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To cite this article: Francesca Calo, Alessandro Sancino & Fulvio Scognamiglio (19 Feb 2024): Social enterprise and social entrepreneurship in the Public Administration (PA) scholar field: a bibliometric analysis and some conceptual considerations, Public Management Review, DOI: 10.1080/14719037.2024.2311181

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2024.2311181
Social enterprise and social entrepreneurship in the Public Administration (PA) scholar field: a bibliometric analysis and some conceptual considerations

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ABSTRACT
Social enterprises, promoted by policymakers as effective and efficient public services producers and deliverers, are increasingly gaining academic focus. This paper explores the state of studies on social enterprise within Public Administration (PA) field, highlighting through a bibliometric analysis a community of 274 scholars contributing to 138 articles, grouped in six research clusters. We discuss three scenarios for SE-PA relationships: separation, cooperation, and integration into public administration & management (PAM) field alongside suggesting a future research agenda for SE in the PAM domain.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 22 December 2022; Accepted 24 January 2024

KEYWORDS
Social enterprise; social entrepreneurship; public management; public value; public services

Introduction

Background and rationale

In the last decades, public service delivery systems have begun to change significantly due to increasing budgetary pressure and changing societal needs such as a progressively ageing population, increasing rate of migration, and growing health inequalities (Baglioni and Calò 2023; Bellazzzecca et al. 2022; Marmot and Allen 2020; Montgomery et al. 2017; Scognamiglio et al. 2023). Faced with these challenges, social enterprises and social entrepreneurs have gained prominence in the policy and public service arenas and have come to be seen as effective solutions for addressing societal issues (Calò et al. 2018; Macaulay et al. 2018; Roy, Baker, and Kerr 2017). In many public services, especially those human-centred, we experience every day the key role of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises for the provision of those public services and, more generally, for the co-creation of public and social value (S. P. Osborne et al. 2022; Powell and Berry 2021; Powell, Gillett, and Doherty 2019; Sancino 2022; Sinclair et al. 2018; Torfing, Sørensen, and Røiseland 2019).
Accordingly, academic interest in social enterprise and social entrepreneurship has also increased, with a flourishing debate on the definition and conceptualization of social enterprise (Bellazzecca et al. 2022; Teasdale et al. 2022).

Different people in different countries at different points in time have understood the concept of social enterprise in distinctive ways (e.g. Kerlin 2012; Sepulveda 2015; Teasdale 2012). Social enterprise and social entrepreneurship have been used to refer to a wide range of organizational forms, which vary in their activities, legal form, governance, funding, and relationships with stakeholders (Alter 2007; Peattie and Morley 2008). Specifically, in Western Europe, social enterprise has been seen as a (partial or total) non-profit-distributing organizational form operating with democratic governance that may also work in partnership with the state to address societal goals (Defourny and Nyssens 2010; Poledrini 2014). This definition was principally developed by the EMES network (EMergence des Entreprises Sociales en Europe), which started as a European research network and emerged mainly from a group of scholars studying cooperatives and work integration social enterprises, focusing on the social dimension of these organizations (Defourny and Nyssens 2010).

On the other hand, in the US, where the expression social entrepreneurship is mostly used, this phenomenon has been defined as an activity grounded in an increased reliance of non-profits on commercial revenue sources (Kerlin 2012), aiming to increase revenues and funding for non-profit organizations (Alter 2007; Dees 1998; Dees and Anderson 2006). Alongside this conceptualization, another definition focuses on the role of individual innovators who pursue social change (Dees and Anderson 2006; Waddock and Post 1991). Here, a strong emphasis is placed on the ‘heroic’ entrepreneurs as change agents who create social value and operate to provide public or social goods (Dees 1998), deriving from a major interest on the market activities of the organizations and a specific focus on an enterprise tradition.

Drawing on both the US and European traditions, an approach has emerged by which any organizational form that aims at achieving positive societal impacts can acceptably be identified as a social enterprise (Doherty, Haugh, and Lyon 2014; Ridley-Duff and Bull 2011; Teasdale 2012). This conceptualization includes social enterprises that trade with the public sector and organizations that aim to achieve a positive societal impact in distinct markets. In this paper we draw upon this conceptualization to explore how social enterprises and social entrepreneurship have been perceived and analysed by the scholars publishing within the PA academic field.

Although the blurred and lack of unique definitions of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship, there is agreement about the increasing attention to these types of organizations in the policy arenas, particularly concerning public services delivery (Caló et al. 2018). Indeed, since the late 1990s, social enterprises have been increasingly promoted by governments as a tool to deliver a wide range of policy outcomes (Caló and Teasdale 2016). Initially, policymakers, particularly in the UK, saw social enterprises as a vehicle to regenerate deprived communities as just one player in a collaborative, pluralistic welfare system (Buckingham 2009; Teasdale 2012). Over time, however, social enterprises have become the preferred mechanism for delivering a range of public services, most notably in health and social care (Hall, Miller, and Millar 2016; Sepulveda, Lyon, and Vickers 2018; Vickers et al. 2017). An increasing number of governments have actively encouraged third sector organizations and social enterprises, in particular, to deliver public services (especially in the health care sector in England) as they are
assumed to exhibit higher levels of innovation, cost-efficiency, and responsiveness (Bellazzeca et al. 2022; Buckingham 2009; Hall, Miller, and Millar 2016; Scognamiglio et al. 2023).

