

# Collaboration or Isolation? Disciplinary Dynamics in Sociology

Radhamany Sooryamoorthy<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Rovashni Chetty<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA.

<sup>2</sup>DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in STI Policy, Stellenbosch University, SOUTH AFRICA.

## ABSTRACT

In the social sciences, the discipline of sociology has not been actively involved in establishing collaboration among its members. Drawing on information from the abstracts of 4,491 papers presented at the 20<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Sociology in Melbourne in 2023, which were manually collected from the published abstract volume and the metadata of the papers were captured in the SPSS program, this paper analyses collaborative trends in sociological research and pathways of the discipline of sociology globally. This study examines the impact of author composition on the diversity of themes addressed and methodologies employed in papers on collaboration. It examines the effects of collaboration on the production of academic papers, demonstrating how presenters from different countries are involved in collaborative research to shape the thematic focus and contextual relevance of their work. Through this analysis, this paper aims to provide insights into the dynamics of authorship in the academic landscape. The analysis reveals patterns in knowledge production within sociology, highlighting how presenters' collaborations are shaped by the themes, methodologies, and contexts of their studies. The analysis revealed that the mean number of authors per paper was below two, and most presenters originated from only a few countries. The analysis identified seven key areas around which the papers were presented, which were aligned with the country of affiliation of presenters. A majority (two-thirds) of the papers were based on empirical data. Themes also determined the methodology adopted. The collaboration of authors, as reflected in the regression models, was influenced by control variables such as themes, methodology, and country of affiliation. The findings suggest distinct ways presenters connect and collaborate based on the nature of their research. The paper contributes to an understanding of how sociologists worldwide collaborate to make joint presentations at significant forums, such as international conferences. The paper offers insights into how the interests of presenters, in terms of topics, methodology, and research contexts, influence joint presentations and collaborations, thereby paving the way for future research collaborations.

**Keywords:** Collaboration, Methodologies, Social Sciences, Sociological Research, Sociology.

## Correspondence:

**Radhamany Sooryamoorthy**

<sup>1</sup>University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
SOUTH AFRICA.

<sup>2</sup>DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in STI  
Policy, Stellenbosch University,  
SOUTH AFRICA.

Email: sooryamoorthy@ukzn.ac.za

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## INTRODUCTION

Global sociology has undergone significant evolution over the past few decades, reflecting a growing recognition of the complexities involved in producing sociological knowledge and the need for a clearer understanding of global issues (Kislenko, 2021). Rocha (2022) shows how *Current Sociology* has chronicled the development of sociological thought, demonstrating its pivotal role in shaping the discipline in response to global changes and challenges. In our increasingly interconnected world, geographical distance is no longer a barrier to exchanging

ideas and pursuing research. Is this the case when it comes to collaboration in Sociology?

Like published papers, conference presentations offer scholars a valuable platform to present their research. The analysis of conference presentations, however, has not been attractive to scholars due to the availability of data that can be collected from prominent databases, such as Web of Science or Scopus. However, it is a worthwhile exercise mainly because abstracts of each paper at a prominent conference cannot be found in databases, as they are not indexed individually but only as a volume. Conference papers, like journal articles or book chapters, constitute an important component in the study of disciplines. Analysis of conference papers contributes to the understanding of the directions a discipline is taking in its course. For such an analysis, conference papers need to be manually captured before they are prepared for analysis. Despite this preventing data manageability, a detailed analysis of the papers presented can uncover several dimensions of a discipline. In sociology, such an analysis can



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reveal the dynamics of the discipline in terms of collaboration, the themes that presenters are exploring, the specific contexts in which their studies are situated, and the methodologies they employ. More importantly, a study of conference presentations can show how scholars engage and collaborate with their peers, both within their own geographical regions and across different locations. This interaction not only reflects the diversity of sociological inquiry but also illustrates how sociologists are interconnected, fostering a rich exchange of ideas that can lead to innovative research and a deeper understanding of social phenomena. A few studies (for instance, Sooryamoorthy, 2024) examined data from the International Sociological Association (ISA) to investigate African sociology during the 20<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Sociology. The research focused on the interest of international scholars in African sociological knowledge, the themes of papers related to Africa presented by both local African scholars and those from abroad, the composition of authorship among the presenters, and the collaborative efforts involved in the paper presentations.

Few scientometric studies in sociology have explored patterns of collaboration among sociologists (Sooryamoorthy, 2017; 2023). Most prior investigations have relied on citation indexes, which primarily capture published journal articles and books. While these sources are valuable, they often reflect finalised research outputs and may overlook early-stage ideas and emerging collaborations. In contrast, conference papers provide a distinctive vantage point for understanding the discipline. This makes them particularly useful for mapping the dynamic and evolving nature of sociological research.

The present study introduces a methodological innovation by analysing a large sample of conference papers to examine multiple dimensions of sociological activity. This approach offers insights into the characteristics of presenters, thematic orientations, methodological preferences, and the geographical or institutional contexts of research. Moreover, conference presentations involve collaborative work, making them an ideal source for studying patterns of co-authorship and academic networking. By focusing on these aspects, the study contributes to an understanding of how sociologists interact, share knowledge, and shape the discipline's trajectory in its formative stages.

This paper analyses global trends in sociological research through author composition and the contents of the papers, using abstracts from 4,491 papers presented at the 20<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Sociology in Melbourne in 2023. The focus of this paper is centred around the level of collaboration in Sociology that has evolved in recent years, and the composition of the authors of papers influences the diversity of themes addressed and methodologies employed. It is also of interest to study how the presenters from different countries involved in collaborative research affect the thematic focus and contextual relevance of their papers. In this

paper, collaboration refers to co-authorship, where two or more presenters jointly prepare a paper. Such collaboration may occur between presenters from the same or different departments, or across national boundaries. When presenters represent more than one country, the collaboration is classified as international.

