendas (Beeksma & De Cesari, 2019; Ferilli et al., 2017; Montanini, 2020). Culture is therefore relevant to neighbourhood governance because cultural actors occupy contested positions between public policy, institutional agendas and residents' everyday practices.

The article brings this problem into dialogue with collaborative governance, New Public Governance, public value governance, co-production and metagovernance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson et al., 2014; Emerson et al., 2012; Osborne, 2006; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009; Voorberg et al., 2015). It uses local cultural intermediaries to describe actors that mediate between professionalised cultural systems, public institutions and everyday cultural ecologies (Perry et al., 2015; Warren & Jones, 2015).

The article asks how neighbourhood governance scholarship developed between 2012 and the 2026 search cut-off, which conceptual clusters structure the field, and how the literature conceptualises public steering and cultural intermediation as mechanisms linking institutions, residents and public value goals. It combines bibliometric mapping with thematic review to reconstruct the field and specify the governance role of local cultural intermediaries.

2. Material and Methods

2.1. Research design

The study applies a hybrid review design combining bibliometric mapping and focused thematic review. This combination connects the identification of broad publication patterns and conceptual relationships with a more detailed qualitative examination of the literature, as illustrated by previous applications integrating bibliometric and qualitative analyses (Malekpour et al., 2026a, 2026b). Bibliometric mapping identifies the development and conceptual organisation of the field, while the focused thematic review examines a smaller body of full-text literature in greater depth (Snyder, 2019).

The design follows science mapping principles (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021) and draws on transparent literature selection and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Page et al., 2021; Tranfield et al., 2003). The analytical movement is from mapping trends to a conceptual synthesis on public steering.

2.2. Bibliometric corpus and search strategy

The bibliometric analysis was based on Scopus metadata. The main search was conducted on 12 August 2026 using the following query: TITLE-ABS-KEY ((neighbourhood OR neighborhood) AND (governance OR management) AND ("collaborative governance" OR co-production OR coproduction OR participation OR partnership OR empowerment OR accountability OR "public service*" OR "public management" OR "public administration" OR steering OR "public value" OR "social innovation")).

The search was limited to English-language articles and reviews published from 2012 to the 2026 search cut-off and indexed in at least one of four Scopus subject areas: Social Sciences (SOCI), Business, Management and Accounting (BUSI), Arts and Humanities (ARTS), and Economics, Econometrics and Finance (ECON). Records were retained when they addressed neighbourhood- or local-scale governance, public action, participation, service coordination, co-production, public management or related mechanisms; records using neighbourhood only descriptively were excluded.

The search returned 993 records. Relevance screening retained 852 records, which were converted into a Scopus-compatible BibTeX format. Of these, 850 documents were successfully imported into Bibliometrix/Biblioshiny and analysed. The two-record discrepancy arose during technical conversion/import and did not involve an additional substantive screening decision.

The Biblioshiny analysis combined performance analysis and science mapping. Performance-oriented analyses included descriptive bibliometric indicators, annual scientific production, source productivity, Bradford's Law and citation patterns. Science-mapping outputs included keyword prominence, temporal keyword development, keyword co-occurrence networks, thematic mapping and factorial analysis. The imported dataset contained 2 724 author keywords (DE) and 2 160 Keywords Plus terms (ID).

The analyses were conducted using the Biblioshiny interface of the bibliometrix R package (version 5.5.0), running under R version 4.5.1. The co-occurrence network, thematic map and factorial analysis (Figures 3-5) were based on Authors' Keywords (DE) from the 850-document corpus. Before these analyses, the standalone keyword entries 'neighborhood', 'neighbourhoods' and 'neighborhoods' were standardised to 'neighbourhood' in the input metadata, so that the variants were merged analytically rather than only relabelled in the visualisations. Compound keyword phrases were retained as recorded. Factorial analysis was performed using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), with the number of clusters manually specified as three; this setting served exploratory interpretation and does not imply that three is the optimal number of conceptual groups.

2.3. Focused thematic review of culture-related papers

The focused qualitative component was based on a separate Scopus search conducted on 4 September 2026. The search used the following query: TITLE-ABS-KEY ((neighbourhood OR neighborhood) AND (governance OR "local governance" OR "collaborative governance" OR co-production OR coproduction OR participation) AND ("cultural institution*" OR "cultural organisation*" OR "cultural organization*" OR librar* OR museum* OR theatre* OR theater* OR "cultural centre*" OR "cultural center*" OR "community arts" OR "arts organisation*" OR "arts organization*")). It covered English-language articles and reviews published from 2012 to 2026 in Social Sciences, Business, Management and Accounting, Arts and Humanities, or Economics, Econometrics and Finance.

The supplementary search identified 61 records independently of the main bibliometric dataset. Selection was based on three principal criteria: (1) a substantive role for cultural institutions, organisations or practices; (2) an identifiable neighbourhood, local or community

dimension; and (3) collaboration, participation, co-production or another governance-relevant mechanism.

First, ChatGPT assisted with preliminary screening of titles, abstracts and keywords against criteria defined by the author. Of the 61 records, 29 were classified as potentially relevant, 19 required further verification and 13 were excluded. The primary exclusion reasons were absence of a substantive cultural actor (n = 9), a predominant focus on cultural consumption or service provision without collaborative mechanisms (n = 3), and insufficient attention to relational or collective processes (n = 1).

Second, the author manually reassessed the remaining 48 publications against the same criteria and excluded 11 records that did not sufficiently match the cultural, local or governance-related focus. This produced 37 publications for additional assessment.

Third, the 37 publications were submitted to Elicit for AI-assisted relevance screening, information extraction and preliminary thematic organisation. Four publications were excluded because of insufficient relevance to governance or participation (n = 2), a mismatch in geographical scale or research setting (n = 1), or a predominant focus on aesthetic, economic or virtual dimensions without sufficient engagement with place-based governance (n = 1). The final qualitative corpus comprised 33 full-text publications.