The need of collaboration between social enterprise and social entrepreneurship with public administration for the (co)creation and development of public value was even more evident during the COVID-19 emergency with, for example, many organizations rethinking their services and processes to address the health emergency (e.g. Calò et al. 2023; Scognamiglio et al. 2023). However, although in practice collaboration and hybridization of public administration with social enterprises is evident, exists and is driven by the purpose of (co)creating public and social value (e.g. Brandsen, Van de Donk, and Putters 2005; Johanson and Vakkuri 2017; Karré 2020; Noordegraaf 2015), there is a lack of studies that investigate social enterprise and social entrepreneurship in the academic field of public administration. While there is an increasing interest in social enterprises and social entrepreneurs from policy makers and scholars that have a background in studying non-profit organizations, community organizations, and entrepreneurship (e.g. Bacq and Lumpkin 2020; Battilana and Lee 2014; Haugh 2007; Jackson, Nicoll, and Roy 2018; Mair and Marti 2006; Nicholls 2010; Teasdale 2012; Tracey, Phillips, and Haugh 2005), it is not clear if and how social enterprise and social entrepreneurship interact within the PA scholarship field and literature. While there have been several reviews and meta-analyses of the role of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship in public sector services (see Andrews and Hodgkinson 2022; Calò et al. 2018; Roy et al., 2014 for example), bibliometric analyses of the concept (see Ayob, Teasdale, and Fagan 2016; Bellazzeca et al. 2022), and empirical studies that explored the contribution of social enterprises to health and social care sectors (see for example Calò et al. 2018), up to our knowledge a systematic and comprehensive analysis of how the topics of social enterprises and social entrepreneurship (SE hence forth) are studied in the public administration (PA hence forth) field and literature has not been conducted yet.

We think this analysis is essential to understand if and how the existing literatures in these two fields intersect and interact, what kind of research streams exist and can be developed in the future. Thus, exploring the patterns of the academic literature on SE in the PA field provides fundamental information on how future research at the intersection between PA and SE should be undertaken to not only inform academic literature, but also to provide more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the reality on the ground and specifically on the collaboration and hybridization of PA with SE.

To do so, we undertook a bibliometric approach, which is considered a suitable means to explore the intellectual structure of a specific concept, synthesizes the past research findings, with the aim to detect the eventual presence of specialities, specific literature strands, subcommunities, or any possible changing paradigms (e.g. Calero-Medina and Noyons 2008; Mingers and Leydesdorff 2015). Our paper is structured as follows: first, we offer an overview of the bibliographic methodology, and we focus on exploring how we built the bibliographic search. Then, we present our findings, detailing the results from the performance analysis and science mapping alongside an interpretive analysis of the clusters. We conclude by discussing the key role of research into SE for rejuvenating the PA field towards what is often referred in this journal as the public administration & management field of academic scholarship (e.g. Osborne, 2022).
Methodology

To get a comprehensive view of the SE literature within the PA field, we developed the following search query: (‘social ent*’ OR ‘community ent*’ OR ‘social venture*’ OR ‘social purpose venture*’ OR ‘social business*’ OR ‘social purpose organization*’ OR ‘social firm*’ OR ‘social cooperative*’ OR ‘community business*’). This search query has been built based on similar works in the SE literature (see, for example, Caló et al. 2018; Campos, Sanchis, and Ejarque 2020; Hota 2021; Saebi, Foss, and Linder 2019). In this study, we used the Web of Science Core Collection, one of the most significant citation databases supporting extensive PA field coverage (Martín-Martin et al. 2018). To circumscribe our analysis to the PA field, we launched our search in title, abstract, keywords of the 48 journals ranked in the JCR SSCI Public Administration category in 2021. We are aware of the limitation of using this list as discussed below. We limited the results to articles written in English, and our timeline included papers until the end of 2021. The search query and the filters applied resulted in 138 papers.

Two analyses were then conducted using the bibliometric methodology (Güzeller and Çelik 2018). First, we executed a performance analysis of our dataset, focusing on the evaluation of productivity and the impact of various research units, aiming at providing an overview of the state of the art. We employed the web app of the bibliometrix package in the R environment (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017). Then, we built the citation structure of the SE literature within the PA field, exploring the evolution of publication trends throughout the timespan of our records and the most cited articles. We also focused on the authors’ analysis, discovering who has been the most productive and cited authors of our set of articles. Finally, we analysed the journals where the articles of our dataset have been published.