## Theoretical Background

Collaboration in Sociology has become essential for addressing social issues and improving theoretical frameworks (Dusdal and Powell, 2021). Collaboration among sociologists is encouraged by the wealth of knowledge generated globally, which not only drives innovative theoretical and methodological advancements but also provides effective solutions to pressing global challenges (Sooryamoorthy, 2023). The rise of collaborative research networks has transformed the sociological landscape, enabling researchers from diverse backgrounds to share data, resources, and expertise (Bruckert and Parent, 2018). Collaboration is instrumental in methodological advancements, particularly through the adoption of mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative techniques to enhance sociological inquiry (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The relationship between specialisation and collaboration in sociology reveals that, while many researchers focus on their specific areas, there are opportunities for interdisciplinary research that foster innovation (Leahey and Reikowsky, 2008). Hunter and Leahey (2008) reported that collaboration rates among sociologists have increased since 1935, with nearly half of the articles in major journals now coauthored. Collaborative projects are more common in data collection, and authors from prestigious institutions collaborate more frequently, with geographic co-location becoming less important over time.

Leahey and Reikowsky (2008), based on the study of published papers, identified three primary styles of collaboration among sociologists. The first, Reinforcing Generalists, accounts for 70% of the papers and involves scholars with diverse research interests working together on familiar topics. The second style, Complementary Specialists, represents only 11% of the papers and features authors with narrow research agendas who frequently publish on the same subject, sharing limited subfields but having some prior publications related to the focal topic. Lastly, Generalists Broaching a New Topic comprises 18% of the papers, where generalists collaborate on new subjects, potentially fostering innovative research that spans multiple subfields. Quantitative research is more frequently coauthored than qualitative research. This trend, as Hunter and Leahey (2008) found in their study, is attributed to the greater suitability of quantitative methods for the division of labour, as tasks such as coding and analysis can be more readily shared among multiple researchers. This will be examined in the data on how interests influence collaboration in new subjects, cross-field collaboration and the methodology that underpins their research in collaborative enterprises.

## DATA AND METHODS

The abstracts published by the International Sociological Association (ISA) in 2023 (ISA, 2023) were used to extract data based on a set of selected variables, which were then analysed using the statistical program SPSS. The data, sourced from the official ISA website (<https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/conferences/world-congress/melbourne-2023/statistics-23>), revealed that a total of 4,701 presentations were made at the 2023 World Congress of Sociology. For this paper's analysis, 4,491 abstracts were selected, as they contained complete and relevant information needed for examining the variables under study. The papers were excluded if the abstract did not contain information about presenters, their affiliation or methodological details. The selected variables, namely, the number of presenters, their affiliating country, theme of the presentation, methodology employed in the papers and the country contexts of the research on which the paper was written, were manually extracted from 4,491 abstracts and captured individually into the SPSS program to run both descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson correlation test and linear regression test were used.

A comprehensive overview of the authors was gathered from the abstracts by recording details for the first five authors of each submission. This approach provided insight into most presenters, as the average number of authors per paper was 1.6. Only one per cent of the papers had more than five authors. For each paper, three keywords were chosen to encapsulate the main themes discussed, ensuring adequate representation of the subjects addressed. To effectively organise the extensive range of topics, these keywords were classified into broader thematic groups. In this grouping, related themes were clubbed. For instance, the broad theme of gender encompassed topics related to gender, women, or sexuality. Education encompasses topics such as education, knowledge, learning, and higher education. Profession included career, occupation or work, while communication covered topics of communication, media, internet, digital divide or ICT. Health, illness, disease or disability were grouped under health, and state, democracy, politics or power were considered under state. Data regarding the study contexts were gathered for up to three countries per paper, as there were cases in which more than one country was involved.

### Analysis and Findings

#### Overview of the Papers

The abstracts of 4,491 papers showed that the majority, 97.3% (4,370), were in English, 2.2% (97) in Spanish, and 0.5% (23) in French. Most papers had an average of 1.6 authors (S.D. =1.06), with 67% authored by a single individual, 20% by two, and smaller percentages by three to seven authors. A total count of 6,991 authors from 109 countries was identified. Australia, the hosting country, led with 863 authors (12.3%), followed by the USA (635), India (528), and others. Notably, 93% of the papers had authors

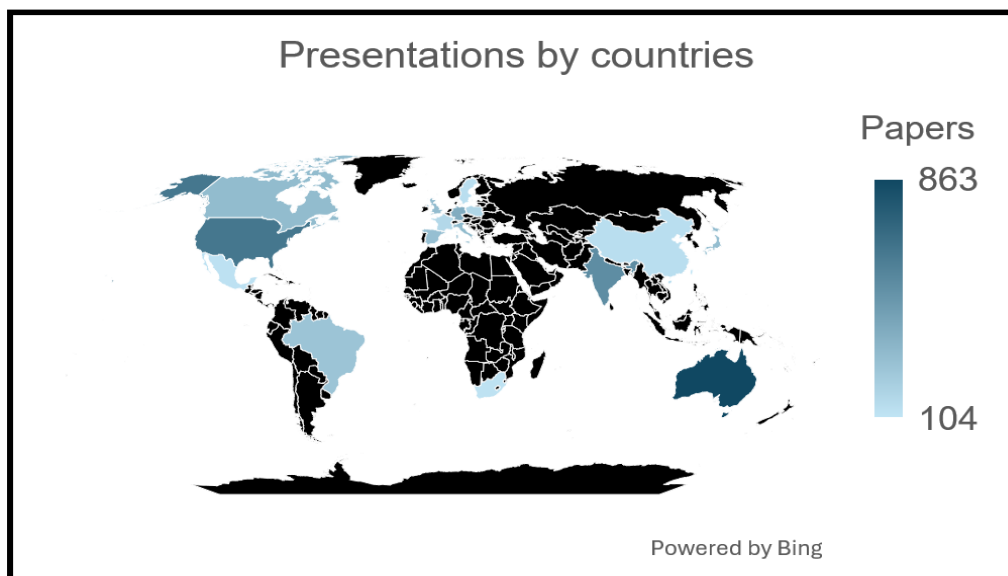
from a single country, and only 7% involved collaboration across multiple countries. Most presenters (90%) were affiliated with universities or colleges, while 6% came from research institutions and 4% from non-governmental or government sectors. The mean number of papers for the first top 10 countries indicates that the highest mean was meant for Australia (0.19), followed by the USA (0.14), India (0.12), Germany (0.08), Italy (0.07), Canada (0.07), the UK (0.07), Japan (0.07), Spain (0.06) and Brazil (0.06).