The qualitative synthesis was organised around a theory-informed analytical framework covering cultural actor types, governance functions, public steering mechanisms, community participation, public-value dimensions and tensions associated with cultural intermediation. Public steering was coded when a publication described public-authority influence through funding, commissioning, ownership, planning or regulation, partnership design, technical assistance, or performance and accountability requirements, including cases reporting mixed or contested effects.

Elicit supported initial extraction and thematic organisation. The coding categories were subsequently formalised into a structured analytical framework, while the author retained responsibility for screening decisions, interpretation and final wording. The full documentation of the research procedure, including search strategies, screening prompts, coding definitions, selection records, analytical settings and the list of included publications, is available from the author upon reasonable request. The analysis was conducted as a single-author review supported by AI-assisted tools; no independent inter-coder reliability assessment was performed.

2.4. From bibliometric mapping to conceptual synthesis

The two components of the review are based on independently constructed literature corpora and serve complementary analytical purposes. Bibliometric mapping identifies the conceptual structure and dominant themes of neighbourhood-governance scholarship, while the focused thematic review examines the governance functions and institutional relationships of a particular category of local actors: cultural institutions and organisations.

Their integration is interpretive rather than based on a common sample. Three analytical dimensions connect the components: (1) participation, collaboration and co-production; (2) public steering, institutional arrangements and accountability; and (3) the contribution of local intermediaries to public-value creation.

The qualitative findings are interpreted in relation to these dimensions to identify mechanisms, contextual features and tensions underlying the broader conceptual patterns. This approach moves beyond bibliometric description towards a theoretically informed understanding of mediated neighbourhood governance without assuming that the cultural literature constitutes a distinct cluster within the bibliometric dataset.

3. Literature Review and Theory Development

3.1. Neighbourhood governance and public steering

Neighbourhood governance refers to arrangements through which public authorities, residents, civil society organisations, local institutions and other actors address problems at neighbourhood scale through consultation, participation, co-production, partnership, service coordination, community development or place-based planning (Durose & Lowndes, 2010; Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008).

From a public governance perspective, the neighbourhood is both proximate and relational: public problems are experienced locally, while action depends on networks, trust, institutional mediation and links between citizen experience and public decision-making. Public authorities therefore steer neighbourhood governance not only directly, but also by designing frameworks, allocating resources and creating accountability mechanisms. This continuing steering capacity is captured by metagovernance (Sørensen & Torfing, 2009).

In this article, public steering refers to the direct and indirect ways in which public authorities shape the institutional, resource and accountability conditions of neighbourhood collaboration. It includes funding, commissioning, ownership, planning and regulation, partnership design, technical assistance, and performance or accountability requirements. Public

steering does not necessarily imply hierarchical control: the same instrument may enable local agency, constrain it, or do both simultaneously.

3.2. Collaboration, public value and managerial drift

Neighbourhood governance is often associated with collaborative governance, participation, co-production and social innovation, which emphasise citizens and non-state actors in public problem-solving and public value creation (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson et al., 2014; Emerson et al., 2012; Voorberg et al., 2015).

Participation and co-production are therefore treated as governance processes rather than automatic indicators of public value. Public Value Governance places democratic values and the public sphere at the centre of action involving governments, citizens, organisations and businesses, while retaining a distinctive public responsibility for safeguarding public values (Bryson et al., 2014). Reviews of co-creation similarly show that much of the evidence concerns enabling conditions rather than demonstrated outcomes (Voorberg et al., 2015).

However, neighbourhood governance may drift towards service delivery, performance indicators and administrative coordination. The key tension is therefore between collaboration as public value creation and management as technocratic control (Griggs & Roberts, 2012; Yi & Qiu, 2025).

3.3. From cultural intermediaries to local cultural intermediation

Local cultural institutions are relevant because libraries, museums, theatres, cultural centres and community arts organisations often operate as places of encounter, memory, social connection and civic expression. They may translate public programmes into locally meaningful practices (Humm Delgado, 2024; Mager & Wagner, 2022).

The concept of cultural intermediaries originally focused on actors mediating between the production and consumption of symbolic goods. Later work brought agency, negotiation and power to the foreground, showing that mediation is not neutral but shapes access, valuation and representation (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2012). Community-oriented research has extended the concept beyond market mediation to organisations and practitioners that connect formal cultural institutions with everyday cultural ecologies, particularly under changing local-governance and austerity conditions (Jones et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2015; Warren & Jones, 2015).

In this article, local cultural intermediation denotes the relational work through which cultural actors connect residents, cultural practices, public institutions and governance arenas.

These actors may build trust, support inclusion, enable participation and create social infrastructure, but they may also reproduce selective access or become absorbed into project-based, performance-oriented and regeneration logics.

Transformative intermediation is used in a limited analytical sense to denote reported cases in which cultural intermediation extends beyond access, attendance or consultation and gives residents demonstrable influence over meanings, priorities, programme design, resource allocation or governance arrangements. It describes the depth of resident agency reported in the reviewed cases; it does not denote a causal effect attributable to any single institutional condition.

