

Review

A thematic review on community governance from 2018 to 2023: Analysis of future research trends

Jing Bin-Qiang¹, Haslinda Abdullah^{1,2,*}, Sarjit S. Gill², Mohd Roslan Rosnon², Zeinab Zaremohzzabieh^{1,3}, Yiming He^{1,4}

¹ Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang 43400, Malaysia

² Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang 43400, Selangor, Malaysia

³ Women and Family Studies, University of Religions and Denominations, Qom 37491-13357, Iran

⁴ School of Social and Public Administration, Lingnan Normal University, Zhanjiang 524088, China

* Corresponding author: Haslinda Abdullah, lynn@upm.edu.my

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Abstract: With the advancement of modernization, commoditization and grassroots governance have become important terms. Community governance not only promotes modern democracy but plays a key role in improving community governance capabilities and modernizing the governance system, which is receiving much attention. Despite the expanding number of articles on community governance, few evaluations investigate its evolution, tactics, and future goals. As a result, the particular goal of this study is to provide the findings of a thematic analysis of community governance research. Investigating the skills and procedures needed for practice-based community government. Data for this study were gathered through a thematic assessment of 66 papers published between 2018 and 2023. The pattern required by the researchers was provided by the ATLS.ti23 code used to record the review outcomes. This study proposes six central themes: 1) rural advancement, 2) community (social) capital, 3) public health and order governance, 4) governance technology, 5) sustainable development, and 6) governance model. The research results show that the research trend of community governance should focus on rural advancement, taking rural community governance as the starting point, the dilemma and adjustment of the governance model, community public health and order governance, and digital governance. It will yield new insights into new community governance standards and research trends.

Keywords: grassroots governance; communityization; modernization of governance system and governance capabilities; community governance; rural advancement

1. Introduction

Urbanization and industrial civilization, pivotal forces in shaping human history, entail the concentrated growth of urban areas and the transition to industrial economies. These processes have not only transformed the physical landscape but have also established communities as central hubs for residence and life. In response to this urban-centric paradigm, there has been a notable rise in the emphasis on community governance (CG) across diverse sectors. This emphasis has intensified, particularly with the expanding influence of contemporary democratic processes. The democratic framework places a significant spotlight on inclusivity, citizen participation, and local decision-making, thereby elevating expectations for robust grassroots CG. Shields et al. (2021) emphasize the critical role of CG in navigating modern challenges, underlining the need for active community involvement in policy-shaping, local development, and fostering a collective sense of responsibility.

This dynamic interplay between urbanization, industrialization, and democratic ideals reflects the evolving expectations for effective CG in the complex landscape of contemporary societies.

In the late 20th century, the “community renewal” movement championed communalism through grassroots approaches, encouraging residents’ active involvement in CG to revive community vitality and foster government reform and social development (Putman, 2000). This movement, influenced by the community care development program and neoliberalism, led to a new CG paradigm. The government entrusted public services and community affairs to communities through service purchases, sparking a transformative “rediscovery” of communities. This shift emphasized the balance between social and collective responsibility, moving away from individual rights (Stahn, 2017).

In this evolving scenario, CG has taken on a new meaning, involving processes that provide public goods, manage community affairs, and meet community needs through consensus-driven consultation, negotiation, coordination, and collaborative action. The community, serving as the territorial scope, has stakeholders forming the primary body, with diverse participants contributing to daily community management for the common goal of enhancing community life (Liu et al., 2020; Pierre and Peters, 2000). As a vital part of social governance, CG undergoes scrutiny in a comprehensive literature review, revealing controversies, especially regarding participants and governance models. The shift from complete community autonomy to pluralistic involvement poses challenges of unclear rights, responsibilities, and division of labor among participants (Qua and Zhou, 2022). Governance models primarily appear as the autonomous model in the United States, the administrative-led model in Singapore, and the mixed model in Japan (Hangsheng and Jialiang, 2012).

The history of CG studies traces back to the 1920s, gaining attention with various approaches. Qualitative methods, particularly case studies, have been prominent. An emerging focus is the analysis of governance models and their impact on community development, as noted by Totikidis et al. (2005). Despite its significance, systematic reviews on CG are scarce. Only one comprehensive study on community research has been identified, conducted by Oetzel et al. (2015).

To address this gap, this work aims to cope with the issues that have been discussed in CG publications between 2018 and 2023 by posing the following research question:

RQ: What are the current patterns and trends in CG publications discussed in the literature from 2018 to 2023?

The decision to focus on this specific time frame, despite the longer history of CG research since the 1920s, is driven by the need to tackle contemporary developments, address recent challenges, and consider methodological factors, ensuring our study captures the latest trends with relevance and accuracy.

2. Community governance

Communities play a crucial role in effective governance by addressing challenges that cannot be adequately tackled by individuals or traditional market and

governmental mechanisms (Masefield et al., 2020). The concept and practice of CG intersect with societal development, collaboration, and the efficient functioning of diverse human ecosystems (Armitage et al., 2020). In light of global dynamics, technological advancements, and socio-political shifts, it is essential to critically examine the trends and paradigms shaping CG (Herrfahrtd-Pähle et al., 2020). In the context of building a modern socialist country, CG holds a pivotal position in enhancing the social governance system and local governance capacity. Its significance extends to social stability, people's well-being, and national security. The construction of a unified CG structure is a contemporary and practically significant issue in the current development stage. This unity is based on the establishment of a social governance community, which involves forming interconnected and stable relationships among the government, social organizations, and the public, guided by principles of interaction, consultation, power and responsibility reciprocity, and a shared goal of addressing social issues and governance needs.

