

# Collaborative public sector innovation: An analysis of Italy, Japan, and Turkey

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## Abstract

The importance of involving citizens in the early stages of public sector innovation and bottom-up governance arrangements for collaboration has been proposed in a number of theoretical papers. However, to date, few empirical studies are evident in the literature. To deepen our understanding of collaborative public sector innovation, our exploratory article analyses: (i) the actors of collaboration, (ii) collaboration across the innovation stages, (iii) the perceived aspects of collaboration for innovative outcomes, and (iv) the governance of collaboration. Our analysis covers 99 innovations from Italy, Japan, and Turkey. We reveal that collaboration still largely occurs within the bureaucracy of public sector organizations. Attempts to include civic and private sectors are evident, depending on the country context. Further, we uncover that a mutual understanding and shared goals are crucial for success, which is accomplished through top-down governance as opposed to self-governed bottom-up networks.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Public sector innovation (PSI) is attracting growing academic interest (e.g., Lewis et al., 2022; Williams & Yecaló-Teclé, 2020). The literature recognizes the role of collective action with external partners, where governance networks and horizontal relations can solve wicked

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problems (Considine & Lewis, 2007). A number of theoretical studies introduced the term “collaborative public sector innovation” (Hartley et al., 2013; Sørensen & Torfing, 2017). Together they suggest that collaboration with other public sector organizations, businesses, universities and citizens increasingly forms the main driver of PSI. Recent empirical studies examined the role of collaboration as an independent variable on innovation outcomes and pointed a positive relationship (e.g., Clausen et al., 2020). However, detailed empirically derived understanding of the nature of collaboration is lacking.

Four main weaknesses are evident within existing research. First, Hartley et al. (2013) proposed that collaboration within PSI can emerge through four activities: co-initiation, co-development, co-implementation, and co-diffusion. Nonetheless, existing empirical studies have been unable to capture the process dynamics of collaboration (e.g., Sørensen & Torfing, 2018). In particular, these studies have failed to capture the type of collaborative actors within this process. Notably, evidence on the role performed by citizens, proposed by the collaborative PSI model, is limited. Second, collaboration for innovation is complex with competing dimensions and trade-offs (Wegrich, 2019). While the health innovation literature has provided initial insights (e.g., Windrum, 2014), there is a limited understanding of which constructs of collaboration are critical for positive innovation outcomes. Third, to manage the actors and complexities above, two different approaches to governance of collaborative PSI have been proposed; bottom-up (hands-off) (Sørensen & Torfing, 2017) and top-down (hands-on) (Vento, 2020). Yet, empirical understanding is lacking. Fourth and finally, prior empirical research has been limited to single country studies, primarily conducted in the context of the United States (Lindsay et al., 2018), European Union countries (Sørensen & Torfing, 2018), or Australia (Nowacki & Monk, 2020). This illustrates a need for cross-country studies to reach more accurate generalizations, and uncover how collaboration differs across varied contexts.

The purpose of this article is to respond to the recent calls for cross-national studies in public administration (e.g., Meier et al., 2017; Milward et al., 2016; Suzuki & Demircioglu, 2019). In particular, our objective is to explore the nature of collaborative PSI using an international sample. There has been an increasing amount of cross-country research on PSI based on managerial attitudes and indexes (e.g., Demircioglu & Vivona, 2021a; Lapuente & Suzuki, 2020) within European countries. We contribute to this literature by studying 99 actual innovation adoption processes from Italy, Japan and Turkey. To accomplish this, our research analyses 99 semi-finalists from the United Nations Public Service Awards Scheme (UNPSA). Our approach is also informed by the recent call by Bertelli et al. (2020) to study public administration in developing countries, in our case Turkey. The method of examining awards applications has been utilized by other studies within the PSI literature (e.g., Borins, 2014; Chen et al., 2020). Our findings provide two main contributions to the literature.