3.4. Research gap and analytical contribution

Existing syntheses remain divided across adjacent literatures. The systematic review of local governance by Yi and Qiu (2025) organises the field around community, power, partnership, participation, reform and performance but does not examine cultural organisations as a distinct category of governance intermediaries. Research on co-creation and co-production maps citizen roles, enabling conditions and outcomes across public innovation (Voorberg et al., 2015), while reviews of cultural governance focus primarily on cities, decentralisation and local cultural policy (Baltà Portolés et al., 2014). Community-oriented cultural-intermediation scholarship has made socially engaged, non-economic and place-based practices more visible, but much of its conceptual development has been grounded in particular creative-city and UK austerity contexts (Jones et al., 2019; Perry et al., 2015; Warren & Jones, 2015). These bodies of scholarship have rarely been connected at neighbourhood scale. This article addresses that intersection by examining how public steering conditions the intermediary functions through which diverse cultural actors connect residents, institutions and public-value claims. It does not claim that cultural intermediation constitutes a dominant strand of neighbourhood-governance research; rather, it treats intermediation as a theoretically significant but under-specified governance mechanism.

4. Bibliometric Results: Mapping the Field

4.1. Corpus characteristics, growth and disciplinary dispersion

The bibliometric corpus confirms that neighbourhood governance is broad, interdisciplinary and expanding. It comprises 850 documents published between 2012 and 2026 across 401 sources, including 822 articles and 28 reviews by 2 326 authors (Figure 1). The annual publication growth rate was 7.83%, the average document age 5.2 years and the average citation count 16.52.

Annual production increased from 39 publications in 2012 to 112 in 2026, with acceleration after 2020 and especially from 2024 onward. As the search was conducted during 2026, the final year is partial.

The subject distribution confirms interdisciplinarity. Social Sciences dominates, but the corpus also includes Business, Management and Accounting; Arts and Humanities; and Economics, Econometrics and Finance.

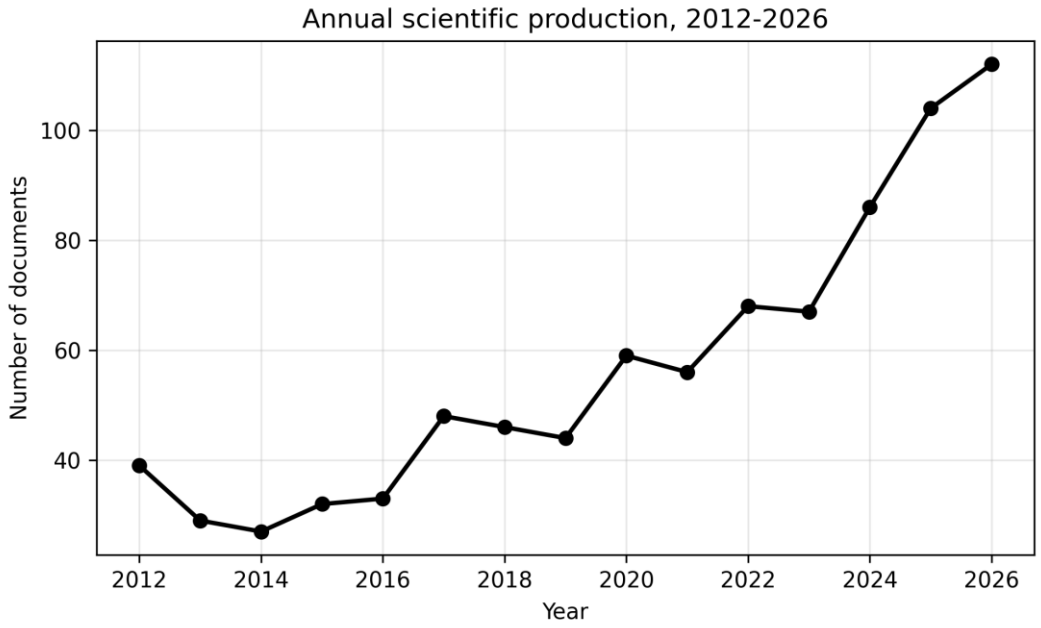


Figure 1. Annual scientific production in the Scopus corpus of 850 publications, 2012–2026.
Source: Own elaboration

4.2. Leading sources and citation patterns

The ten most prolific publication sources are *Cities*, *Sustainability*, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *Urban Studies*, *Land Use Policy*, *Habitat International*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *Urban Affairs Review*, *Geoforum*, and *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* (Figure 2). Together, these ten sources account for 189 publications, representing 22.2% of the bibliometric corpus.

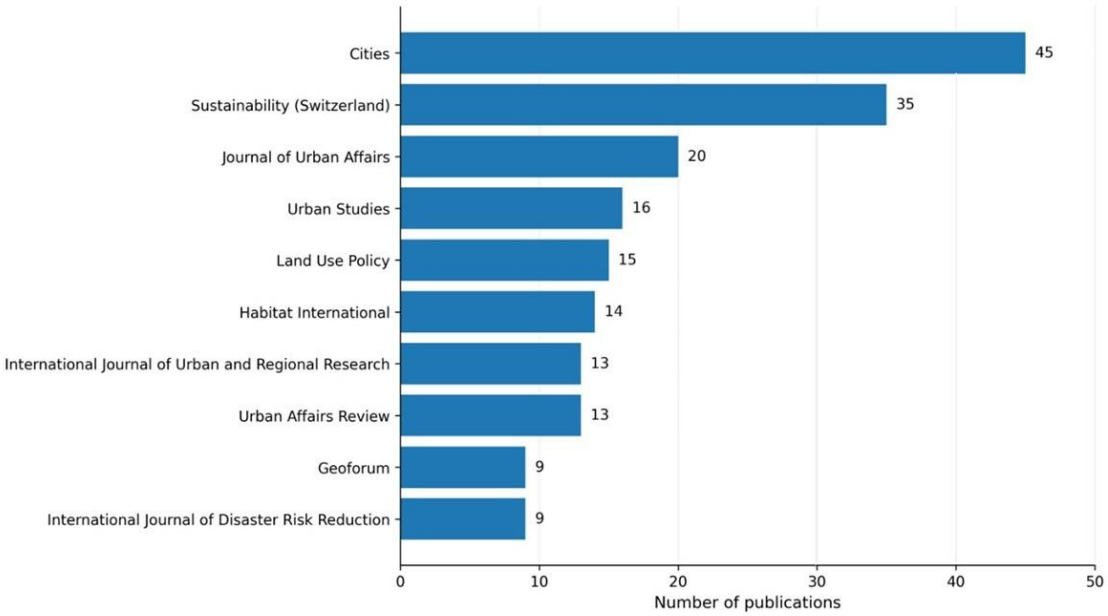


Figure 2. Most relevant publication sources in the corpus, top ten.
Source: Own elaboration