Seven key areas emerged as dominant groups of themes at the conference, each representing about 5% of the total papers presented, with 362–511 papers dedicated to gender, profession, education, communication, health, theory and methods, and state and democracy. Several topics were underrepresented, accounting for less than 1% of the total.

Among the papers that contained methodology details, 62% (2,789) were based on empirical studies, while 38% (1,694) were theoretical or literature-based. Within the empirical studies, 27% (742) used quantitative methods, 67% (1,850) employed qualitative methods, and 6% (178) utilised mixed methods. Nineteen empirical papers did not specify the methodologies. A total of 3,965 abstracts provided specific information about the countries of the contexts based on which the papers were written, encompassing 133 countries across all continents. India had the highest representation in the study contexts, contributing approximately 11% (429 papers), followed by Australia with 350 papers (9%). Other countries, listed in descending order of paper count, include the USA, Japan, China, Germany, Brazil, Canada, the UK, Italy, Spain, South Africa, Poland, France, Chile, Mexico, Argentina, Taiwan, South Korea, Turkey, Sweden, the Philippines, and Russia (Figure 1).

Given a more focused analysis of variables that are in sizable numbers, the analysis pertains to countries that represented a major share of the papers at the conference and the major groups of themes in terms of the number of presentations. The major affiliating countries of the authors were Australia, the USA, India, Germany, Italy, Canada, the UK, Japan, Spain and Brazil, as seen in Table 1. These countries collectively held a 59.5% share of all papers. Since there were several groups of themes, the analysis pertains only to the groups of themes that formed at least 5% of the total presentations. They were papers on gender, profession, education, communication, health, theory and methods, and state and democracy (Table 2), which together constituted 39% of the papers.

As stated earlier, the mean number of papers shows that the ten major countries had a varied presence in the papers presented at the conference. Australia recorded the highest mean of papers, while Spain and Brazil had the lowest mean, indicating the number of papers for each country. Among all, 1,486 papers (33%) were collaborative papers involving more than one author per paper (Figure 2). Only 131 papers (3%) were prepared, with



**Figure 1:** Papers by country of affiliation.

authors from more than one country exhibiting international collaboration.

### Thematic Groups

When the contributions of countries were compared with the major thematic groups of papers, Australia presented its highest number of papers in the thematic groups of education (7.4% of all its papers), communication (7.2%), and profession (7%). These three groups were followed by gender (5.8%), health, and theory and methods (4.6% each). The least number of papers for Australian scholars, among the top seven thematic groups, was in the state and democracy category (Table 3). The USA, the second largest contributor of presentations, produced its highest shares of papers in two thematic areas: gender and state and democracy, each accounting for 8.3% of all its submissions. Following closely was the theme of the profession at 7.2%, with health studies not far behind at 6.8%. The themes that garnered the least interest among American scholars were communication (3.9%) and education (3.8%). Contributions to the field of theory and methods were also notable, comprising 5.8% of the total.

Indian scholars demonstrated a strong focus on gender studies, which made up 15.2% of all their papers, followed by health (8.1%) and education (8%). Their interest in theory and methods was comparatively low. Germany placed greater emphasis on education, with 9.8% of its papers dedicated to this theme, more than any other topic. Their interest in theory and methods was also prominent, accounting for 8.1%, which is above the average of 4.8% for all countries. Italian presenters primarily concentrated on communication-related topics, including media, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and big data. For Canadian scholars, the top thematic areas were gender (8.6%) and

state and democracy (7.6%), followed by profession (6.9%) and communication (6.6%). In the UK, education and health were of great significance, each representing 7.9% of their papers, while the theme of profession appeared in 7% of their submissions. Japanese presenters exhibited a strong interest in gender studies, with 15.4% of their papers focused on this area, more than double the overall share of gender-related papers presented at the congress. They also dedicated 10.2% of their work to topics related to the profession, with health discussions comprising about 10% of their submissions. The least interest was shown in state and democracy, as well as communication, each accounting for less than 5%. Spanish presenters found communication to be the most appealing theme, comprising 8% of their papers, while other topics ranged from 2% to 4%. Brazilian scholars prioritised theory and methods (8%), profession (7.6%), and state and democracy (6.8%) in their contributions.

To further investigate the relationship between the country of affiliation of the presenters and the thematic groups of papers, Pearson's correlation tests were conducted between the binary variables derived from the raw data. The findings are summarised in Table 1. Although the coefficients were not generally strong, a positive associative tendencies were found between the number of papers focused on gender and the affiliations of presenters from India and Spain. The theme of education was represented generally by presenters from Australia and Germany. Communication was positively associated with presenters from Australia, Italy, and Spain. Health studies demonstrated a positive correlation with presenters from the USA, Canada, and the UK. The theme of theory and methods was associated with Germany. An association was observed between state and democracy in Brazil. These results align with the previous percentile analysis.

## METHODOLOGY

As papers were based on the studies conducted by presenters, papers were classified according to their empirical and non-empirical content. A few empirical papers were not explicit in the type of methodology (qualitative, quantitative or mixed) used. Approximately two-thirds of the papers were empirical, while the remainder were theoretical in nature. Country-wise presentations revealed similar trends across all countries, except for Brazil, where theoretical papers accounted for approximately two-thirds of the country's total presentations. The above-normal range of the general trend was observed in the presentations from authors from Japan and Spain, with more than 70 of their papers being empirical.

Sixty-seven per cent of all empirical papers used qualitative methods, while 27% employed quantitative methods, and 6% used mixed methods. In contrast to this general pattern, the papers presented by Japanese scholars comprised 49% qualitative and 45% quantitative content. Some countries had more qualitative papers than the normal figure for all countries. Australia had 76% of its empirical papers using qualitative methods, and India 74%. Mixed methods were employed in more than the average number of papers, particularly among those presented by scholars from Brazil (14.8%). Italy and Canada (8.3% each), India (7.6%), the UK (7.4%), Australia (5.6%).