In the second analysis, we adopted a science mapping approach to explore the relational side of our dataset (Zupic and Čater 2015). Specifically, we decided to undertake two different investigations. We conducted a co-authorship analysis with the authors as research units to identify meaningful scientific collaboration patterns in the SE literature. A bibliographic coupling of the articles was then undertaken to cluster the literature into theoretical subcommunities which then were analysed thematically. We have also added an additional interpretive analysis phase. To avoid the risk of excluding papers and theoretical arguments that have been contributing to the PA scholarship field but have not been published in the proxy PA journals list, we conducted a search of the papers related to SE and PA in the four major non-profit and social enterprise journals. After screening the abstracts, 33 papers have been selected and analysed. Their theoretical arguments will be compared with the findings deriving by the science mapping approach.

Findings

According to our results, 274 single authors have contributed to the SE literature within the PA field. The timespan of our research goes from 1983 to 2021. However, as suggested in Figure 1, the largest share of articles about SE within the public administration field was published from 2011 onwards. This finding can be explained by the recent emergence of social enterprises policies and regulations in Europe and the promotion at the policy level of social enterprises as the most effective providers of
public services (Caló et al. 2018), as well as the rising interest in social innovation (Ayob, Teasdale, and Fagan 2016; De Pieri and Teasdale 2021).

In Table 1, we can observe the citation structure of the SE literature within the PA field. An increasing hoarding of citations over the timespan and the inconsistency of the pattern reveals that, most probably, the emergence of the literature in the PA journals has been aligned with the development of policies around the topic of social enterprise, social entrepreneurship and social innovation described above. Thus, it seems that researchers increased their productivity (or targeted the PA journals) when there was an active interest in the topic from the policy makers.

In addition to the citation structure, Table 2 shows the most cited articles based on an h-index threshold (Waltman 2016). This kind of analysis, in such newly born literature, represents a backbone for future scholars approaching the field. Indeed, while we acknowledge the controversy of using citations as a raw measure of impact, bibliometric methods have at their core the notion of citation and use it as a proxy to find the most relevant articles or any other research unit within a field (Panagopoulos, Tsatsaronis, and Varlamis 2017; Waltman 2016). As shown in Table 2, a wide variety of topics, such as the marketization of the third sector (Eikenberry and Kluver 2004), the development of public private partnerships (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2011), the establishment of performance measurement indicators (Millar and Hall 2013) and the conceptualization of entrepreneurship typology (Terjesen, Bosma, and Stam 2016), collected the highest number of citations per year.

Table 3 shows the authors who have written two or more articles about social enterprise/social entrepreneurship. Many authors are affiliated with universities in the UK and US. While the language of publications and the Western centric position of academic journals might affect these results, it is interesting to note that the countries where SE have been promoted as a potential substitute or complement for public sector

![Annual Scientific Production](image_url)

**Figure 1.** Annual scientific production.
organizations are also the countries in which researchers published the most on this topic in PA journals. In addition, most of the authors that are part of the network of social enterprise scholars in Europe (EMES) and American authors that focus on hybridity seem to prefer publishing more in management or economic journals. Thus, they are not included in our dataset.

Regarding the journals ‘contribution, we can see from Table 4 how Nonprofit Management & Leadership and Public Management Review represent the two leading journals that focus on the SE literature within the PA field. A possible explanation could be the specific interests of these two journals in non-profit organizations (the first one) and co-production, co-creation and collaborative governance (the second one). Following these two journals, we also find a significant contribution from Public Administration Review and Public Money & Management, with nine and eight published articles. However, we could observe quite a concentration of interest in SE only in these journals, revealing a circumscribed community and possibly an under-developed field within the PA community.

Two different science mapping methods were used to analyse the intellectual structure of the SE community within the PA field (Zupic and Čater 2015). First, a co-authorship analysis of the authors that have authored at least two articles about SE within the PA academic field was performed. This kind of analysis represents a suitable way to explore scientific collaboration within a specific academic field and identify any cooperation pattern between a specific research unit (Baji et al. 2021). Indeed, co-authorship is often employed by academics to track what are the communities within an intellectual structure, being this a journal, a scientific sector, or specific concepts such as in our case (Bu, Ni, and Huang 2017). Through the combination of VOSViewer as software analysis and Gephi as a tool for network visualization, an undirected weighted co-authorship network of scholars contributing to the SE within the PA academic field was developed. Due to the limited number

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Publications</th>
<th>Total Citations</th>
<th>Citations per Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Publications, citations and citations per publications.
of articles in our dataset, we preferred to perform the co-authorship analysis by employing authors as our research unit and not organizations or countries. We set a threshold of at least two articles published for scholars to be included in the analysis (González-Alcaide 2021). The edges connecting the research units are the articles to which the two authors have collaborated, with the weight of the edges based on the number of articles co-authored by the two scholars connected. We employed the Modularity technique to cluster the network (Newman 2004).

As shown in Figure 2, the co-authorship network of SE within the PA field is relatively small. Indeed, two relevant components were identified, mainly composed by authors from UK Universities.