Bradford's Law indicates partial concentration and broad dispersion: 25 core sources account for approximately one-third of publications, while 104 sources are in zone 2 and 272 sources are in zone 3. This dispersion reinforces the interdisciplinary character of the field, suggesting that relevant scholarship extends beyond traditional public administration and public management journals to encompass urban studies, planning, sustainability, and related areas.

4.3. Conceptual prominence and thematic shifts

Keyword analyses show that the corpus is not organised around neighbourhood as a merely spatial category. Prominent terms include neighbourhood, governance approach, local participation, urban planning, urban development, local government and urban governance.

Trend-topic analysis suggests a movement from earlier debates on communities, democracy, governmentality, public housing and community-based participatory research towards localism, participation, social innovation, collaborative governance, co-creation and urban resilience.

These keyword-based outputs are interpreted as exploratory rather than definitive conceptual classifications. Some Biblioshiny visualisations include indexing-style terms, geographical labels and metadata-derived expressions and should not be read in the same way as a full-text thematic analysis. The maps are therefore used to identify broad patterns rather than to make strong claims about the substantive content of individual publications.

4.4. Co-occurrence network and thematic clusters

The author-keyword co-occurrence network reveals interconnected groups of concepts concerning governance, participation, community organisation, planning and public services (Figure 3). Governance and neighbourhood are associated with community, social capital, localism and accountability. Urban governance and participation appear alongside planning, social innovation and public services, highlighting connections between participatory processes and the organisation of local public action. Another grouping links China with community governance, co-production, public participation, COVID-19 and urban renewal, indicating a context-specific configuration of community mobilisation, service provision and urban transformation. These groupings represent patterns of keyword co-occurrence within the corpus rather than mutually exclusive research traditions.

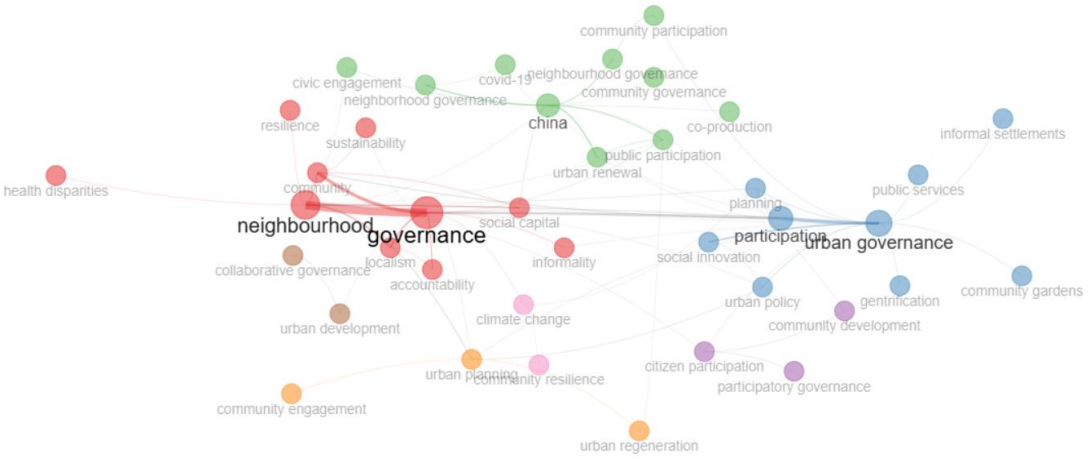


Figure 3. Co-occurrence network of harmonised Authors' Keywords in the Scopus corpus (n = 850), 2012–2026
Source: Own elaboration

The thematic map complements the network by positioning keyword clusters according to their centrality and density (Figure 4). Centrality indicates a cluster's connections with other themes, whereas density reflects its internal cohesion. The cluster represented by citizen participation, collaborative governance and community engagement occupies the motor-theme quadrant, combining comparatively strong external connections with a developed internal structure. It brings together participatory and collaborative approaches to neighbourhood-level public action.

Governance, urban governance, China and co-production identify four separate clusters in the basic-theme quadrant, with the co-production cluster located close to the intersection of the quadrants. Their positions indicate connections with the wider thematic network alongside comparatively lower internal density. The governance cluster includes neighbourhood,

community, empowerment, localism and accountability, linking community-oriented concepts with institutional responsibilities. The urban governance cluster connects participation with urban planning, urban regeneration, social capital and social innovation. The China cluster includes public participation, community participation and community governance, indicating the visibility of research situated in this national context. The co-production cluster encompasses community development, resilience, housing and health promotion, connecting collaborative public action with diverse neighbourhood concerns.

More specialised clusters occupy the niche-theme area. These include health disparities and community-based participatory research; accessibility and public housing; evaluation and regeneration; and neighbourhood regeneration, social cohesion and trust. Their positions indicate comparatively cohesive keyword groupings with weaker connections to the wider thematic network. These patterns identify specialised areas within the retrieved corpus, but do not establish that their underlying literatures are theoretically isolated.

Participatory planning and management occupy the lower-left quadrant, indicating comparatively low centrality and density under the selected analytical settings. Although this quadrant is conventionally associated with emerging or declining themes, a static map cannot distinguish between these trajectories; establishing change in their prominence would require temporal analysis.