The first contribution is to provide evidence from three distinct contexts about the actors of collaboration underscoring local-central level distinction of PSI innovation activity. Higher levels of citizen collaboration are evident within Japan, while Turkish and Italian cases included greater collaboration within the bureaucracy. While we identified collaboration with universities, it is not relatively common compared to other contexts (Demircioglu & Audretsch, 2019). Second, our findings provide additional evidence to how collaboration varies across the innovation process (Hartley et al., 2013; Sørensen & Torfing, 2018). Co-initiation is uncommon. Co-design activities were reported more than co-implementation opposed to Voorberg et al.'s (2015) findings and it was the stage where the citizens most actively collaborated. Co-diffusion was not well exploited across the contexts studied while Hartley (2016) proposed it as the public sector's secret weapon for innovation. We provide empirical insights into

the dimensions of collaboration. Building upon Windrum (2014) and Wegrich (2019), our article highlights a mutual understanding and shared goals during the process were perceived to be more important than a resourceful environment and inclusion for creativity. Also, we identify that a top-down (hands-on) approach (Vento, 2020) is more common when governing collaborative interactions, as opposed to the bottom-up (hands-off) approach proposed by Sørensen and Torfing (2017).

This article begins with a review of the literature examining: (i) actors of collaboration, (ii) collaboration across innovation process (iii) the complex nature of collaboration with competing dimensions, and (iv) the governance of collaboration. Subsequently, we present the research context and our methodology. Finally, the article discusses the findings and concludes with an agenda for future research.

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 | Actors of collaboration

The following discussion examines the literature on collaboration partners. First, intergovernmental collaboration is a well-established theme in PSI literature. Bardach (1998) studied successful cases of intergovernmental collaboration within the Harvard Kennedy School Innovation in Government Awards. Using the same awards, Borins (1998) recognized holism as an emerging term to describe systems and multiple services coordinated by intergovernmental coordination. The importance of collaboration between public sector organisations (PSOs) was also identified by empirical studies on PSI (e.g., Walker, 2006). Subsequently, Borins (2014) longitudinally observed an increase in collaboration with other PSOs among successful PSIs.

Second, the resources of private enterprises have played a significant role in PSI. “PUBLIN (Innovation in the Public Sector)” was the first EU funded research project investigating PSI in multiple contexts. The most important insight of this research programme was collaboration (see Osborne & Brown, 2011). PUBLIN also identified the involvement of private enterprises, particularly with respect to health innovations (Windrum & Koch, 2008). The subsequent research project “SERVPPIN (Service Public-private Innovation Networks)” also provided significant insights on public-private collaboration (Gallouj et al., 2013). Similarly, Borins (2014) identified public-private partnerships grew from 28% to 54% in the over the period, suggesting that there was a growth in collaboration in recent years.

The third actor identified in the literature is citizens and NGOs, as collective institutions of citizens, which form significant actors in the PSI process. The concept of collaborative PSI, proposed by Hartley et al. (2013) and Sørensen and Torfing (2011), places particular emphasis on the contribution of citizens to spur innovation. To date, the limited empirical evidence provided has focused on collaboration with citizens in the Danish context (e.g., Sørensen & Torfing, 2018), which has had historically decentralized strong local governments. Hence this needs to be tested in other administrative cultures. For example, Bovaird and Loeffler (2016, p. 160) argued “the contribution of citizens to public service innovation is already high, but it could be much greater.”

While universities are identified as a crucial actor in national systems of innovation (Freeman, 1995), it is surprising that their role is not well-documented in PSI. Neither the studies of Borins (1998, 2014) nor recent survey based literature (e.g., Arundel et al., 2015) have investigated the role of universities. Recently, in their quantitative study, Demircioglu and Audretsch (2019) identified a significant influence of universities. Hence there is a need to further explore their involvement.

Finally, international organizations such as the World Bank, United Nations, and European Union have facilitated public sector reforms (Ongaro & Kickert, 2019). Correspondingly, they can also contribute to the PSI process. Cinar et al. (2019) noted their role in funding innovations in the developing world. PSOs can also interact with international partners to transfer innovations (Borins, 2014). However, the literature provides limited information on collaboration with international organizations.

## 2.2 | Innovation process stages and collaboration

Against this backdrop of growing collaboration, the question of when to involve collaborators in the innovation process is crucial. Initial insights from Cinar et al. (2019) identified differences across the stages of the innovation process, and highlighted that this process is complex, non-linear and iterative.