## Themes and Methodology

Themes and methodologies in research are often closely intertwined, with specific themes aligning with particular methodological approaches. A comparative analysis of the major themes and the methodologies employed in the corresponding papers revealed distinct patterns, as illustrated in Table 2. The findings suggest a correlation between the qualitative methods employed and the themes examined in the analysis (Figure 3). Theory and methods demonstrated the highest reliance on qualitative approaches, with 80% of the papers in this category utilising qualitative methodologies. The theme of communication also showed a significant preference for qualitative methods, with 77% of the papers employing this approach. The themes of gender, health, state, and democracy were closely followed, with each receiving 68% of the papers that utilised qualitative methods. The themes of profession and education also exhibited a notable use of qualitative methods (65% and 61% of the papers, respectively), employing qualitative approaches. These themes also distinguished themselves by having a higher proportion of quantitative papers compared to the other themes. Specifically, 32% of the papers in the education theme utilised quantitative methods, while 30% of the papers in the profession theme did the same. The theme of health emerged as the area with the highest utilisation of mixed methods, with 9% of the papers employing this approach. The pattern is further confirmed in correlation. The test results are given in Table 3.

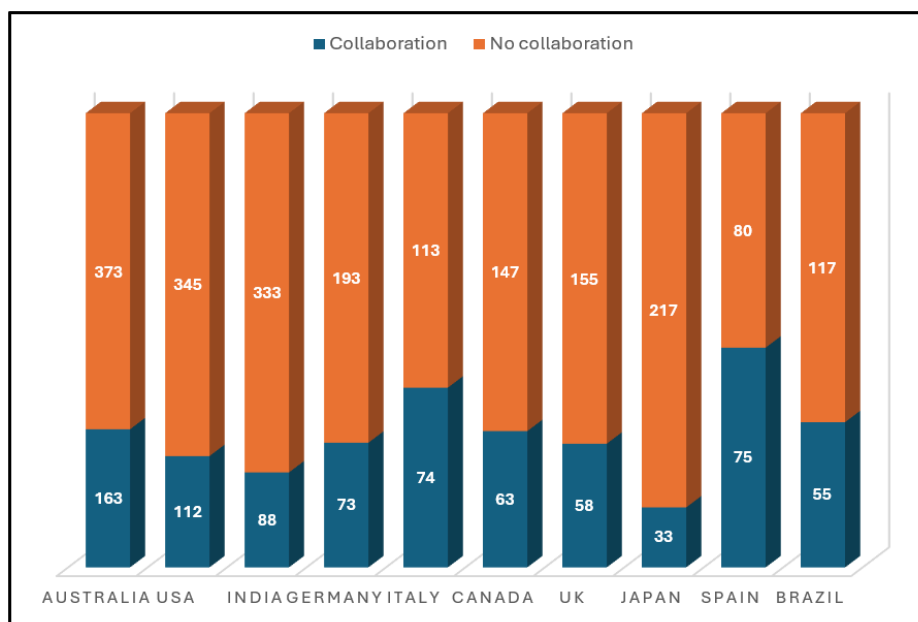
**Table 1: Correlation between themes of papers and country of affiliation of presenters.**

Themes	Australia	USA	India	Germany	Italy	Canada	UK	Japan	Spain	Brazil
Gender	-0.027	-0.003	0.068**	-0.023	-0.022	0.019	0.013	0.018	0.043**	-0.024
Profession	0.025	0.005	-0.028	0.013	0.001	0.006	0.009	0.018	-0.031*	0.018
Education	0.041**	-0.005	0.006	0.043**	0.021	-0.019	0.025	0.002	-0.010	0.000
Communication	0.032*	-0.018	-0.009	-0.015	0.072**	-0.003	-0.011	-0.039**	0.055**	0.012
Health	0.013	0.036*	0.015	-0.018	-0.007	0.041**	0.054**	0.026	-0.019	0.001
Theory and methods	-0.030*	-0.008	-0.057**	0.030*	-0.011	-0.022	0.001	-0.032*	-0.019	0.013
State and democracy	-0.039**	0.016	-0.034*	0.001	-0.014	0.003	-0.005	-0.007	-0.019	0.032*

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 2: Themes and methodology of papers.**

Methodology	Gender		Profession		Education		Communication		Health		Theory and Methods		State and Democracy		All papers	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Qualitative	249	68.6	232	64.8	200	61.0	227	76.9	212	67.7	98	80.3	119	68.4	3532	68.1
Quantitative	89	24.5	109	30.4	106	32.3	48	16.3	72	23.0	21	17.2	49	28.2	1311	25.3
Mixed	25	6.9	17	4.7	22	6.7	20	6.8	29	9.3	3	2.5	6	3.4	340	6.6
All	363	100	358	100	328	100	295	100	313	100	122	100	174	100	5183	100



**Figure 2:** Collaboration vs. noncollaboration, major countries.

## Themes and Contexts

In exploring the connection between the themes of the papers and the contexts of the countries in which the papers were based, all the country contexts were computed (as a paper may have more than one country context) and compared with the major themes. A Pearson correlation test using binary variables was used to find the correlation between these two variables, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4 presents correlation values for various themes (gender, profession, education, communication, health, theory and methods, state and democracy) across ten country contexts. The significant positive correlations in India and Japan in gender suggest that gender issues may be more pronounced or recognised in these countries. In contrast, the negative correlations in Australia and the USA indicate a lesser emphasis on gender matters. Research on the profession has primarily focused on the USA, as evidenced by the significant positive correlation found there. Negative correlations in India and Spain suggest that research on professions is less relevant in these contexts. Australia and Germany exhibited significant positive correlations in education, while other countries showed weaker or insignificant correlations. The theme of communication does not appear to have any positive correlations with the given country contexts. The USA and the UK demonstrated a strong relationship between health themes and their respective contexts, whereas other countries had minimal correlations. Brazil recorded a significant positive correlation between state and democracy themes.