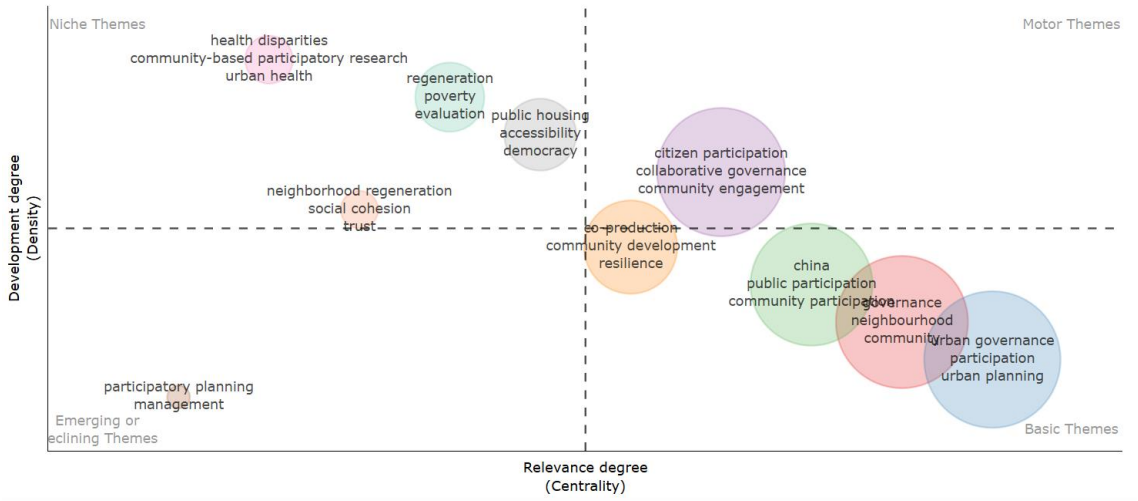


Figure 4. Thematic map of harmonised Authors' Keywords in the Scopus corpus (n = 850), 2012–2026
Source: Own elaboration

Together, the network and thematic map highlight a prominent collaborative and participatory vocabulary within the corpus. However, keyword prominence does not establish how extensively the publications examine public steering, accountability, legitimacy or public

value. These concepts may be addressed through alternative terminology or discussed in abstracts and full texts without appearing as author keywords. The observed patterns are also conditioned by the search strategy, which included participation, collaborative governance, accountability, steering and related terms among its retrieval criteria. Relative keyword visibility is therefore treated as exploratory and query-dependent. The focused thematic review complements the bibliometric analysis by examining, in selected full texts, how public steering and cultural intermediation operate, which keyword mapping alone cannot capture.

4.5. Factorial analysis and keyword proximity

Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) of author keywords provides an exploratory representation of the conceptual structure of the corpus (Figure 5). The first two dimensions account for 18.73% and 10.83% of total inertia, respectively, together representing 29.56%. The map therefore offers a partial representation of differences in keyword profiles and should be interpreted alongside the co-occurrence network and thematic map.

With the number of clusters manually specified as three, the analysis identifies a large grouping encompassing governance, neighbourhood, participation, community, collaborative governance and co-production. This grouping also includes community governance, public services, social innovation and resilience, indicating connections among institutional, participatory and service-related aspects of neighbourhood public action. China, COVID-19 and civic engagement occur within the same broad grouping, bringing context-specific research into the wider conceptual configuration.

A smaller cluster comprises urban planning, gentrification, urban policy, public space and urban politics. These terms connect the spatial and policy dimensions of neighbourhood change, including the organisation, use and transformation of urban space. Their grouping distinguishes this keyword configuration within the selected solution without establishing a separate or internally uniform research tradition.

The smallest cluster contains localism, accountability and neighbourhood planning. Its peripheral position indicates a distinctive keyword profile in the two-dimensional representation. However, its three-term composition and the manually specified cluster count limit the substantive conclusions that can be drawn. This grouping is therefore interpreted as an exploratory association rather than as an independent theoretical orientation.

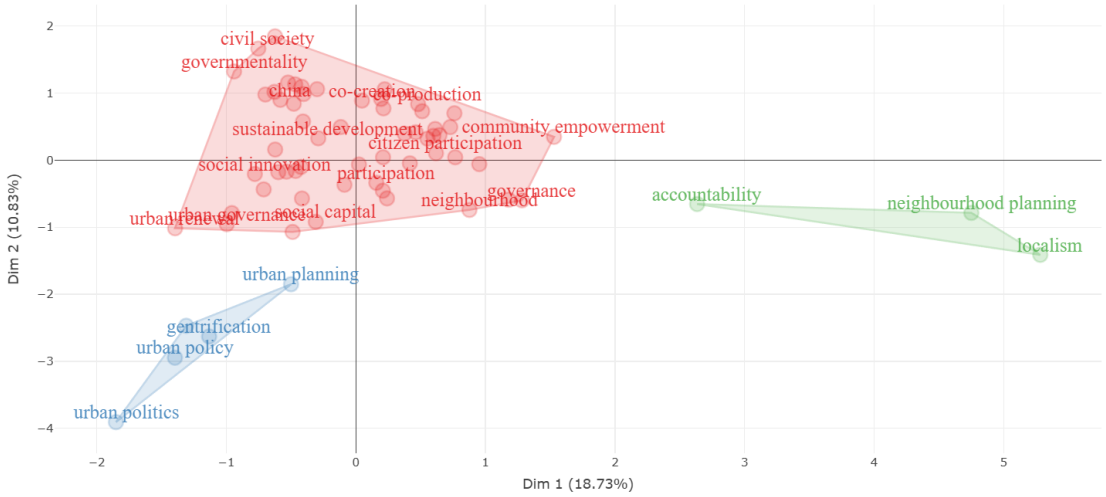


Figure 5. Multiple Correspondence Analysis of harmonised Authors' Keywords in the Scopus corpus (n = 850), 2012–2026

Source: Own elaboration

Interpretation is also conditional on the scope of keyword standardisation. The standalone entries 'neighborhood', 'neighbourhoods' and 'neighborhoods' were merged into 'neighbourhood' before analysis, whereas compound phrases were retained as recorded. Consequently, 'neighborhood planning' and 'neighbourhood planning' remain separate entries and are assigned to different clusters. This residual spelling variation limits the interpretation of the smallest cluster, whose stability under broader standardisation has not been established.