CG unity, defined as a harmonious social relationship grounded in equal consultation and mutual collaboration, is crucial for maximizing the effectiveness of CG (Qua and Zhou, 2022). In the 1990s, governance theory emerged as a predominant framework for understanding public affairs at national and community levels. Governance, distinct from concepts like 'management' and 'rule,' aims to establish a stable social order (Tan et al., 2022). Scholars such as Rosenau, Rhodes, Shoulong Mao, and Keping Yu linked the evolution of governance to global political and social transformations (Liu, 2021). Deliberative democracy theory gained prominence, advocating for political decisions to involve citizen consultation and deliberation (Castro, 2020). Influential figures like Habermas and Rawls emphasized open reasoning and moral deliberation (Lafont, 2020). In China, scholars like Puqian Wang explored deliberative governance's significance in realizing human rights (Han et al., 2022). Participatory governance theory, rooted in Arnstein's civic participation ladder, gained international attention with practices like participatory budgeting (Hordijk et al., 2015). Ecological governance theory highlights the interdependence of individuals, populations, and the environment, contributing to the development of an ecological civilization (Karpouzoglou et al., 2016).

Endogenous development theory, originating in the 1960s, focuses on self-sustaining development using local resources and resisting external control. Sustainable development theory emerged in response to global ecological crises, emphasizing harmonious development and unity with nature. This comprehensive theoretical framework, encompassing governance, deliberative democracy, participatory governance, ecological governance, endogenous development, and sustainable development theories, offers a comprehensive lens for analyzing community development.

3. Materials and methods

The foundation of this project's primary data was established through searches conducted on Scopus and the Web of Science. Mendeley, a reference manager, played a crucial role by linking datasets to articles, thereby enhancing the ease of

literature exploration within these databases. For theme analysis, we employed the ATLAS.ti 8 tool, adhering to the methodology outlined by Clarke and Braun (2013). This method entails the identification of patterns and the development of themes through thorough subject-specific reading.

The project’s overall goal is to examine and evaluate the trends in CG publications and suggest directions for future research in CG. The articles selected for analysis met specific criteria: published between 2018 and 2023, containing the keyword CG, addressing CG issues, written in English, and published in Web of Science journals and Scopus.

The literature search aimed to elucidate the concept of CG, resulting in the identification of 205 articles across the three databases. A refined search within the Web of Science, using terms like “CG,” “community management,” or “community administration,” along with filters for language and specific document types, yielded a subset of 99 articles from 25 August 2018, to 25 August 2023. Further refinement, incorporating specific search strings, produced a total of 106 articles (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. Search strings from databases.

Database	Search strings	Number of manuscripts
JCR	Title “community governance” or “community management” or “CG” or “community administration” and English (language) and articles or proceedings papers or review articles (document types) timespan: 25 August 2018 to 25 August 2023 (publication date)	99 articles
Scopus	(Title-abs-key (“community theory”) or title-abs-key (“community governance”) or title-abs-key (“governance theory”) and language (English) and pub. year > 2018 and review articles or research articles (article type)	106 articles

Note: Community governance = CG.

Out of the initial papers considered, 139 were excluded due to the presence of anecdotes, preliminary findings, or a lack of discussion on relevant subjects. Various publications faced challenges such as missing sections, broken links, duplication, or incomplete metadata, resulting in only 66 items for further evaluation (**Figure 1**). These papers were imported into ATLAS.ti 23, utilizing author information, journal details, publication years, and language criteria for categorization. The qualitative analysis employed an inductive approach to thematic analysis, transitioning from specific content to broader generalizations and theory development. The goal was to establish effective connections between identified themes and the collected data, utilizing coding, classification, and pattern recognition (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2001). This research encompasses both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The quantitative section presents numerical data, while the qualitative part identifies themes derived from selected articles. The article also introduces a framework outlining trends for future CG.

The study highlights that CG research while achieving certain results, lacks depth and primarily relies on practical research reports. The urban and rural CG development is notably unbalanced, leading to a widening governance gap. New technologies based on science and technology bring fresh expectations to CG. Exploratory research on CG benefits from practical insights and case studies. The

article emphasizes the need to enhance the evaluation of data collection techniques, units of analysis, and theoretical frameworks. A review of literature from the past five years provides insights into current trends and patterns in the discipline.

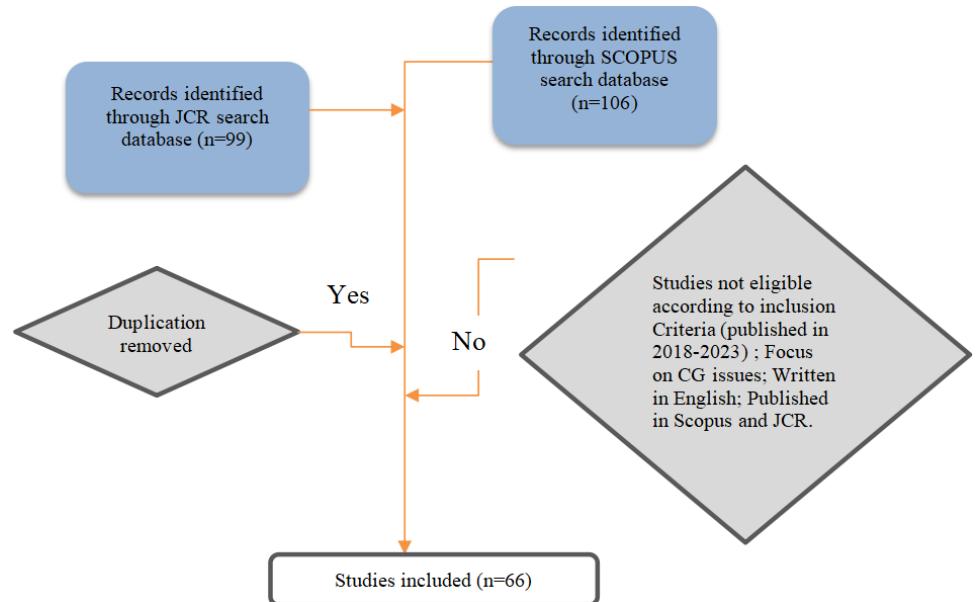


Figure 1. Criteria for inclusion in the selection of studies for thematic review.