The first component can also be divided into two different groups. The first group comprises four out of five researchers (excluding Pascal Dey from the University of Bern) working or used to work in the Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health, Glasgow Caledonian University. The Centre has a specific interest in social enterprise as a potential intervention to address health inequalities, thus their area of research has focused on the role and evaluation of social enterprise, in collaboration with the public sector, in reducing inequalities, in particular within the health sector (see for example Bellazzecca et al. 2022; Caló et al. 2018; Mazzei, Montgomery, and Dey 2021; Roy et al.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Total Citations</th>
<th>TC per Year</th>
<th>Topic Paper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EIKENBERRY AM, 2004, PUBLIC ADMIN REV</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>31.4737</td>
<td>Marketization of third sector</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRINKERHOFF DW, 2011, PUBLIC ADMIN DEVELOP</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>19.0833</td>
<td>Public Private Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WADDOCK SA, 1991, PUBLIC ADMIN REV</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>5.2188</td>
<td>Social entrepreneurship and policy making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILLAR R, 2013, PUBLIC MANAG REV</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>Performance Measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOROSEC RL, 2006, PUBLIC ADMIN REV</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>7.2941</td>
<td>Local council and social entrepreneurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TERJESEN S, 2016, PUBLIC ADMIN REV</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>12.4286</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPULVEDA L, 2015, SOC POLICY ADMIN</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>7.125</td>
<td>Social enterprise and policy arena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELM ST, 2010, NONPROFIT MANAG LEAD</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.7692</td>
<td>Social entrepreneurship behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICHOLLS A, 2017, POLICY POLIT</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Social enterprise and policy arena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEASDALE S, 2012, PUBLIC MONEY MANAGE</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.6364</td>
<td>Social enterprise and policy arena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SASTRE-CASTILLO MA, 2015, NONPROFIT MANAG LEAD</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>Social entrepreneur conceptualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NANDAN M, 2015, HUM SERV ORG MANAGE</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>Education for social entrepreneurship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIRABELLA R, 2012, NONPROFIT MANAG LEAD</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.2727</td>
<td>Social enterprise sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POWELL M, 2019, PUBLIC MANAG REV</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>Social enterprise sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRAKET J, 2013, AUST J PUBL ADMIN</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Social impact measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALO F, 2018, PUBLIC MANAG REV</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Social enterprise contribution to public services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILLIAMSON B, 2014, PUBLIC POLICY ADMIN</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.6667</td>
<td>Cross-sector intermediaries and big data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGAFONOW A, 2015, ADMIN SOC</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3.875</td>
<td>Social enterprise and value creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCOCK P, 2012, SOC POLICY ADMIN</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.7273</td>
<td>Social enterprise and policy arena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KLEINHANS R, 2017, PUBLIC MANAG REV</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.6667</td>
<td>Community enterprise and coproduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HALL K, 2016, PUBLIC MANAG REV</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.7143</td>
<td>Social enterprise and health care services</td>
</tr>
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<td>MOODY M, 2015, NONPROFIT MANAG LEAD</td>
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<td>HALL K, 2012, J SOC POLICY</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>JENSON J, 2017, J SOC POLICY</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Social enterprise and policy arena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNOTT JH, 2007, ADMIN SOC</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.3125</td>
<td>Foundations and venture capitalists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of the researchers in the cluster have a background in political science and/or social policies, which explains the disciplinary lens used and the connection with the PA literature and community. The second group, connected through Simon Teasdale, who worked in both institutions, is formed by four researchers from the University of Birmingham (Alcock, Hall, Miller, Millar).

Table 3. Most productive authors on SE in PA journals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Articles Fractionalized</th>
<th>Affiliation country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HALL K</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDERSSON FO</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHOI D</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILLAR R</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEASDALE S</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCOCK P</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KLEINHANS R</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>NL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOOK L</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDERSON DM</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAGLIONI S</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRAKET J</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>AUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BERRY FS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEY P</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>CH</td>
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<tr>
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<td>UK</td>
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<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIBBON J</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GILLET A</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAYTON K</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAZENBERG R</td>
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<td>0.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>KERLIN JA</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAZZEI M</td>
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<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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that are working or used to work in the Third Sector Research Centre (TRSC) and one from the University of Northampton (Richard Hazenberg). Most researchers in this second cluster focus on the role of social enterprise in health and social care and the interrelations of health and social policies with the social enterprise/social entrepreneurship realm alongside having a specific interest on evaluation (for example Hall, Alexander, and Martino 2023; Henderson et al. 2019; Roy and Hazenberg, 2019). The second component consists of only three researchers, all of whom are scholars from the University of York, focusing more on the role of social enterprise in food systems (Doherty and Kittipanya-Ngam 2021), and in developing or providing public services (see for example Fowler and Gillett 2021; Powell and Berry 2021).