Overall, the MCA displays a broad governance and participation grouping alongside smaller configurations concerning urban planning and localism–accountability. These patterns describe relationships within the selected keyword data; they do not establish theoretical fragmentation or the absence of substantive connections in the underlying publications.

These results do not demonstrate a distinct cultural strand within the bibliometric corpus. Rather, they provide a broad conceptual context for examining how participation, collaboration, public steering and accountability operate through specific local actors and institutional arrangements. The focused review of cultural intermediaries addresses that narrower question from a complementary, theoretically motivated perspective.

5. Focused Thematic Review: Local Cultural Intermediaries in Neighbourhood Governance

5.1. Scope and evidence base

The focused thematic review examines how specific local actors mediate neighbourhood governance in practice. The selection of cultural intermediaries was theoretically motivated

and did not result from the identification of a culture-specific cluster in the bibliometric analysis.

The final qualitative corpus comprises 33 publications selected through the multi-stage procedure described in Section 2.3. It is dominated by qualitative case studies, supplemented by mixed-methods and other empirical approaches, and covers diverse international contexts.

Cultural actors are understood broadly: museums, libraries, theatres, cultural centres, community arts organisations, public art initiatives, cultural districts, heritage organisations, cultural commons and embodied cultural practices such as dance, theatre and participatory cinema. The review examines how they connect spaces, publics, narratives, resources, authorities and participation.

5.2. Types of cultural actors and governance functions

The evidence confirms that cultural intermediation is functional rather than sectoral. Museums often support memory, recognition and place-based negotiation (Avram, 2020; Miklošević, 2023; Qiu et al., 2025); libraries act as public spaces and resource brokers (Humm Delgado, 2024; Sze, 2021); community arts and theatres create embodied formats of participation (Beauregard et al., 2020; Cowie, 2017; Dan-Ogosi et al., 2025; Viola et al., 2024); and cultural centres, districts and commons may become platforms of self-organisation, regeneration or contestation (Eizaguirre Anglada, 2022; Kim, 2023; Sánchez Belando, 2017).

Additional cases show how associations and museums contribute to urban cultural vibrancy and territorial relations and how cultural images are negotiated among residents, public agencies and cultural producers (Bonel & Manna, 2026; Cheung & Zheng, 2018).

The synthesis identifies four overlapping governance functions rather than mutually exclusive actor roles (Table 1).

Table 1. Analytical Governance Functions of Local Cultural Intermediation

Governance function	Core intermediary practice	Potential public-value contribution	Characteristic risks
Spatial-relational anchoring	Sustaining accessible spaces, routines and relationships for neighbourhood life.	Access, trust, belonging and continuity.	Unequal accessibility and dependence on temporary resources.
Participation and co-production brokerage	Enabling residents to contribute knowledge, stories and preferences and, in stronger cases, influence design or decisions.	Voice, recognition, empowerment and collective capability.	Tokenism, selective participation and retained professional control.
Institutional-policy translation	Connecting local knowledge and needs with policy, funding, administrative and accountability arenas.	Responsiveness, resource access, learning and accountability.	Co-optation, projectification and narrow performance metrics.

Place and regeneration mediation	Negotiating memory, identity and cultural meaning within processes of neighbourhood change.	Place recognition, heritage preservation and local identity.	Selective narratives, branding, instrumentalisation, gentrification or displacement.

Note: The four governance functions are ideal types and are not mutually exclusive; individual cultural actors may perform several functions simultaneously. Potential public-value contributions and associated risks are presented as distinct analytical dimensions rather than as governance functions.

Source: Own elaboration

5.3. Spatial-relational anchoring and participation brokerage

One strong finding is that cultural actors create persistent spatial and relational settings for neighbourhood life. The Shijia Hutong Museum, Karlstorbahnhof, Axis arts centre and Boston public library branches show how cultural spaces can support encounter, access to resources, community-building and collaboration (Carnegie & Norris, 2015; Humm Delgado, 2024; Mager & Wagner, 2022; Qiu et al., 2025).

A second function is participation brokerage. Cultural actors create formats through which residents contribute memories, stories, artefacts and creative expression, as in the Museum of Copenhagen, Trešnjevka Neighbourhood Museum, Bon Pastor, Montreal community arts and North London participatory-budgeting theatre cases (Beauregard et al., 2020; Dan-Ogosi et al., 2025; Giersing, 2012; Miklošević, 2023; Moraru et al., 2026; Remesar & Vergel, 2021).

The qualitative review shows that participation may be contributory, consultative, selective or symbolic rather than co-produced. Across the reviewed cases, more substantive resident influence was reported where cultural actors combined place-based legitimacy and relative autonomy with arrangements giving residents influence over decisions, resources or meanings. This is interpreted as a recurrent cross-case association rather than a causal condition.

5.4. Public steering: enabling, constraining and mixed mechanisms

The qualitative review specifies public steering. Authorities shape cultural intermediation through ownership, commissioning, funding, policy, planning, partnerships, asset transfers, technical assistance, accountability and performance expectations. Such steering can enable and constrain simultaneously.