4. Results and discussion

This section intends to elaborate on the primary discoveries of the thematic review. The study examines publications on CG, analyzing research patterns and trends, with findings categorized into quantitative and qualitative aspects. The quantitative segment initiates with a word cloud generated from the analysis of the key 66 documents. Following this, we delve into the annual publication status, the number of articles per journal, and the geographic distribution of publishing countries.

After reviewing 66 studies, 18 initial codes were created in a subsequent qualitative study, each representing a distinct aspect related to identified trends. The process of recording and merging codes in the thematic analysis includes refining codes based on a deeper understanding of the data and consolidating similar or closely related codes. This iterative process enhances the clarity and comprehensiveness of the thematic analysis, ensuring an accurate representation of underlying patterns in the data. Six major themes were eventually found in trends and patterns in ATLAS (Analysis of Text, Sound and Image).ti 23 after several iterations of recoding and code merging (**Table 2**).

As introduced earlier, this article centers on unraveling the lineage of CG. Notably, despite existing research in this realm, there is a dearth of review articles that consolidate and structure CG, along with its trends, within a multidisciplinary framework. The research proposals outlined herein follow a logical sequence, building from recent findings in data collection and preparation to the interpretation of results.

closely (Figure 3).

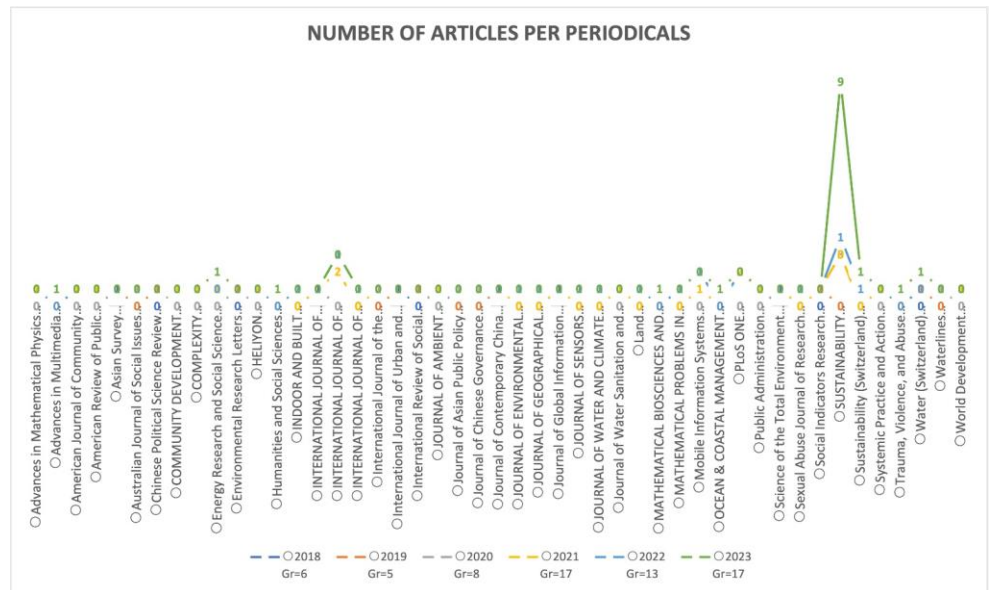


Figure 3. Number of studies per periodical.

An examination of the article's evolution, as seen in Figure 4 below, reveals a progressive growth of CG in recent years. A geographic distribution study reveals that China has witnessed a surge in the popularity of CG studies. 36 papers from China were the most published in the previous six years, according to the data. There are over eighteen published publications that examine the link between China and governance paradigms in several of these research. This can be seen in Hu et al. (2018), who analyzed the dilemma between state intervention and community autonomy in grassroots CG in China; Wu et al. (2018) believed that the government was forced to transfer some responsibilities and there are other participants, but in CG, the government is still the leading force; Sun (2019) explores the influencing factors that lead to different CG models. Fu and Ma (2020) analyzed the main players and mechanisms of sustainable development of urban communities. The second largest published literature is the United Kingdom, with 7 papers; most of the articles discuss rural advancement and focus on the improvement and improvement of rural community infrastructure. For example, Whaley et al. (2019, 2021) pointed out the improvement of rural water governance and participation in governance; in addition, O'Hare (2018) analyzed the reconstructive role of community civil organizations in formal organizations from the perspective of governance models. The United States ranks third in the number of publications from 2018 to 2023, contributing 5 papers. The governance model is an important aspect of CG in the United States today. Governance structure (Sanchez-Youngman et al., 2021) and top-down and bottom-up governance assessment (An, 2021) are hot issues discussed (Figures 4–6).

CG reveals several central themes. Initial coding yielded 18 features; however, after merging and renaming, this theme was reduced to only six. The six major themes are rural progress, governance technology, governance model, sustainable development, and public health and order governance. In the next qualitative section,

these themes are explored in depth.

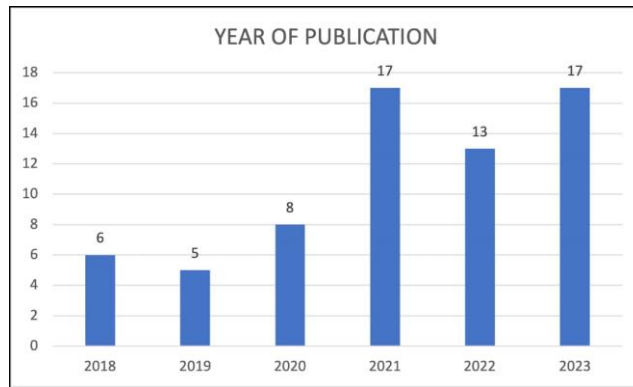


Figure 4. Articles per year of publication.