## Methodology and Contexts

Regarding the relation between the methodology and country contexts of the papers, Australia showed a significant positive

correlation with qualitative methodology, while Japan had a significant negative correlation. Other countries, such as the USA, India, Germany, Italy, Canada, the UK, Spain, and Brazil, presented weak or insignificant correlations. Japan reported a significant positive correlation with quantitative methodology. The mixed methodology approach yielded a generally weak association across the countries, with only Brazil showing a significant positive correlation, as presented in Table 5.

## Collaboration

The data was analysed to answer the research questions about collaborations in producing papers and their influence on the countries of affiliation of the presenters, the thematic focus and contextual relevance of their papers, and the nature and type of methodologies used. Correlation test results, presented in Table 6, revealed collaboration among presenters affiliated with Australia, the USA, India, Germany, Italy, Canada, the UK, Spain, and Brazil, with varying levels of correlation strength. Japan was an exception. When international collaboration, i.e., collaboration between presenters from different countries, was examined, it was found to have a significant positive association with presenters from Australia, the USA, Germany, Canada, and the UK. No other major country on the list showed their preference for international alliances. Regarding the collaboration across the themes of the papers, namely profession, education, communication, and health, a significant positive association was observed. In contrast, international collaboration was only associated with the theme of education. In the use of methodology for the papers, the application of quantitative methodology has prompted presenters to engage in collaboration, including international collaboration. Qualitative methods were negatively

associated with collaboration in general and international collaboration in particular.

Building on these findings, it was explored whether collaboration could be predicted based on the number of countries and specific countries of affiliation of the presenters, as well as the themes of the papers. The regression models presented in Table 7 indicate that collaboration among presenters can indeed be predicted by the number of countries involved in preparing the papers, as this variable shows a significant association with ongoing collaboration. All ten major countries included in the analysis showed a significant association with collaboration, albeit at varying levels.

The  $R^2$  value of 0.275 suggests that the independent variables in the model can explain 27.5% of the variance in the dependent variable. In the second model, which predicts international collaboration among partners, presenters from all the major affiliating countries were enthusiastic about engaging in international collaboration for joint papers. The variable of the number of presenters was excluded from the model due to multicollinearity. Significant associations with the constant of international collaboration were found only for presenters affiliated with Australia, the USA, Germany, Canada, and the UK. On the other hand, presenters from India, Italy, Japan, Spain, and Brazil appeared to be less inclined to pursue international collaboration for presentations. The  $R^2$  value of 0.060 indicated a limited ability to assess the variance in international collaboration.

In the model predicting collaboration based on the major themes of the papers, only education, health, and state and democracy showed a significant correlation with the constant of collaboration. No correlation was identified between themes and international collaboration. This suggests that when papers focus on themes such as education, health, and state and democracy, collaboration is likely to occur. The model accounts for only 18% of the variance. The model used for international collaboration, as the constant, did not yield any significant correlations.

By examining the papers presented at a major international sociology event, the contemporary features of sociology as a discipline at the global level are evident. The analysis demonstrates that the presence of sociology is prominent in a few countries in North America, Europe, Asia and Australasia. In the realm of global sociology, specific topics have consistently ranked among the most prominent interests of sociologists. For instance, topics related to gender, profession, education, communication, health, theory and methods, and state and democracy have become popular topics. The preferred methodology among sociologists is revealed in the study. Empirical studies dominate theoretical studies. Among the methods, qualitative methods dominated, followed by quantitative and mixed methods. The analysis is also indicative of the connection between the country of affiliation and the themes of the papers, highlighting the choices countries have made in selecting their research topics.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of papers presented at the 20<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Sociology highlights several key characteristics of contemporary sociology. Most papers (3,005) had a single author, suggesting a trend towards individual research contributions rather than collaborative efforts. The research output was heavily concentrated among a few countries, with Australia leading. International collaboration was relatively limited. The conference showcased seven main thematic areas—gender, profession, education and communication, health, theory and methods, and state and democracy. Numerous topics, such as animal-human interactions, service delivery, and discrimination, were underrepresented. A significant majority of the papers were empirical, with a notable preference for qualitative methods over quantitative or mixed approaches. The research that went into the preparation of papers encompassed a diverse range of contexts, with contributions from numerous countries across all continents, showing the global nature of the studies. India emerged as the most represented country in the context of research, followed closely by Australia.

**Table 3: Correlation between themes and methodology.**

Methodology	Gender	Profession	Education	Communication	Health	Theory and Methods	State and Democracy
Qualitative methodology (1=yes, 0=others)	0.017	-0.015	-0.044*	0.077**	0.006	0.048*	0.008
Quantitative methodology (1=yes, 0=others)	-0.019	0.032	0.046*	-0.080**	-0.031	-0.050**	0.008
Mixed methodology (1=yes, 0=others)	0.008	-.026	0.004	0.006	0.041*	-0.036	-0.031

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

In Australia, presenters prioritised themes related to education, communication and profession, which resonate with contemporary societal concerns. German scholars have focused on education, theory, and methods, in line with their tradition of contributing to the advancement of sociological theories and methodologies. India focused on its pressing themes such as gender, education and health. Italian presenters emphasised communication as their primary theme, while Canadian scholars showed a strong inclination towards gender studies and state and democracy. In the UK, there was considerable interest in issues related to education and health. Japanese scholars have increasingly focused their attention on gender issues alongside themes of profession and health, suggesting a shift in their sociological inquiries. Spanish researchers prominently engaged with communication topics, while Brazilian scholars concentrated on sociological theories and methods. These thematic preferences do suggest the contemporary sociological issues faced by these countries, as the papers reflect the current social contexts and challenges unique to each country. The selection of themes serves as a mirror to the pressing social realities and academic interests that characterise the sociological landscape in different parts of the world.

The variation in the diverse nature of themes implies that academic traditions and institutional priorities alone do not shape sociological inquiry; instead, they are also profoundly influenced by the unique social, political, and cultural contexts of each country. The varied preferences for sociological themes based on the presenters' country affiliations demonstrated the dynamic interplay between local contexts and academic inquiry. This diversity enriches the field of sociology, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of global social phenomena and promoting cross-cultural dialogue among scholars. By examining these preferences, valuable insights can be gained into how sociological research can be responsive to the unique challenges and opportunities present in different societies. The associations not only highlighted the diversity of research interests across different countries but also underscored the contextual factors in shaping academic inquiry within various thematic areas.