Enabling public steering provides resources, legitimacy and continuity while strengthening local actors' capacity to act on their own terms. This pattern is illustrated by network governance in Cleveland, participatory budgeting in North London, municipal embedding in Skanderborg, public–community partnerships in Barcelona and collaborative governance around the Shijia Hutong Museum (Dan-Ogosi et al., 2025; Eizaguirre Anglada, 2022; Kim, 2023; Paulsen & Mørk, 2024; Qiu et al., 2025; Sánchez Belando, 2017).

Constraining steering appears when cultural actors are subordinated to top-down regeneration, branding, diversity-management or social-control agendas. Red Location, the Van Eesteren Museum and cultural districts in Doha and Singapore illustrate how cultural language may coexist with selective inclusion or state-defined narratives (Beeksma & De Cesari, 2019; Molho, 2020; Montanini, 2020; Roux, 2018). Insufficient resources and performance logics can also limit intermediation (Carnegie & Norris, 2015; Mager & Wagner, 2022).

Public steering is therefore best understood as a set of enabling, constraining and mixed institutional influences. The same funding, planning, accountability or partnership arrangement may supply resources while narrowing autonomy or privileging funder-defined priorities.

5.5. Public value and variation in the depth of community agency

The public value generated by cultural intermediaries is mainly social and relational: social cohesion, inclusion, trust, recognition, local identity, empowerment, learning, wellbeing, cultural vibrancy, democratic legitimacy and heritage preservation (Beauregard et al., 2020; Carnegie & Norris, 2015; Humm Delgado, 2024; Qiu et al., 2025; Trivic et al., 2020).

Other conditions also matter, including adequate and sustained resources, durable legal and institutional arrangements, and the specific governance roles that cultural actors are expected to perform. Importantly, cultural actors cannot substitute for public investment in social infrastructure. Rather, they can enhance the social and relational value of such investment when sufficient resources and supportive institutional arrangements are in place (Carnegie & Norris, 2015).

Across the reviewed cases, deeper forms of community agency co-occurred with several recurrent contextual features: place-based legitimacy, sustained neighbourhood presence, relative community autonomy, adequate resources and durable institutional arrangements. These associations are illustrated by the place-based histories of Can Batlló and the District Six Museum and by the institutional collaboration in Mapping Green Dublin (Avram, 2020; Clavin et al., 2021; Sánchez Belando, 2017). They should be interpreted as cross-case patterns rather than as necessary or sufficient causal conditions.

Embodied and arts-based practices, including dance, theatre, participatory cinema and community arts, were reported to lower barriers to participation and connect groups often excluded from conventional civic processes (Beauregard et al., 2020; Cowie, 2017; Moya Pellitero & Vidal-Ribas Belil, 2026; Pritchard et al., 2025; Schneider, 2016).

5.6. Tensions, risks and ambivalences

The review cautions against a celebratory interpretation. Cultural infrastructure and programming may be instrumentalised for regeneration, branding, diversity management, social cohesion or service outreach in ways that subordinate community priorities to policy goals. The examples of Red Location and Van Eesteren show how inclusive rhetoric may coexist with gentrification, displacement, state-led urban renewal or social cleavages (Beeksma & De Cesari, 2019; Montanini, 2020; Roux, 2018).

A second risk is tokenistic or selective participation: residents may contribute objects, memories, attendance or stories without shaping interpretation or governance (Miklošević, 2023; Roux, 2018). A third risk is co-optation, where access expands while interpretive authority and strategic control remain largely unchanged (Molho, 2020; Sze, 2021). Institutionally sponsored participation may also remain guided by institutional actors rather than redistribute interpretive authority (Salvini, 2018).

A fourth risk is projectification, because many initiatives depend on temporary grants, partnerships, voluntary labour or political support (Beauregard et al., 2020; Miklošević, 2023; Petrescu et al., 2026). Furthermore, managerial drift appears when cultural actors are expected to deliver social cohesion, innovation, regeneration, health, education, participation and place-branding simultaneously (Mager & Wagner, 2022; Zebracki & De Bekker, 2018). Formal organisational networks may likewise coexist with relatively thin collaboration (García Henche et al., 2020).

5.7. Integrating bibliometric and qualitative findings

The integration of the two review components reveals three complementary insights. First, bibliometric mapping identifies participation, collaboration and co-production as prominent organising concepts in neighbourhood-governance scholarship. The focused qualitative review adds an actor-level perspective, showing that participation may range from symbolic consultation to meaningful co-production, depending on institutional arrangements, community autonomy and the distribution of decision-making power.

Second, the keyword maps foreground collaborative and participatory vocabulary, while accountability and localism appear either within the broader governance cluster or, in the MCA, as a small exploratory grouping. This pattern provides a conceptual context for examining public steering. The qualitative evidence identifies specific mechanisms through which public authorities enable or constrain local collaboration, including funding, commissioning,

institutional partnerships, accountability requirements and regeneration policies. These findings specify how steering operates in the cultural cases examined without implying that its wider prevalence can be inferred from keyword patterns.

Third, although cultural intermediation does not emerge as a distinct cluster in the bibliometric mapping, the focused review demonstrates how cultural actors can connect public institutions, residents and local collective action. This provides a theoretically relevant illustration of governance mechanisms that cannot be examined through bibliometric relationships alone.

The contribution of the hybrid approach therefore lies not in confirming the same findings across overlapping datasets, but in connecting the conceptual structure of neighbourhood-governance scholarship with a more detailed understanding of actor functions, institutional mechanisms and variation in the depth of community agency.