We then undertook a bibliographic coupling analysis to map the contemporary knowledge clusters of the SE literature within the PA field. We used articles as our research units, with ties between them representing one or more references shared in their reference list. This analysis assumes that the more shared references two documents have, the more similar their research topics and theoretical backgrounds are (Bu, Ni, and Huang 2017). A bibliographic coupling approach is focused on discovering how the knowledge within a community is combined and shared, different from a co-authorship analysis that is more focused on analysing the social side of an academic community (Biscaro, Giupponi, and Ouzounis 2014). In addition to that, a bibliographic coupling analysis is more suited to a relatively new literature strand because it is built on weak and static signals as shared references and not citations from other papers, such as a co-citation network which requires a certain amount of time to accrue (Gazni and Didegah 2016). Similarly to the co-authorship analysis, we first employed VOSviewer to construct an undirected weighted bibliographic coupling network and Gephi for the network visualization and analysis. Due to its small size, we do not set any citation threshold for admitting documents within the network (Tang, Cheng, and Chen 2017). Conversely, we set a threshold of at least four shared references to include only relevant and meaningful relationships, avoiding including tokenistic relationships based on some ‘conceptual stretched’ references (Sartori 1970). As shown in Figure 3, there are six relevant bibliographic coupling clusters in the SE literature within the PA field.
For each cluster, we identified a broad topic that covered most of the papers included and a related title and we undertook an analysis of the papers to better explore that cluster.

"From non profit to social enterprise: marketization, hybridity and legitimacy " (purple cluster)

The first cluster includes papers focusing on the evolution of non-profit organizations towards social enterprises, the contextual characteristics that have affected this evolution, and the generated consequential tensions (hybridity) between the different institutional logics.

Third sector organizations were influenced towards marketization and more entrepreneurial behaviours due to the contextual changes identified such as resource constraints (Addicott 2017), institutional pressures and organizational contingencies (Suykens et al. 2021). The marketization of third sector was identified by researchers as bringing potential tensions and criticisms. For example, Eikenberry and Kluver (2004) identified marketization’s risks on
third sector organizations, particularly the risk of losing the ingredients that determine citizens’ engagement and its long-term social impact. Chew (2010) explored how the differences between social enterprises and their parent charities created tensions in the relationships.

These tensions between the social and economic logics, understood as hybridity, were also investigated through the theoretical rationale behind social enterprise existence, such as market failure theory. For example, Beaton and Dowin Kennedy (2021) explored the connection between market failure and social enterprise, focusing on how social enterprises respond to market failure and how these responses align with social enterprises and non-profit conceptualizations. The hybridity of social enterprises was also studied through the lens of management theories by papers that investigated how the institutional complexity of having to balance social and economic missions influenced the existence of social enterprises (Gibbons and Hazy 2017; A. G. Gillett and Tennent 2022) and its ability to manage simultaneously social and financial sustainability (Powell, Gillett, and Doherty 2019). Multiple logics were also identified in cross-sectoral collaborations to understand how the logics conflicted and the potential tensions among actors were resolved (A. Gillett et al. 2016; Vining and Weimer 2016). Some authors even suggested potential solutions to the hybridity tensions. For example, Michaud and Tello-Rozas (2020) suggested that normative values can feed into economic values by resolving the tension between different institutional logics, while Powell et al. (2019) analysed how social enterprise should build a marketing model based on a service-oriented approach to produce effective public services. Finally, some papers connected social enterprises and their hybridity with instances of legitimacy. Jian (2017) discusses that transformation towards social enterprises supported the acquisition of legitimacy of third sector organizations, while Kerlin et al. (2021) analysed the role of intermediaries in facilitating the legitimacy of social enterprises in different ecosystems.

"Social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation" (light green cluster)

In the second cluster, most papers focused on social entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurship characteristics and behaviours, focusing on the interrelation between contexts (macro and micro) and entrepreneurship and how the behaviours might affect those characteristics.

For example, Asarkaya and Taysir (2019) used theories of planned behaviour and the concept of imprinting to understand how the background and history of founders impacted the founding decision for their social enterprises. Similar theories were also applied by Helm and Andersson (2010) to explore behavioural differences between entrepreneurial and non-entrepreneurial non-profits, and by Ip et al. (2021) and Svensson et al. (2020), who, through theory of planned behaviour and cognitive career, analysed the determinants of social entrepreneurial behaviours. Sastre-Castillo et al. (2015) investigated the characteristics of more socially oriented entrepreneurs using sociodemographic variables and theories of universal values. Yusuf and Sloan (2015) used instead effectual decision-making theory to explain the decision-making process used by actors in the non-profit sector in understanding how social entrepreneurs made decisions during the development of a non-profit or social venture. Further
exploration of the experience of entrepreneurs was conducted by Nandan et al. (2015); they analysed the specific challenges that social workers face in practising social entrepreneurship.

In addition to focusing on entrepreneurs’ characteristics and behaviours and their influence on the organizations, other studies focused on the impact of entrepreneurship on the macro context. For example, Cho and Kim (2017) studied the contribution of entrepreneurship to economic and social performances by exploring if there was a connection between the two and what were the mediators of those connections. Melovic et al. (2020) analysed the impact of social entrepreneurship on self-government developments, and Terjesen et al. (2016) focused on conceptualizing entrepreneurship types and their implication for public policy.