The general trend across most countries is a preference for papers that are products of empirical research, except Brazil, which had a significant focus on theoretical work. This deviation from the general trend reflects Brazil's unique research culture or academic focus that prioritises theoretical exploration over empirical investigation. Countries like Japan and Spain showed a strong inclination towards empirical studies. The data indicated that empirical research is generally favoured in the academic outputs of the countries analysed, reflecting a possible trend towards data-driven studies in the social sciences.

The findings make a pronounced trend in Australia and India for qualitative research, suggesting a preference for rich, narrative-driven insights over purely numerical analysis. A growing pattern among Brazilian researchers to integrate both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in their studies was evident. A near-even split in Japan suggests a balanced approach to research methodology.

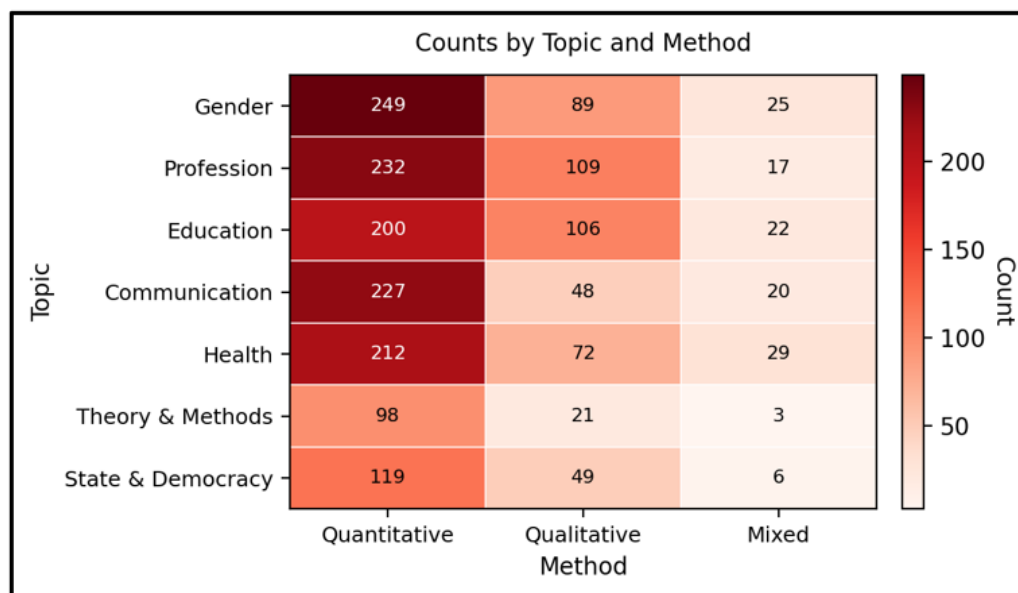
The topics of education and profession suggest that while qualitative methods were prevalent, there was also a significant interest in quantitative analysis within these domains. There is a growing recognition of the value of integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to address the multifaceted nature of health-related research. The use of mixed methods in health research enables a more comprehensive understanding of health issues, combining statistical analysis with in-depth qualitative insights. The study of themes and methodologies provided a clear predominance of qualitative methods across most themes, with notable exceptions in education and profession, where quantitative approaches are also prevalent. The theme of health stands out for its use of mixed methods.

The themes and country contexts analysis showed a close relationship between gender themes and the country contexts of India and Japan. At the same time, no relations in Australia and the USA indicated a lesser emphasis on gender-related topics. Research on the profession is centred in the USA, whereas the theme is less relevant in Indian and Spanish contexts. Positive

**Table 4: Correlation between themes and contexts of countries.**

Themes	Australia	USA	India	Germany	Italy	Canada	UK	Japan	Spain	Brazil
Gender	-0.023	-0.006	0.098**	-0.008	0.007	0.009	-0.015	0.034*	0.031*	-0.012
Profession	0.011	0.041**	-0.013	0.018	-0.007	0.030*	0.009	0.016	-0.031*	0.027
Education	0.049**	-0.010	0.004	0.043**	0.012	-0.003	0.019	-0.002	-0.016	-0.004
Communication	0.009	-0.015	-0.025	-0.024	0.016	-0.035*	-0.021	-0.035*	0.026	-0.017
Health	-0.007	0.037*	0.000	-0.017	-0.004	0.013	0.042**	0.025	-0.010	0.008
Theory and Methods	-0.023	-0.023	-0.069**	-0.008	-0.040**	-0.019	0.005	-0.040**	-0.037*	-0.017
State and Democracy	-0.040**	0.015	-0.027	-0.001	0.003	-0.002	0.018	-0.015	-0.014	0.045**

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .



**Figure 3:** Themes and methodology, showing intensity.

correlations in health themes are observed in the USA and UK, contrasting with minimal correlations in other countries.

The presenters from Australia, the USA, India, Germany, Italy, Canada, the UK, Spain, and Brazil collaborated. Japan's lack of significant collaboration may lead to potential isolation or a different research culture, which could limit its international engagement. The positive association between international collaboration and presenters from Australia, the USA, Germany, Canada, and the UK suggested that these countries were more likely to form cross-border research partnerships. This could indicate a robust academic infrastructure, ample funding opportunities, and a culture that fosters collaborative research efforts.

Certain themes, particularly those related to profession, education, communication, and health, were more conducive to collaboration. The specific association between international partnerships and the theme of education may suggest that educational research is a priority area for global partnerships, possibly due to its universal relevance and the shared challenges faced by educational systems worldwide. The use of quantitative methodologies was associated with increased collaboration, including international partnerships. This might be because quantitative research, which requires larger sample sizes and diverse data sources, benefits from collaborative efforts. The negative association between qualitative methods and international collaboration suggests that qualitative research may be more context-specific or reliant on localised knowledge, which could limit the scope of collaboration. The insights gained from this analysis could inform future research initiatives by emphasising the importance of fostering international collaborations, particularly in education-related themes. Understanding the methodological preferences can guide researchers in forming partnerships that align with their research

approaches. This corresponds to the theory of Reinforcing Generalists (Leahey and Reikowsky, 2008), which suggests that the diverse interests of scholars tend to work together and that they collaborate when there is potential for innovative research in specific fields. Again, the finding that revealed the connection between quantitative methods and international collaboration supports the view of Hunter and Leahey (2008) that the suitability of quantitative methods inspires collaboration.