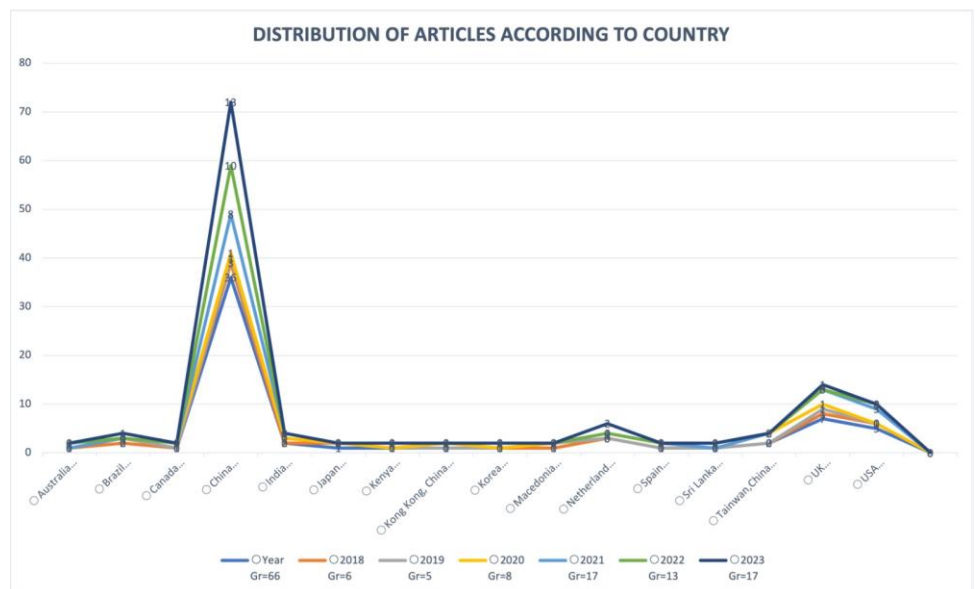


Figure 5. Study distribution according to the country of publication.

4.2. Qualitative results

The emergence of six distinct themes in the qualitative analysis resulted from a thorough examination of journal articles, utilizing both topic analysis and the study of frequency sequences. Each theme was identified based on recurring patterns and prevalent discussions found within the reviewed articles. Notably, there was some overlap in the articles, with some focusing solely on a single theme, while others incorporated multiple themes concurrently. In the context of rural development, scholars exhibited a significant interest, particularly in infrastructure projects like rural community water and energy governance. This theme delves into the challenges and advancements associated with rural progress within the broader context of CG. Another prominent theme, the governance model, revolves around the organizational structure, subjects involved, and participation mechanisms within CG. Articles under this theme provide insights into various governance models, shedding light on their effectiveness and implications.

Scholars explored the application of technology in governance technology, particularly investigating the impact of smart communities and Internet technology.

This theme examines how technological advancements influence CG, considering factors such as efficiency, accessibility, and innovation. Sustainable development emerged as a persistent focus within the discourse on CG, exploring how CG practices either contribute to or impede sustainable development across environmental, social, and economic dimensions. The theme of community social capital examines the social relationships and networks within a community, investigating how these connections influence and are influenced by CG practices. Particularly highlighted by challenges posed during the new coronavirus epidemic, the theme of public health and order governance centres on how CG responds to and manages public health crises and societal disorders. The qualitative results section provides detailed insights into each theme individually, offering nuanced answers to the research questions posed. **Figure 6** visually encapsulates an overview of these critical community governance issues, illustrating the interplay and relevance of each theme within the broader context.

4.2.1. Theme 1: Rural advancement

Figure 7 shows the results of the preliminary analysis of rural progress. Modernization and urbanization have had a major impact on global CG. As policies and resources are tilted toward cities, rural communities are in a state of decline (Whaley et al., 2019). Rural revitalization and rural community development are some of the most popular topics in CG research. A total of 14 papers discussed rural CG from the perspective of rural land transfer and rural community development.

In rural community development, community water governance research has received the most attention (Machado et al., 2023; Shields et al., 2021) and others through the case of Brazilian water governance. It is argued that there is an urban-rural gap in water governance in terms of policy documents, access to resources, and human rights. Hasan et al. (2020) proposed water supply associations to promote rural community water governance in over-supply water supply in Bangladesh. In addition, there are also articles analyzing the issue of rural land transfer. Ye et al. (2021) believe that village committees' promotion of rural land flow to agricultural enterprises is of great significance to rural development.

All in all, the theme of rural progress mainly improves the governance level and governance capabilities of rural communities by improving the basic facilities of rural communities.

4.2.2. Theme 2: Governance model

The governance model is the research topic with the highest proportion of articles in this study, with a total of 28 papers discussing the governance model. From the perspective of the research area, research on CG models is mainly concentrated in China and the United States (**Figures 5 and 6**). In addition, the UK also has significant research on governance models. By comparing the number of articles published with countries, we found that the above three countries are all the top three countries in terms of the number of articles published (**Figure 6**). It can be seen that the governance model is currently the most focused topic in the field of CG.

Through the analysis and summary of coding, it was found that the research on CG models is mainly reflected in the following three aspects: CG, governance

structure and logic, and organization and participation (Figure 8).