**Social enterprise and the interrelation with the policy arenas (light blue cluster)**

Most of the third cluster papers explored the policy arenas where social enterprises have been promoted, how the context affects the form of social enterprises and how these organizations influence the generation of innovative processes.

Some papers in the cluster analysed how policy arenas including social enterprise were generated and how the welfare paradigm changed, or not, in relation to social enterprises by using different institutional theories and approaches. For example, Jenson (2017) discussed the development of a new policy paradigm that sees social enterprise and social investment at the heart of changes in the welfare system, Nicholls and Teasdale (2017) instead highlighted that there was a lack of factual changes behind the existing neoliberal policy paradigm, while an increasing level of tension and contradiction between the narrative and reality was identified (Teasdale 2012; Teasdale and Dey 2019). Alcock (2012) compared divergences and convergences policies in different nations concerning the third sector and social enterprise support.

Further research in this cluster focused more on how policy arenas shape the existence of social enterprise. For example, Mazzei et al. (2021) discussed that although social enterprises are presented in a policy narrative as utopian solutions, the scarcity of financial resources provided by governmental support in several policy arenas may limit what they could do in meeting the challenges they have been promoted to address. Similar conclusions were reached by Sinclair et al. (2018) who highlighted that social enterprises and social innovations are not themselves instigators nor catalysts for systemic change as their impact is constrained by structural conditions and institutional factors beyond their control. In addition to the financial constraints, Caló et al. (2018) focused on how the contexts in which social enterprises are promoted, collaborative or competitive, affected the potential outcomes social enterprises can achieve. Brunetto et al. (2021) further explored the collaborative and competitive contextual characteristics by investigating how the rationale behind social enterprises affected employee outcomes and perception of the services, suggesting that a better strategy for government-social enterprise relations may be to link funding to the attainment of specific quality indicators. Instead, Chan et al. (2019) investigated how social policy mechanisms may facilitate diversification, inclusion, innovation and the expansion of social innovation and social enterprises, while Glennon et al. (2017) analysed the effect of policy on charitable organizations and existing collaboration.
Other studies explored similar topics using literature related to the governance of public services. Sepulveda (2015), for example, explored how social enterprise development affected policy context creation. Other papers investigated practices such as soft metagovernance as a form of relational leadership that can create public value (Ayres 2019) or focused on understanding the role of hybrid organizations in governing through networks and providing services at local levels (Barraket et al. 2023). Fenwick and Gibbon (2016) analysed the relationship between the public sector and the third sector through the lens of localism and how the interaction between different levels of governance affected the governance between the two. Finally, Hansen et al. (2022) investigated how social entrepreneurs spur public sector innovation networks generating social innovation processes that affect the context where social enterprises work.

"Social impact evaluation and specifically social return on investment” (orange cluster)

Cluster four includes papers that discuss evaluation practices and, in particularly social return on investment as the primary performance indicator. Most of the papers included in the cluster are published in a special issue of the Nonprofit management and leadership journal, and they have been funded by the Canadian research council.

A broader overview of performance indicators was also conducted by analysing the conceptual, symbolic and instrumental uses of performance (Lee 2020). Other papers discussed barriers and enablers of impact evaluation (Barraket and Yousefpour 2013; Liston-Heyes and Liu 2021), focusing on social entrepreneurs’ attitudes (Grieco 2018). Others, as part of a special issue, analysed specific methods such as SROI, highlighting how the tool was used and the related challenges (Classens 2015; Millar and Hall 2013; Moody, Littlepage, and Paydar 2015; Mook et al. 2015; Mook, Chan, and Kershaw 2015; Owen et al. 2015; Vieta, Schatz, and Kasparian 2015; Walk et al. 2015).

"Social enterprise, publicness and generation of public value at local level” (dark green cluster)

Cluster five includes papers discussing the role of social enterprises in generating public value, specifically at local levels. Most papers included in this cluster explored the South Korean setting.

Anderson and Taggart (2016) investigated theoretically the concept of public value and how the process interacts with for profit higher education institutions. Public value was also studied as an outcome to public-private partnerships, in particular in relation to the implications of embodying and promoting good governance norms and values (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2011; Chien 2015; Hazenberg and Hall 2016). Social entrepreneurship in disaster recovery was also analysed to explore how social entrepreneurs develop opportunities and organize public value over time (Chandra and Paras 2021). A specific focus on what happens to an organization’s publicness and its outcome when the organization leaves the public sector was conducted by Hall et al. (2016) and Miller et al. (2012), while Choi et al. (2021) explored how social enterprises publicness have an influence on public value creation.
Publicness theory was also used to investigate the role of governments (national and local level) in shaping social enterprises’ ownership, funding and control (D. Choi, Berry, and Ghadimi 2020; D. Choi and Park 2021; Myers 2017), with a particular focus on South Korea (Jung, Jang, and Seo 2016; Kim and Moon 2017).

“Social enterprise, design, production and delivering of public services” (red cluster)

Cluster 6 instead includes papers that discuss the production of public services, ranging from codesign to codelivery and the role of social enterprise in those processes alongside the factors to make those processes successful.