It is evident from the regression models that collaboration among presenters is significantly influenced by the number of countries involved in preparing the papers and the countries' affiliations. While presenters from Australia, the USA, Germany, Canada, and the UK presented a strong inclination towards international collaboration, those from India, Italy, Japan, Spain, and Brazil were less likely to engage in such collaborative efforts. Collaboration is influenced by discipline and the country of origin (Avdeev, 2021). In most cases, collaboration with the USA is greater than with other countries, as revealed in the scientometric analysis (For instance, González Brambila *et al.*, 2021). The extent of collaboration is not always positively correlated with geographical difference, as shown in empirical analysis (Avdeev, 2021).

Collaboration among presenters is likely to occur when papers focus on the themes of education, health, and state and democracy, as these themes showed a significant correlation with collaboration in the regression model; however, the model only explains 18% of the variance, indicating that other factors may also play a role in collaboration dynamics.

In line with this finding, collaboration in similar fields within the social sciences has been inconsistent. The analysis by González Brambila *et al.*, (2021) indicated that collaboration in social sciences disciplines in Mexico has not produced steady growth, as evident in the mean number of publications. Specifically, in the

social sciences and other fields where sociology is involved, it has one of the highest numbers of solo publications compared to other areas, such as psychology, business, economics, and educational research. No supportive conditions have facilitated co-authorship in the social sciences, particularly with international peers, despite an increase in the number of publications.

The analysis of publications in social sciences in the Central and Eastern European countries stored in the Scopus database for a recent 22-year period by Mervar and Jokić (2022) showed that while there has been an increase in the number of authors in all social science fields that included sociology, the average number of authors for sociology specifically was below two authors. Below, the mean value of two authors indicates the low level of collaboration among the authors in sociology. Similarly, Arhiliuc and Guns (2023) reported that while the number of publications in the Humanities has increased, the proportion of collaborative publications has reached a plateau. In the Social Sciences, sociology is part of it; the percentage of publications written in collaboration has been increasing slowly, and Arhiliuc and Guns (2023) expect it to reach a saturation point in the future.

Although the findings of Cheng *et al.*, (2025) in Earth sciences align with the current data used in this paper, the analysis by Cheng *et al.*, (2025) suggests that excessive disciplinary disparity becomes more pronounced, which can increase the complexity of collaboration. Cheng *et al.*, note that fostering international collaboration is critical for enhancing the capabilities of the disciplines, providing access to a range of perspectives and expertise. As the analysis indicates, this has not occurred in Sociology, showing poor levels of international collaboration among themselves.

There can be many reasons for the relative isolation of sociologists among themselves, as seen in the data. As de Frutos-Belizón *et al.*, (2024) found, factors such as individual and collective are decisive. Individual factors include human capital, innovation, and leadership, while the collective determinants include the research team's orientation towards productivity and social capital. The internal factors in the case of social sciences are

insufficient to establish international connections that may lead to collaboration. Social capital, a collective factor, has a strong influence on promoting international collaboration due to its cognitive and structural dimensions. They recognised that a higher level of social capital in its cognitive dimension can improve international contacts and research. Perhaps sociologists lack these aspects, which hinders their ability to be more collaborative than before. It is also evident that collaboration does not necessarily result in the prospects of conducting joint research and publications that arise from such alliances. Although it is not clear in the data that the joint presentations of papers at the conference were the product of prior research collaboration, conferences such as the one analysed here provide opportunities for scholars to work together and may lead to continued association. The importance of conferences, therefore, cannot be undermined compared to concrete research collaboration. It is also possible that some of the joint presentations at the conference may lead to journal articles or book chapters, further intensifying research collaboration. Joint presentations also have the potential to foster more established research alliances in the future and provide opportunities for institutions in different countries to establish memoranda of understanding for future research.

The significance of international collaboration in advancing knowledge and for greater impact has been acknowledged in the literature (Didegah and Thelwall, 2013; Nomaler *et al.*, 2013; Shen *et al.*, 2021; Vieira, 2023). Through international collaboration, the sharing of skills and knowledge becomes possible, leading to the production of sociological knowledge in areas where advanced skills are necessary and ultimately facilitating the growth of the discipline. Khor and Yu (2016) reported that institutions, both new and established, benefited from international collaboration. It will be in the best interest of the institutions to encourage and support international collaboration, particularly when the criteria for ranking institutions take into consideration the visibility and impact of the research conducted by their members. Institutions can help scholars in establishing international collaborations by providing funding and crediting them in the performance management system.

**Table 5: Correlation between methodology and the contexts of study of papers.**

Methodology	Australia	USA	India	Germany	Italy	Canada	UK	Japan	Spain	Brazil
Qualitative methodology (1=yes, 0=others)	0.068**	-0.016	0.046*	-0.019	0.031	0.013	0.023	-0.075**	-0.004	0.011
Quantitative methodology (1=yes, 0=others)	-0.066**	0.025	-0.067**	0.022	-0.038*	-0.014	-0.036	0.096**	0.020	-0.048*
Mixed methodology (1=yes, 0=others)	-0.005	-0.015	0.029	-0.008	0.007	0.000	0.029	-0.023	-0.022	0.045*

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 6: Correlation between collaboration and other variables.**