Prior studies have identified the potential for collaboration across four key innovation stages, (i) initiation, (ii) design, (iii) implementation, and (iv) diffusion (see Hartley, 2016; Hartley et al., 2013). First, collaborators can co-initiate an innovation process, through an idea proposal (Borins, 1998). They can also be involved later in the process to co-design new solutions (Bason, 2010). The innovation process requires concrete resources to implement these solutions. Governments, as well as the collaborative PSI approach, promote the use of stakeholders, particularly citizens, as a resource for the implementation stage (Torfing, 2016). Finally, Hartley (2016) proposed the potential benefits of collaboration for the diffusion stage. The transfer of innovation can cross national boundaries with PSOs, allowing other countries to benefit from identified best practices (Borins, 2014).

The PSI literature has provided little evidence of how collaboration differs across the stages of PSI. Borins' (2014) longitudinal study found that co-initiation by interest group leaders, clients and citizens occurred relatively rarely in comparison to organizational and political initiation. Voorberg et al. (2015) uncovered that while co-implementation was a very common practice, co-design occurred less frequently and specifically co-initiations were seldom. Sørensen and Torfing (2018, p. 395) noted "public organizations tend to involve citizens and civil society organizations rather late in the innovation process when the agenda is already set." Thus, the variation of collaboration activity across the innovation stages needs further examination.

## 2.3 | The complex nature of collaboration with competing dimensions

The recent empirical studies on PSI identified a positive relationship between collaboration and innovativeness: Arundel et al. (2015) found that knowledge scanning agencies, who prioritize collaboration, were able to achieve more innovative outputs. In their configurational qualitative comparative analysis, Torugsa and Arundel (2017) uncovered the contributions of collaboration in every success recipe. Demircioglu and Audretsch (2019) identified the positive impact of collaboration on innovativeness and public service quality. These studies demonstrate the positive influence of collaboration conceptualized through idea sources for innovation along with the type of collaboration actors. However, an in-depth understanding of how PSOs perceive competing aspects of collaboration to spur innovation is lacking. This is of particular importance in light of the complex nature of collaboration for innovation (Chen, 2020): While a wider

diversity of stakeholders can provide a resourceful environment to innovate and the inclusion of collaborators can enhance creativity (Bernier et al., 2015; Torfing, 2016), a shared understanding and goals is required to innovate (Torugsa & Arundel, 2016; Windrum, 2014). Where this is not present, collaboration holds the potential to increase difficulty in decision making (Wegrich, 2019). Yet, similar mind-sets can also deter discussion and creativity (Torfing, 2016). Hence there is a need to better understand those constructs of collaboration which influence the innovation process, and the relative importance of each to PSI success.

## 2.4 | The governance of multi-actor innovation

The formation and governance of an institutionalized setting where interactions between actors can emerge is crucial for multi-actor innovation. Vangen et al. (2015, p. 1244) defined the governance of collaboration as “The governance of a collaborative entity entails the design and use of a structure and processes that enable actors to direct, coordinate, and allocate resources for the collaboration...”. While recent studies of PSI demonstrate a growing interest in social network analysis (e.g., Lewis et al., 2018), the governance of collaboration and innovation networks has received scant attention over last two decades.

The seminal network governance typology for public administration by Provan and Kenis (2008) proposed three different structures. First, a highly decentralized structure where power is equally distributed. From a normative perspective on shared-governance they considered this is the “most common” and “simple” form. Second, a highly centralized network structure in which the great extent of the power belongs to a central leading organization. Finally, a highly centralized structure characterized by power relationships that are balanced through a special administrative network organization.

Sørensen and Torfing (2017) offered a different description for governance of collaborations, which also stems from the network literature: Metagovernance. Metagovernance is defined as the regulation of bottom-up interactions at different levels and intersections of networks. This definition stems from the interactive governance and policy networks that prioritize bottom-up and empowered participation mechanisms, as opposed to government authority and steering in the governing of society and economy (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011, p. 861). To date, the only empirical evidence for this type of governance was provided within Danish local governments (e.g., Sørensen & Torfing, 2017, 2018). Thus, the applicability, generalizability and context dependency of the governance of collaborative PSI requires further investigation. Agranoff (2007), as cited in Bryson et al. (2015, p. 653), highlighted that “collaborations or networks have often overlaid—rather than replaced—existing hierarchical arrangements.” Thus, the administrative structures within the macro context can influence the governance of networks in a path-dependent manner. Indeed, within a Finnish context, Vento (2020) found that classical top-down governance approach was more appropriate than a bottom-up approach.