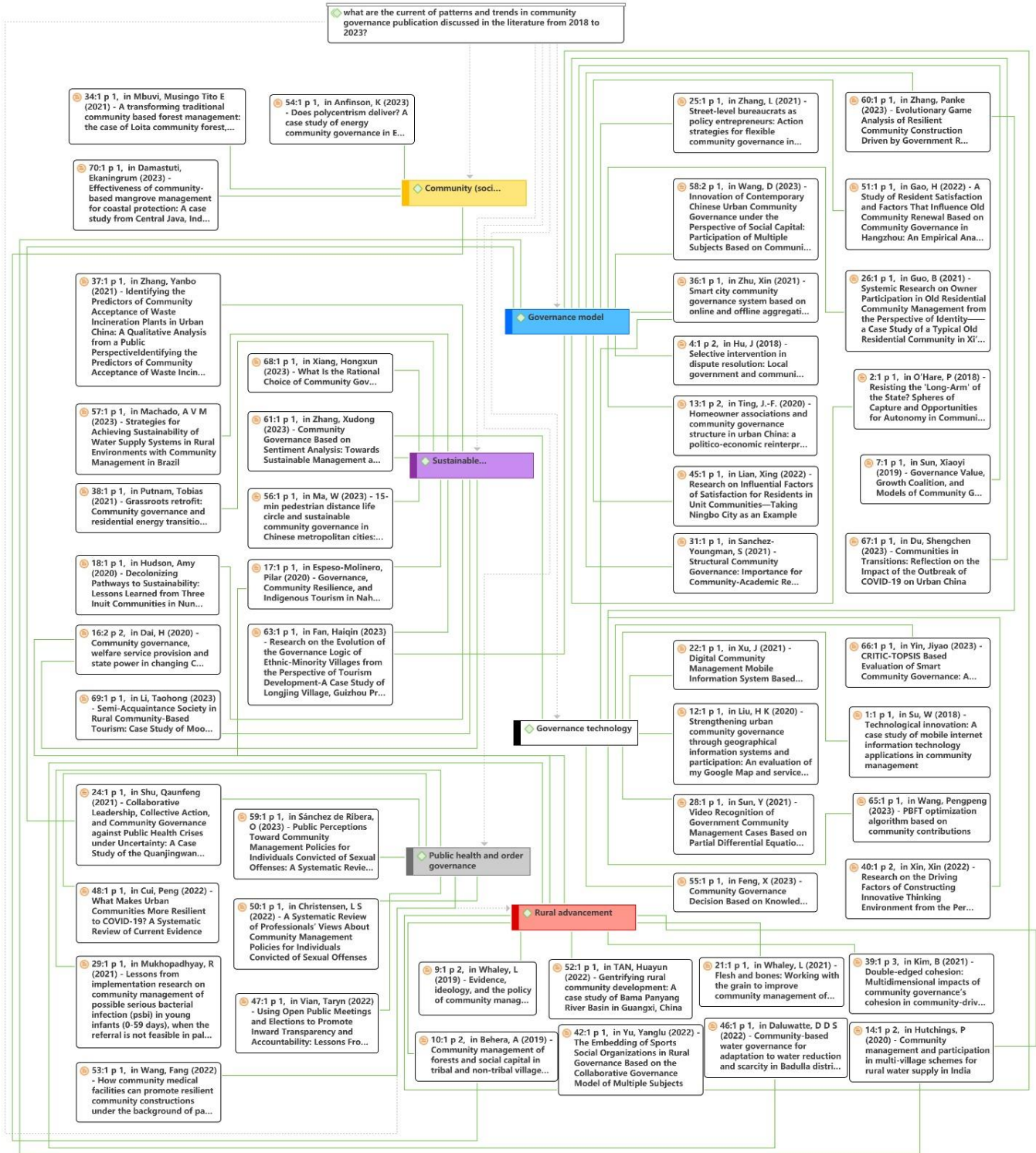


Figure 6. Overall network for CG.

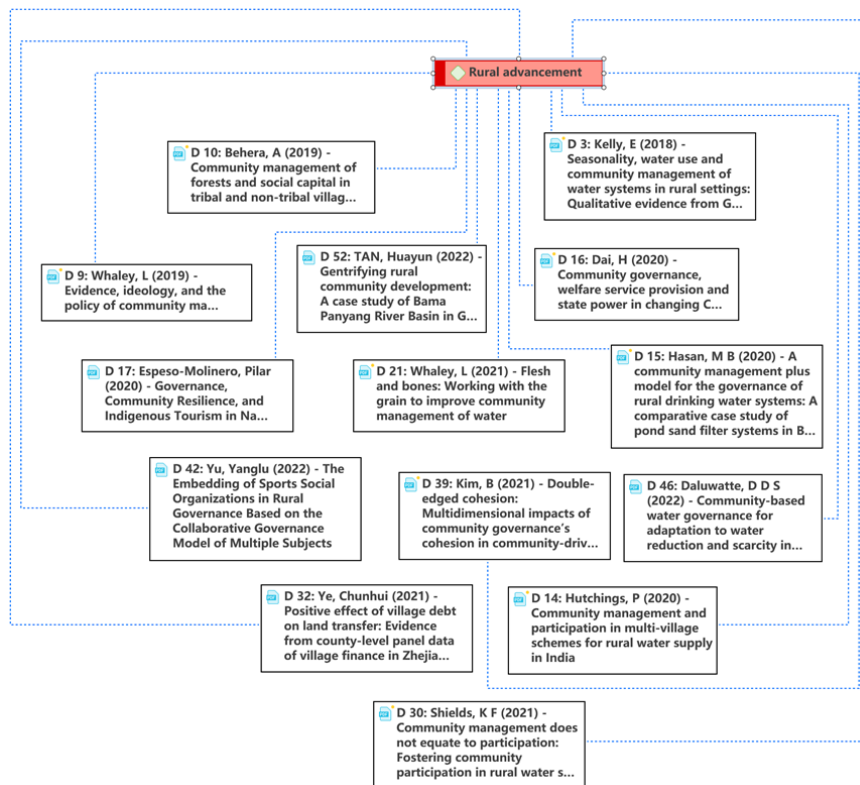


Figure 7. Network of rural advancement.