Fazzi (2012) explored how the different characteristics of social enterprises affect the production of welfare services and influence collaboration with the public sector. Gibbon and Rutter (2022) analysed the role of social enterprises in cocreation, how they could inform public service policy and strategy and the ingredients needed to ensure success and mitigate challenges. Moran et al. (2022) focused on empirically testing codesign processes in the field of regulation for social enterprises.

Further exploration on coproduction was conducted by Baines et al. (2023), who analysed the understanding and process of coproduction of a social enterprise case study, and by Kleinhans (2017), who studied the tension between policy discourse on co-production with community enterprises and institutional responses at local level that affect the success of this coproduction processes. Finally, Kleinhans et al. (2023) and van Meerkerk and Edelenbos (2018) investigated the configurations of conditions for the durability of community enterprises, analysing the variables affecting collaboration.

Research on social enterprise and public sector in social enterprises-related journals

Papers extracted during the search on social enterprises related journals revealed a similar pattern regarding topics and theories. Most of the papers were aligned to cluster 1 and cluster 3 topics, some papers were more aligned to cluster 4, 5 and 6, while only one paper was aligned to cluster 2.

Some papers focused on the marketization of third sector and its reconceptualization (Salamon and Sokolowski 2016), the hybridity of social enterprises, investigating its conceptualization (Blessing 2015; Busenitz et al. 2016; Rhodes and Donnelly-Cox 2014), the institutional logics tensions in terms of organizational identities and structures (Kravchenko and Moskvina 2018), and the connections between enterprises mission and revenue resources with the qualities of services produced and delivered (Brolis and Nyssens 2020; Searing et al. 2022; Thompson and Williams 2014).

A second group of papers explored the interrelation between social enterprise and policy arenas. Some authors focused on the impact of public policies on social enterprises development and growth (Ćwiklicki and Pacut 2023), while others instead took a more local level view by analysing how specific resources or local policies affected social enterprise’s role and performance (Y. Choi 2015; Henderson et al. 2019; Herranz, Council, and McKay 2011; Kiss, Krátki, and Deme 2021). Three studies
identified the convergences and divergences of policies on social enterprises in different countries (Mason, Moran, and Carey 2021; Teasdale, Lyon, and Baldock 2013) or political parties (Sætre and Hauge 2023).

Social impact evaluation was also a matter of interest in four papers, which depicted a broad overview of the methodological approaches and their challenges in evaluating social enterprises (Calò et al. 2021) or by applying specific evaluation tools (Courtney 2018; Potluka 2021; Poveda et al. 2019). Publicness and generation of public value were instead analysed by investigating the contribution of social enterprises in the creation of decent work (Bandini, Gigli, and Mariani 2021), leading to an economy that works for people (Roy, Dey, and Teasdale 2021) or as a mechanism for addressing crisis (Weaver and Blakey 2022).

Three papers investigated the role of social enterprises in designing, producing and delivering public services by analysing the social procurement practices (Barraket 2020), the development of co-created policies (Cornet and Barpanda 2020) and the mechanisms behind rural innovation processes (Martens, Wolff, and Hanisch 2020).

Finally, only one paper focused on the entrepreneurial orientation of the social entrepreneurship phenomenon by analysing the social entrepreneur as a bridge in the innovation process inside public-private partnerships (Battisti 2019).

**Discussion and conclusion**

Our paper explored how SE topics are studied within the PA field. We were moved by the puzzle to see if and how much the PA scholarship is studying the role of social entrepreneurs and social enterprises in public and social value co-creation and public services delivery alongside identifying the potential of social enterprises as new form of public organizations.

Our findings show a community of 274 scholars writing on these topics producing from 1983 to 2021 an amount of 138 articles within the 48 journals ranked in the JCR Public Administration category in 2020. This community is led by 27 scholars who have (co)authored about half of these articles, and it can be considered a rising stream of research, considering that the number of papers published increased significantly since 2011. This is not surprising, given that – especially after the so-called global financial crisis, which occurred around 2008 - SE have become more recognized in the broader policy arenas as a solution to provide public services in an era of austerity and dwindling resources for the public sector. The ideas of collaboration between government and social enterprise actors were already reflected in studies of new public governance (S. Osborne 2010), collaborative governance (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012), cross-sectoral collaborations (Vangen, Hayes, and Cornforth 2015) and public value co-creation (Alford and Yates 2014; Bryson et al. 2017). In this regard, it is important to note the key role of Public Management Review alongside Non-Profit Management & Leadership as the two journals hosting about 39% of all the articles published on SE topics. In terms of topics covered, we identified six research clusters that are also reflected in the research conducted in four leading journals within the social enterprise and non-profit sector specific field of research. Research varies from the relation between policy arenas and the development of social enterprises to the role social enterprises have in producing and delivering public services or achieving public value. The effectiveness of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship is
also investigated through the analysis of methodological approaches and tools, while part of the research focuses on how to reconcile and legitimize the different institutional logics that are at the heart of those organizations. Finally, the characteristics of the social entrepreneur and the effect on organizations and identities were also partly studied. While some of the cluster topics are not surprising because of their relevance for the public sector (see clusters 1, 2 and 5 and 6), we were surprised to find only a few papers exploring and connecting the SE literature with inter-organizational phenomena, such as collaborative governance processes, social innovation, partnerships, and co-creation. Furthermore, we were also surprised to have only a residual number of papers focusing on methods for exploring the evidence behind social enterprises and social entrepreneurship contribution to the public sector realm. Furthermore, the evident Anglo-Saxon predominance of the literature included suggests the need for decolonizing and including a richer perspective in the field of SE in the PA realm, dedicating more attention to other relevant SE practices (Gaiger, Nyssens, and Wanderley 2019).