## 3 | METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 | The research context

Based on the growing calls for cross-country research in public management (Meier et al., 2017) and particularly in PSI (Suzuki & Demircioglu, 2019), we conducted a cross-national study to

understand the current nature of collaborative PSI in three scantily studied contexts. The application forms of semi-finalist initiatives to UNPSA are the source of our research data. Applicants need to submit an open-questionnaire providing rich qualitative information about their innovation content and adoption process (United Nations, 2015). This information encompasses the problem and innovative solution, collaborators, outcomes and lessons learned.<sup>1</sup> This rich qualitative data from three different countries has enabled us to explore the evidence provided by the applicants on the collaboration activities during the actual innovation process and contribute to the previous comparative literature which studied managerial attitudes and international indexes quantitatively (e.g., Lapuente & Suzuki, 2020). The complete population of semi-finalist innovations from Italy (34), Japan (26), and Turkey (39) submitted between 2009 and 2015 to the UNPSA were studied for this purpose.

The rationale for this selection is three-fold. First, the countries are well-established members of the OECD. Second, the public administration in all countries have been regarded as Weberian bureaucracies, which are not conducive for innovative behavior among PSOs (see Lapuente & Suzuki, 2020; Suzuki & Demircioglu, 2019), and have not frequently been studied for PSI research. However, all three have introduced significant NPM and e-government oriented public sector reforms over the last decades, which has the potential to develop innovation capacity in some parts of the central and local governments (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Finally, despite a number of similarities as a base for comparison, each is sufficiently different to enable insightful comparisons of collaborative PSI across the contexts (see Table 1).

*Italy* is an EU member. It characterizes unitary Southern European public administration with a Napoleonic administrative tradition, and its attempts to decentralize government are long-standing, which constitutes an increasingly decentralized and fragmented landscape for intergovernmental collaboration (Casula, 2020). As a latecomer, some of the NPM and e-government reforms were introduced through a top-down policy change which led to spill overs among local governments (Natalini & Stolfi, 2012; Orelli et al., 2016). Further, there is limited recent research on the other actors of collaborative governance and innovation (see Crivellari, 2019). There has been growing, yet limited evidence on the role of private enterprises in PSI (see Broccardo et al., 2019).

*Japan* is a developed and technologically advanced economy with an interventionist central government. However, the responsibilities of local governments have increased in the recent years and 70% of the government expenditure are being spent by local governments. This led to a blurring functions separation between government tiers. Central government is more active in planning and standard setting and local governments are responsible for the service delivery (Suzuki et al., 2021). Similarly, Japanese prefectures and municipalities adopted NPM reforms earlier and more successfully than the central government (Eshima et al., 2001; Ishihara, 2021). There has been limited research on governmental collaboration (e.g., Aoki, 2015), while other actors of the collaborative governance have historically played a significant role in public administration: Private corporations have been the driver of the Japanese developmental state (Freeman, 1995). Their influence was also uncovered in the e-government policy (Kudo, 2008). In contrast to Italy and Turkey, a number of studies have examined citizen co-creation (e.g., Dollery et al., 2019). A growth in co-production has been attributed to budgetary cuts within local government (Suzuki, 2017) and the central government's policy to promote co-production (Suzuki, 2020). However, our understanding on collaborative innovation in Japan is scarce with a limited number of studies evident (e.g., Niehaves, 2007).