6. Discussion

6.1. From collaborative vocabulary to mediated public value creation

Collaborative-governance frameworks explain how public and non-state actors engage in joint problem-solving, while Public Value Governance emphasises democratic values, public deliberation and the continuing responsibility of public institutions (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson et al., 2014; Emerson et al., 2012). The reviewed cases add an intermediary level to these perspectives: cultural actors translate between formal collaborative arrangements and locally situated meanings, memories, identities and forms of resident voice.

Neighbourhood governance can therefore be understood as a mediated field in which public authorities, local institutions and residents negotiate both the substance and conditions of collective action. This aligns with community-oriented cultural-intermediation scholarship, which foregrounds the relational and contested work required to connect cultural systems with disadvantaged communities rather than treating culture as a low-cost remedy for social problems (Jones et al., 2019; Warren & Jones, 2015).

6.2. Public steering without reducing culture to an instrument

The distinction between enabling, constraining and mixed steering extends the meta-governance argument that public authorities continue to shape collaborative arenas through rules, resources and accountability arrangements (Sørensen & Torfing, 2009). The cultural cases show that the same public involvement may provide continuity and recognition while simultaneously narrowing autonomy or translating community priorities into funder-defined metrics.

This ambivalence also supports Warren and Jones's (2015) account of the continuing but not necessarily supportive influence of the local state on community-oriented cultural intermediation. The policy challenge is therefore not to withdraw public authority, but to design funding, partnership and accountability arrangements that resource cultural actors without reducing them to instruments of service delivery, neighbourhood management or symbolic participation.

6.3. Conditions and limits of cultural intermediation

In the reviewed cases, greater depth of community agency was most often reported alongside place-based legitimacy, sustained neighbourhood presence, relative autonomy, adequate resources and culturally resonant forms of participation. Because the corpus was not designed for controlled comparison, these features are interpreted as recurrent associations and propositions for future comparative research, not as demonstrated causes. This caution is consistent with reviews showing that participation and co-production do not automatically generate desired public outcomes (Voorberg et al., 2015; Yi & Qiu, 2024).

Yet cultural intermediaries cannot compensate for resource deprivation, housing injustice or top-down regeneration. They can make participation more accessible, but they cannot guarantee redistribution of decision-making power. Cultural intermediation should therefore be analysed as a governance condition, not as a policy solution in itself.

6.4. Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the bibliometric component is based on Scopus-indexed, English-language articles and reviews published from 2012 onwards within the subject areas specified in the search strategy; it therefore does not represent all neighbourhood-governance scholarship. The 2026 publication count is incomplete because the search was conducted during that year. Second, bibliometric analyses reflect metadata and keyword structures rather than full-text content. Keyword standardisation was limited to standalone variants of 'neighbourhood'; compound phrases and other spelling or singular/plural variants were retained as recorded and may divide some concepts across separate entries. The number of MCA clusters was specified manually for exploratory purposes, and the relative absence of a term from a keyword map should not be interpreted as evidence that the underlying issue is absent from the publications. Third, the bibliometric and qualitative corpora were generated through separate searches and served different analytical purposes; they were not designed to be nested or statistically compared. Fourth, the focused thematic review was theory-driven rather than a comprehensive systematic review of cultural-policy scholarship. Its heterogeneous and predominantly case-based evidence supports interpretive cross-case patterns but not

causal claims about the effects of cultural intermediation or public steering. Finally, the qualitative analysis was conducted as a single-author review supported by AI-assisted tools. Although the coding categories were formalised and selection decisions documented, no independent inter-coder reliability assessment was performed.

7. Conclusions

This article combines bibliometric mapping of 850 Scopus-indexed documents with a focused thematic review of 33 culture-related publications selected from an independently retrieved corpus of 61 records. The bibliometric component maps a growing interdisciplinary corpus in which participation, collaborative governance, co-production, urban governance and social innovation are prominent. These keyword-based patterns are treated as exploratory and query-dependent: they describe the retrieved corpus but do not indicate how extensively public steering, accountability or institutional mediation are addressed in the underlying publications. The focused thematic review extends the analysis by examining how these processes operate through local cultural actors and their relationships with communities and public authorities.

The focused review identifies four overlapping governance functions of local cultural intermediation: spatial-relational anchoring, participation and co-production brokerage, institutional-policy translation, and place and regeneration mediation. Their expression varied across institutional settings and public-community power relations, while public-value contributions coexisted with risks of instrumentalisation, tokenism, gentrification, projectification and managerial drift.

The main implication is that neighbourhood governance should be understood as a contested and mediated field in which collaborative aspirations, public steering and local intermediation intersect. Cultural actors may support trust, inclusion, recognition, voice and democratic legitimacy, but the reviewed cases do not support treating culture as an autonomous or uniformly transformative policy instrument.

Future research should compare national and municipal contexts, examine different types of cultural intermediary, and test how particular steering arrangements relate to community agency over time. Comparative designs should pay particular attention to resource distribution, accountability, resident influence and the risks associated with tokenistic or selective participation.

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Research Ethics Committee

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Data Availability Statement

The bibliometric analysis was based on Scopus metadata. The supplementary materials accompanying this article provide the main and focused search strategies, keyword standardisation and Biblioshiny analysis settings, screening prompts, inclusion and exclusion criteria, thematic coding framework, selection records, and list of the 33 publications included in the qualitative synthesis.

AI Declaration Statement

ChatGPT (OpenAI) assisted with preliminary screening of titles, abstracts and keywords against author-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, selected translations and language editing. Elicit assisted with additional relevance screening, data extraction and preliminary thematic organisation for the focused qualitative component. Elicit was not used to conduct the bibliometric analysis.

The author defined the methodological criteria, conducted the subsequent manual selection, formalised the analytical framework, critically reviewed all AI-assisted outputs and retained responsibility for source selection, interpretation, argumentation, final wording and conclusions. No AI tool was used as an author.