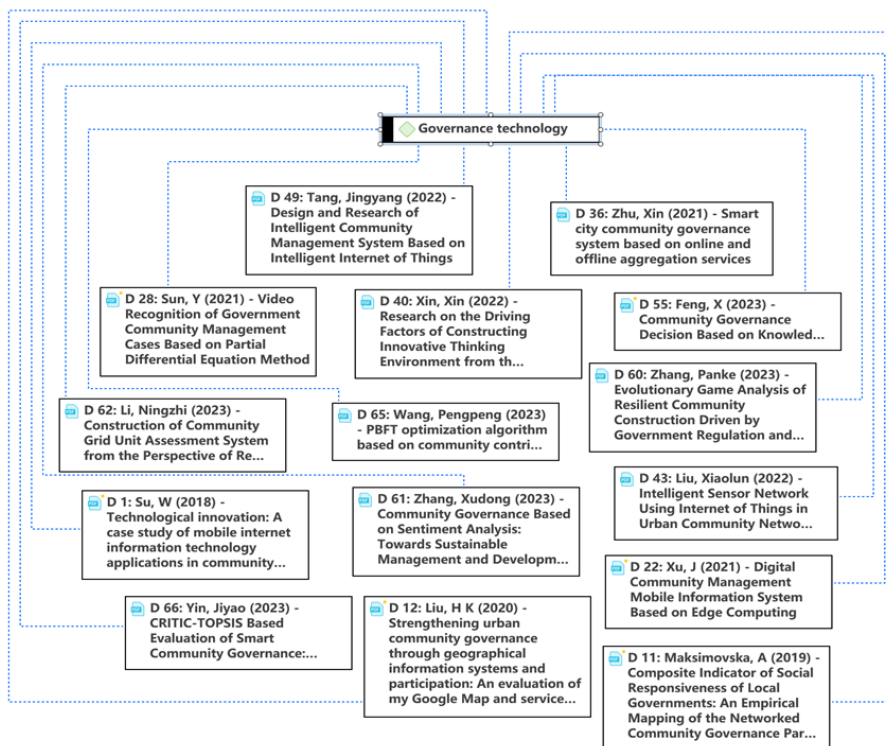


Figure 8. Network of governance technology.

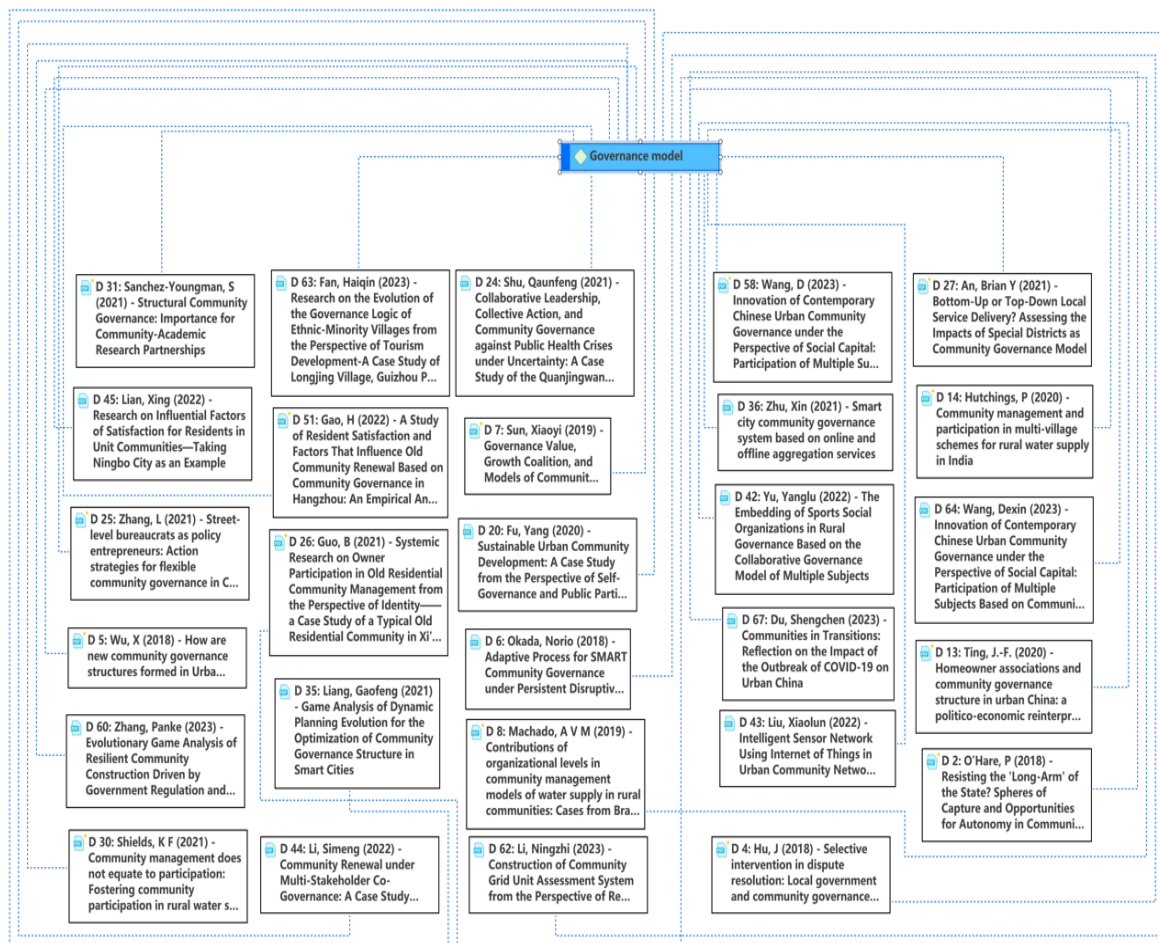


Figure 9. Network of governance model.

Community governance

In terms of specific CG, many scholars have conducted a lot of research. (Maksimovska and Stojkov, 2019) measure the quality of local governance in networked communities by proposing new methods and indicators. L. Zhang et al. (2021) pointed out that the institutional opportunity structure in China enables local grassroots governments to act in an entrepreneurial manner. Zhang et al. (2023) analyzed the relationship between local governments, developers, and residents in CG from a game theory perspective. Li and Su (2023) proposed a hope assessment system framework based on community grid governance.