Collaboration and country of affiliation		Australia	USA	India	Germany	Italy			Canada	UK	Japan	Spain	Brazil
Collaboration (1=yes, 0=no)		0.173**	0.143**	0.036*	0.110**	0.129**			0.108**	0.114**	-0.016	0.154**	0.098**
International collaboration (1=yes, 0=no)		0.061**	0.118**	-0.047**	0.068**	-0.014			0.072**	0.151**	-0.021	-0.015	-0.003
Collaboration and major themes	Gender	Profession	Education	Communication		Health	Theory and Methods	State and Democracy					
Collaboration (1=yes, 0=no)	-0.017	0.033*	0.055**	0.036*		0.082**	-0.053**	-0.062**					
International collaboration (1=yes, 0=no)	0.013	.012	0.039**	-0.005		0.017	0.004	-0.027					
Collaboration and methodology	Quantitative methodology (1=yes, 0=others)	Qualitative methodology (1=yes, 0=others)		Mixed methodology (1=yes, 0=others)									
Collaboration (1=yes, 0=no)	0.127**		-0.113**		0.006								
International collaboration (1=yes, 0=no)	0.085**		-0.065**		-0.021								

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 7: Regression of collaboration on countries of affiliation and themes of papers.**

Variables	Unstandardised B	Standardised $\beta$	SE	Sig.	Variables	Unstandardised B	Standardised $\beta$	SE	Sig.	Variables	Unstandardised B	Standardised $\beta$	SE	Sig.
Constant (Collaboration)	-0.243		0.021	<0.001	Constant (International collaboration)	0.006		0.003	0.095	Constant (Collaboration)	0.316		0.010	<0.001
Number of countries	0.380	0.268	0.018	<0.001						Gender	-0.025	-0.017	0.022	0.261
Australia	0.173	0.238	0.010	<0.001	Australia	0.023	0.090	0.004	<0.001	Profession	0.045	0.030	0.023	0.044
USA	0.174	0.183	0.012	<.001	USA	0.048	0.141	0.005	<0.001	Education	0.085	0.056	0.023	<0.001
India	0.152	0.130	0.015	<0.001	India	-0.003	-0.008	0.006	0.599	Communication	0.060	0.038	0.023	0.011
Germany	0.194	0.161	0.016	<0.001	Germany	0.039	0.090	0.006	<0.001	Health	0.127	0.078	0.024	<0.001
Italy	0.218	0.179	0.016	<0.001	Italy	0.004	0.010	0.006	0.512	Theory and Methods	-0.077	-0.046	0.025	0.002
Canada	0.193	0.145	0.017	<0.001	Canada	0.042	0.088	0.007	<0.001	State and Democracy	-0.091	-0.053	0.026	<0.001
UK	0.177	0.132	0.017	<0.001	UK	0.080	0.167	0.007	<0.001	R <sup>2</sup>	0.018			
Japan	0.083	0.052	0.021	<0.001	Japan	0.005	0.009	0.008	0.554					
Spain	0.228	0.191	0.015	<0.001	Spain	0.003	0.006	0.006	0.681					
Brazil	0.186	0.137	0.017	<0.001	Brazil	0.008	0.016	0.007	0.284					
R <sup>2</sup>	0.275				R <sup>2</sup>	0.060								

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present analysis is based on papers presented at a significant international sociology conference. Participation was constrained by resource limitations, particularly for scholars from developing regions, which restricts the generalisability of the findings. Consequently, the data should not be regarded as representative of global sociological research. Furthermore, the thematic scope of the conference was primarily shaped by its central theme, potentially excluding scholars engaged in other areas of inquiry and resulting in the underrepresentation of certain sociological domains. This study draws on a single, albeit prominent, conference. While accepted papers often reference related research, they do not necessarily reflect completed studies; in some instances-especially theoretical contributions-abstracts were submitted primarily to facilitate participation rather than to report substantive research outcomes.

From a methodological perspective, these limitations underscore the need for multi-source data collection to enhance representativeness and validity. Future research should triangulate findings by incorporating data from additional major conferences, such as the American Sociological Association meeting, and complement these with bibliometric analyses of journal publications. Employing mixed-method approaches-combining quantitative measures of collaboration patterns with qualitative assessments of thematic diversity-would provide a more in-depth understanding of global sociological research trends. Such strategies can mitigate biases introduced by single-event analyses and strengthen the robustness of comparative studies across regions and thematic areas. Further research could focus on how collaboration between presenters is initiated and established, as well as the reasons behind these alliances.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of papers presented at the 20<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Sociology revealed significant characteristics of contemporary sociology, illustrating a trend toward individual research contributions, as a single individual authored most papers. The output was heavily concentrated among a few countries, with Australia leading. The conference showcased seven main thematic areas, while many topics were notably underrepresented. The thematic preferences of presenters varied by country, reflecting local, social, political, and cultural contexts. The diversity in thematic focus enriches the field of current sociology, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and enhancing the understanding of global social phenomena. While most countries favoured empirical research, Brazil uniquely focused on theoretical work. This variation in research preferences illustrates the dynamic interplay between local contexts and academic inquiry, emphasising the importance of contextual factors in shaping sociological research. Although collaboration among scholars was not prominently reflected in the data, those who engaged in

joint presentations exemplify theoretical frameworks concerning the reinforcement of generalists, as well as the interplay between complementary specialists and generalists. Shared interests in diverse and innovative sociological topics, coupled with methodological preferences, facilitated partnerships that culminated in collaborative presentations. This pattern aligns with established theoretical explanations. Ultimately, these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of social dynamics worldwide, illustrating how current sociology can effectively respond to the unique challenges and opportunities present in different societies. As seen in the analysis, sociologists tend to be isolationist than collaborative regarding sociological research. A substantial proportion-exceeding two-thirds-of the published papers were authored by single individuals, underscoring a prevailing inclination among sociologists worldwide towards solitary scholarship rather than collaborative engagement. This tendency may be partly attributable to the limited availability of funding mechanisms for transnational research collaborations within sociology, a constraint that is less pronounced in other scientific disciplines. Sociological inquiry is frequently amenable to individual execution, except in instances necessitating access to extensive cross-national datasets or specialised methodological expertise from colleagues. The absence of collaborative engagement poses significant challenges to the advancement of the discipline. Scholarly collaboration is widely recognised as a mechanism for enhancing academic visibility through increased citation rates and fostering greater efficiency in knowledge production. Insufficient collaboration within sociology results in the forfeiture of these critical benefits, thereby constraining the discipline's intellectual growth and global impact.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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