Bibliographic methods might be criticized because of employing mainly quantitative measures to assess the status of a (sub)field, a limitation we certainly acknowledge. In addition, the method, by using journals as a proxy of a field, risks excluding papers that have not been published in those particular journals, but at the same time, they are part of, and advance the field. Moreover, the search of terms and our decision to exclude, for example, ‘third sector’ and synonyms from the search string might have affected the papers included. Furthermore, using the JCR SSCI Public Administration category in 2021 have affected the papers that have been included.

We have tried to address these limitations with a qualitative interpretation of the data, which allowed us to identify six relevant research clusters. We have also searched papers in the four major journals related to social enterprise and non-profit, and we have analysed how their theoretical arguments reason with the science mapping results to provide a further platform of discussion. Furthermore, although some papers that focus on social policy and politics have also been included due to the list, we foresee these papers as part of the interaction between social enterprise and public administration field. To better address those limitations, future studies should conduct a bibliometric analysis of how elements of the public administration field are integrated into social enterprise journals, to provide a more complete picture of the interaction. Moreover, a bibliometric analysis should also be conducted including further journals in management and business studies (e.g. procurement, tourism) that might touch upon PA and social enterprise interaction.

Based on our analysis, we identified some ‘boundary themes’ that seem to favour the connection and integration of SE within and beyond the PA field. These boundary themes fall mainly into two broad categories: the hybridization of non-profit organizations towards forms of social enterprises; and the recognition of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship as policy tools and as agents of public value co-creation and (co)production of public services. We believe this second boundary theme is particularly important to be discussed as it gives our bibliographic study a strategic relevance and possibly indicates a trajectory of the PA field, which is aligned with the need of the field to become more inclusive and reflective of the diversity of public organizations (McDonald et al. 2022).

Specifically, we hypothesize that the degree of openness towards broadening the units of analysis in the PA field will be decisive in understanding the
evolution of the field. It is quite telling that some journals, more than others, have been more open to publishing SE research. We believe that including social enterprises (and non-profit organizations) that spark social change, as well as public service ecosystems (Osborne 2020) as units of analysis, is important for an expansive future of the field of PA, more driven to explore and explain public value from a multi-actor perspective rather than just to focus inward into the government machineries (Bryson et al. 2017). Moreover, we think this is one of the key contributions of bringing public management into public administration, the former intended not just as a range of managerial reforms of the State promoted by some Western countries or as a subpart of public administration (Milward et al. 2016), but as an evolution from a public administration mainly concerned with institutions and rules to a public administration also recognizing a range of new actors increasingly addressing the publics’ demands and providing new ways to co-create, co-design and co-deliver public services (e.g. Brandsen, Steen, and Verschuere 2018).

Thinking about the relationships between PA as a field and SE research, we identify three possible combinations: i) separation; ii) distinct cooperation; iii) integration and transformation. The first option will see a public administration field more concerned with an institutionalist view of the State and less open to a functionalist view characterized by multiple actors of society potentially taking up a public value function. The second option will see the cooperation of studies on SE with PA mainstream research, respectively, potentially recognizing SE research as a relevant and close stream of research. Based on our results, we think that the second option is where the literature stands. The third option that we would like to suggest as the way forward will see the topics of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship as an integrative part of an advanced and more dispersed function of public management and of ‘entrepreneurship for the common good’ (Vedula et al. 2022) and as legitimate topics within the training and teaching programmes of public administration and management. Some of the key future research issues related to this third option may be, for example, to investigate comparatively the role of governments (and not only the Western ones) in supporting social enterprises, the main varieties of government-social enterprises relations, social innovation, co-production, the methods to understand and explore the contribution of the social enterprises, the role of co-creation between public organizations and social enterprises actors as a type of governance arrangements suitable to promote added public value and the characteristics and ingredients that make social enterprises and social entrepreneurship key actors in achieving public value and addressing societal challenges. Of course, these three options are ideal types for showing possible but different trajectories in the relationships between SE research and the PA field. We hope with this paper to nurture this important debate and foster further research both at the empirical and conceptual levels on the role and relationships of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship within the public administration field.
Notes

1. According to a search conducted on EBSCO Business Source Complete in November 2022, there are 50 articles published in Public Management Review that use the wording ‘public administration and management’.


Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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