Governance structure and logic

The structure and logic of CG are the most important elements of the governance model (Figure 9). The governance structure is the internal driving force and mechanism of CG and plays a decisive role in maintaining the stability and operation of the community. Hu et al. (2018) analyzed the binary interactive relationship between the state and the community from the perspective of the political reasons and response measures for Chinese urban local governments to selectively intervene in community disputes. Wu et al. (2018) emphasized that the Chinese government was forced to transfer some responsibilities to the community to achieve a limited and diversified CG structure. All in all, CG mainly presents a situation of state-society interaction theory, multiple consultations, and co-

governance of the state, organizations, and residents, but it still faces the dilemma of structural conflicts among multiple subjects.

Organization and participation

The organization and participating subjects in the community are one of the core issues of CG. Participating subjects and organizational forms directly determine the model and characteristics of CG. In this study, existing literature was reviewed, and some scholars conducted solid research on community-participating subjects and organizations (O'Hare, 2018). It emphasizes the role of community self-organization in reshaping the formal administrative system. Sanchez-Youngman et al. (2021) and others emphasized the relationship between community participatory research and collective empowerment. Yu and Gao (2022) explored the multiple relationships between rural governance subjects and governance methods. Li et al. (2022) elaborated on the importance of a good interest coordination mechanism and simplifying the community update process, as well as the cooperation between communities and enterprises.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Governance technology

With the development of modernization, science, and technology are inevitably applied to CG. In recent years, digital communities, mobile Internet technology, and CG applications that combine online and offline have emerged. Research on governance technology in the academic community is also increasing.

Digital communities have attracted much attention from all walks of life in recent years. This study found that smart communities make up for the blind ends and shortcomings of traditional communities and provide technical support for CG. Some scholars believe that digital communities play an increasingly important role in preventing and resisting emergencies and achieving sustainable community development (e.g., Liang, 2021; Okada, 2018; Tang, 2022). Tang (2022) believes that smart community platforms play an important role in strengthening the construction of underlying infrastructure, support platforms, and basic databases. Liang (2021) studied the structural optimization problem of smart city CG. On this basis, the positive significance of community self-organization to community cultural governance is confirmed.

In short, science and technology provide governance technical support and a platform for CG and provide a new perspective for sustainable CG (**Figure 8**).

4.2.4. Theme 4: Sustainable development

The concept of sustainable development is a development concept that arises from the dilemma of continuous damage to the global ecological environment in the process of modernization. The concept of sustainable development has also been learned and applied in grassroots CG. In recent years, sustainable community development has received widespread attention from academic circles. Zhang et al. (2023) proposed a community speech text emotion classification algorithm to obtain effective emotional information, thereby enhancing the sustainable development of community urban governance resilience. Ma et al. (2023) proposed a community living circle diagnostic system for megacities through empirical analysis of China's megacities in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Wuhan. And verified and compared

the influencing factors of community living circle facilities. It provides a new perspective on the sustainable development of urban communities. Espeso-Molinero and Jose Pastor-Alfonso (2020) analyzed the development of social-ecological systems in small indigenous communities from an anthropological perspective. What is certain is that with the continuous development of society, the sustainable development of CG has become a consensus and trend recognized by the academic community (Figure 10).

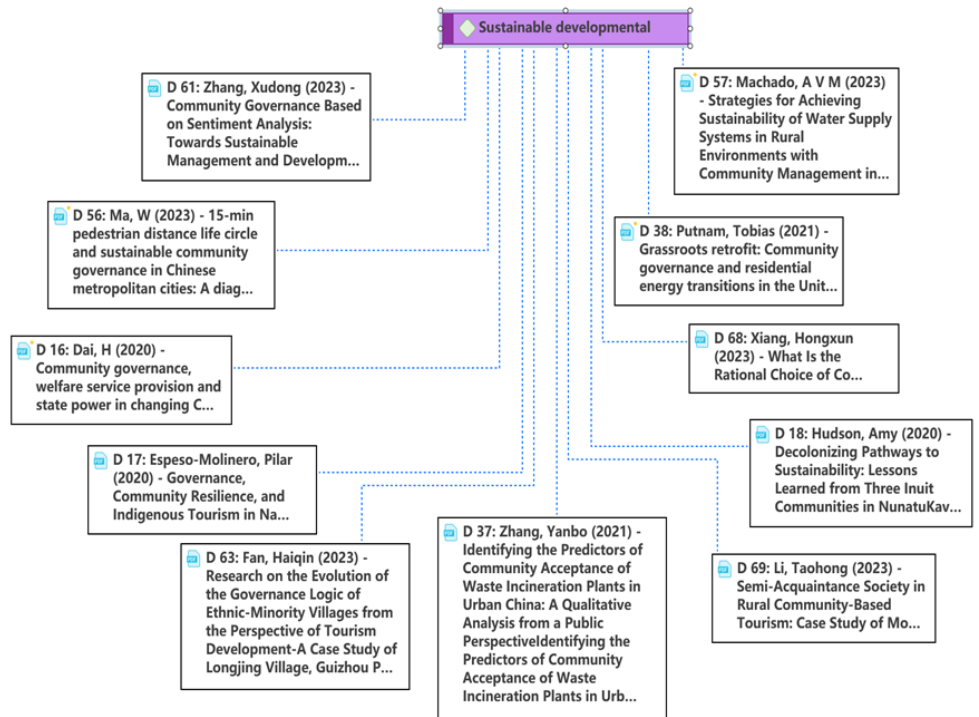


Figure 10. Network of sustainable development.