*Turkey* has been a developing country and a European Union member candidate. The strong central government tradition continues as the EU guided attempts to achieve decentralization

TABLE 1 Information on Italy, Japan, and Turkey

	Italy	Japan	Turkey
Region	Southern Europe	Asia	Eurasia
GDP per capita in 2019	\$44,381	\$43,200	\$27,173
Population in 2019	59.7 million	126.7 million	80.3 million
OECD membership year	1962	1964	1961
Bureaucratic characteristics			
NPM reforms and change mechanisms	Top-down policy based reform from 1990s initiated by the central government	NPM reforms were adopted by governors and mayors from 1990s and diffused by administrative guidance by central government	Top-down policy based reform from 2000s initiated by the central government
Inter-governmental relations	Path-dependently centralistic. Fragmented administrative structure due to the recent administrative reforms	The boundaries between central and local governments are not clear due to complex tax and employment relationships	Strongly centralized
External environment characteristics			
The role of private sector in the delivery of public services	Competition after NPM reforms	Historical role of businesses in the developmental Japanese state	Competition after NPM reforms
The role of citizen participation in the delivery of public services	Important	Important	Limited
The role of universities in economy	Important	Very important	Important
International relations	Europeanization politics	Asian and Pacificist regional politics based on trade	EU membership process and regional historical interests in Balkans and Middle East

Source: OECD (2021a, 2021b) and Literature

(Ertugal, 2011) have failed. Similarly, inter-governmental collaboration has been weak in Turkey, this is steered by the central government (Hermansson, 2019). There is no empirical evidence on the effect of inter-agency collaboration on PSI. The top-down NPM agenda, combined with significant digital government reforms since the 2000s, have made businesses a crucial governance actor (Yildiz, 2004). However, neither citizen participation nor co-production have been a notable public management agenda (Sobaci, 2010).

In conclusion, there are notable differences in collaborative governance paradigms at different levels of government in the three countries for comparison. Significantly, this short review reveals that our understanding on collaborative PSI is scarce for all countries. To the best of our knowledge, there is not a single study on the role of universities on PSI within any of the countries addressed in our research. Hence there is a need to better understand the role of universities in the PSI process. Evidence from the countries under investigation within our article is also limited with regards to the role of international organizations. European Union funds can be utilized by Italian and Turkish PSOs. While, in the case of Japan collaborations with international PSOs could facilitate the diffusion of their innovations.

Following prior literature utilizing awards application forms (e.g., Borins, 1998, 2014; Chen et al., 2020; Demircioglu & Vivona, 2021b), we consider that these applications can serve a suitable proxy to explore PSI and have the potential to reflect the PSI activity in the selected countries.<sup>2</sup> The central-local government composition of submitted applications can also reflect the innovation activity in the public sector of each country considering the context discussion above. Japanese submitted applications were dominated by prefectures and municipalities (73%), which can reflect the early-adopter nature of local governments. This also serves as the most local level context of the three countries to explore citizen-oriented innovation propositions. While Italian applications showed a more balanced composition, the cases from central governments accounted for 56%. The local government applications from Italy were diverse from municipalities, regions and municipality unions. This can reflect the central government centered and top-down policy change oriented innovation activity that spilled over local governments (Natalini & Stolfi, 2012). Similarly, Turkish applications can represent the strong centralistic nature of public administration and administrative reforms where 77% of cases were from central PSOs.

### 3.2 | Coding procedure and analysis

We used content analysis, which has been adopted by prior studies within public policy literature (see Ban, 2015; Wright, 2014). In accordance with Weber (1990), the first phase of the content analysis was to understand the qualitative material. Subsequently, all applications from Turkey were coded by the leading author for pilot coding. Content analysis followed both deductive and inductive perspectives. The first codebook was produced considering the past literature. Simultaneously, the recurring patterns were evaluated in research team meetings and the code book was developed via the identification of additional categories. To ensure the reliability of the coding, six applications were randomly selected and coded independently by two co-authors. At the end, the calculated Holsti co-efficient for intercoder reliability was over 0.9, which is a commonly accepted measure (see Neuendorf, 2002, p. 149). Subsequently, the leading author coded the remainder of applications using qualitative data analysis software in six rounds.<sup>3</sup> The patterns and results were discussed further in joint meetings. The rich qualitative data formed the base of the coding throughout this process. We followed Borins' (2014)



approach and utilized quantitative percentages to report our findings, due to the large number (99) of the applications analyzed. However, this is different from reporting descriptive survey results and hosts an interpretative background as Krippendorff (2013, p. 22) noted: “Ultimately, all reading of texts is qualitative, even when certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers.” For the systematic interpretation of the text, the content analyst's *reflexive involvement* is crucial to consider context surrounding the text, previous literature, research questions, own experience and previously coded pieces of text (Krippendorff, 2013). In this regard, the coders considered the entire qualitative information on the adoption processes as well as the above literature on the collaborative governance studies in each context. For these reasons, a number of quotes are also displayed to each table (see Tables 3–5) to illustrate the qualitative characteristic of the material and to ensure a transparent coding.