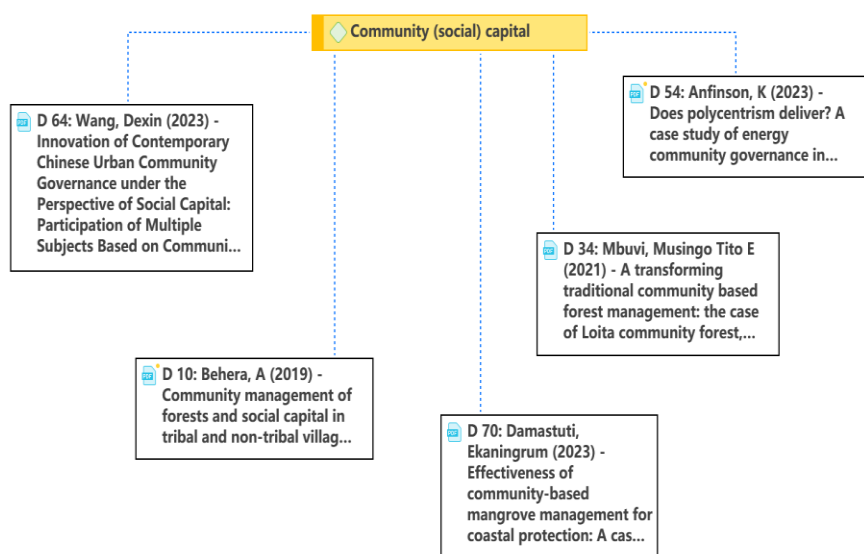


Figure 11. Network of community (social) capital.

4.2.5. Theme 5: Community (social) capital

Community (social) capital is one of the core themes of traditional CG.

Through this review of the literature, it was found that in recent years. Academic research on community capital mainly focuses on the protection and management of community forest resources, community energy management, and other fields. Anfinson et al. (2023) explore how to stimulate the development of renewable energy communities in the context of EU carbon neutrality. Mechanisms for inclusive local self-government with a primary role for higher-level governments were emphasized. Behera (2019) elaborated on the creation of different forms of community capital in the context of different rural indigenous communities. Community forest is an important kind of community capital (**Figure 11**).

4.2.6. Theme 6: Public health and order governance

Community public health and order governance are new topics that have attracted much attention in recent years, with the ageing of the global population and the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic. Policies and facilities related to public health are continuously strengthened. Shu and Wang (2021) explored how collaborative leadership creates a mechanism for collective action in response to public health emergencies in CG. Wang et al. (2022) and others explored the characteristics of community medical facilities in responding to epidemics from the spatial scales of cities, communities, and individuals. It is pointed out that community medical facilities play an important role in improving the construction of resilient communities during public health emergencies. In addition, scholars have provided valuable suggestions on strengthening community disorderly behavior through community management policies from the perspective of the criminal justice system (Christensen et al., 2022; Sánchez De Ribera et al., 2023). In short, with the arrival of an ageing society, public health and order have become new areas of CG (**Figure 12**).

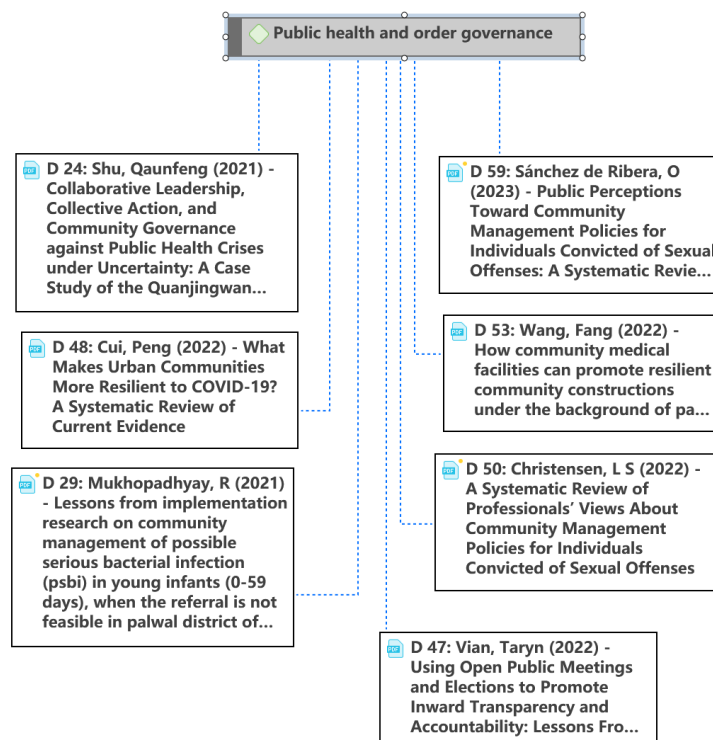


Figure 12. Network of public health and order governance.

5. Conclusion and future study

The recognition of CG as a crucial measure to address governance failures has grown in public awareness. This study, utilizing data from Web of Science and Scopus, conducted a thematic analysis of 66 selected articles, employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches to discern trends in CG research. The quantitative analysis revealed significant contributions from China, the United Kingdom, and the United States between 2018 and 2023, with China notably emphasizing governance models, constituting 50% of related literature. Qualitatively, 18 codes were identified and organized into six themes through ATLAS.ti coding analysis. Key areas of scholarly attention include rural progress, governance models, governance technology, public health, disorder, and sustainable development.

In examining the thematic landscape, scholars exhibit substantial interest in rural advancements, particularly in infrastructure projects such as rural community water and energy governance. Governance models, encompassing CG structure, subjects, and organizational participation, emerged as a focal point, demonstrating a high literature contribution. The application of smart communities and Internet technology in governance technology is a recurrent topic. Public health and disorder, particularly accentuated by the new coronavirus epidemic, have become prominent themes. Additionally, sustainable development remains a consistent focus within the CG discourse.

Despite initial achievements in academic research on CG, this study underscores the imperative for continuous exploration and discussion by subsequent scholars. The evolving societal landscape necessitates ongoing research efforts to keep pace with emerging challenges and opportunities in the realm of CG. In light of these findings, future studies should delve deeper into specific governance models, explore the impact of innovative technologies on CG, comprehensively address public health concerns, and further investigate sustainable development strategies within the CG framework. Such nuanced exploration will contribute to the refinement and evolution of CG research, providing valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars alike.

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