### 3.3 | Limitations

While our research design possesses a number of benefits, we identify four main limitations worthy of note: First, it is crucial to recognize that our research is context dependent and our understanding is limited by the qualitative information provided by the applicants. Hence, we do not claim generalizability of the findings across other countries. Second, we have utilized the written application from UNPSA scheme as a best practice research design.<sup>4</sup> This was adopted by previous studies (e.g., Borins, 2014; Chen et al., 2020), and allows us to study three distinct countries where PSI research has been scarce. While we argue the studied cases can reflect the PSI activity in each country, there are also limitations of this design, which does not allow statistical tests requiring random sampling (Bornstein et al., 2013). Thus, descriptive quantitative statistics and qualitative analysis through content analysis was utilized. We should note that due to the potential selection bias there could be a different nature of collaboration if we would study unsuccessful cases. Fourth, comparative studies may suffer from “problem of equivalence” (Pollitt, 2011). Hence, there is the risk that some terms may not have equivalent meaning in different countries. However, all applications were submitted in grammatically correct written English. Despite these research limitations, the exploratory nature of this research provides a means to understand international features of collaborative PSI.

## 4 | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 | Actors of collaboration

Our analysis revealed evidence of collaboration in all cases. Table 2 shows that collaboration with other public sector organizations was the most common form (71%). This frequency is lower than the figures from the American Innovation Awards at 81% (Borins, 2014). However, it is higher than the results from the EU at 65% (European Commission, 2011), Brazilian awards at 66% (Farah & Spink, 2008) and also higher than all Scandinavian countries, which ranges between 12% and 63% (Bloch & Bugge, 2013). Citizens and their collective organizations formed the second most common collaborative actor, as NGO's frequently interacted with PSO's (57%). Third, in 55% of cases we identified collaboration with suppliers, which is higher than the result of 45% identified in the EU (European Commission, 2011). Fourthly, we have identified enterprises that act as citizens or NGOs to contribute without any profit motive. Further, our article

TABLE 2 Actors of collaboration

Collaboration actors	Italy (N = 34)	Japan (N = 26)	Turkey (N = 39)	Total (N = 99)
	Number of the cases	Number of the cases	Number of the cases	Number of the cases
Other PSOs	27 (79.4%)	15 (57.7%)	29 (74.4%)	71 (71.7%)
Citizens and NGOs	21 (61.8%)	17 (65.4%)	19 (48.7%)	57 (57.6%)
Enterprises as suppliers	17 (50.0%)	13 (50.0%)	24 (61.5%)	54 (54.5%)
Enterprises	12 (35.3%)	10 (38.5%)	13 (33.3%)	35 (35.4%)
Universities	8 (23.5%)	10 (38.5%)	12 (30.8%)	30 (30.3%)
International organizations	6 (17.6%)	2 (7.7%)	7 (17.9%)	15 (15.2%)

uniquely provides insights into university collaboration (30%), which has not been captured in prior studies within America or Brazil. Finally, international organizations collaborated in 13% of cases, which was also not reported in either the American or Brazilian studies, however this figure is lower than the 26% identified in the EU (European Commission, 2011).

Our comparison of cases based on their country of origin did not reveal substantial differences in the actors within the innovation process. Instead, it revealed small differences across the countries, the most notable of which are as follows.

Italian cases most frequently articulated inter-governmental collaboration. This is consistent with the fragmented administrative structure of central government, provinces and municipalities formed by longitudinal decentralization reforms (Oliveira & Breda-Vázquez, 2012), creating a need for such collaborations in order to innovate. Japanese semi-finalists narrated more collaboration with citizens and NGOs, as well as universities. Comparatively less occurred with other PSOs. These findings are in line with the local context of the PSI in Japan needing more local citizen engagement due to the austerity and central government facilitation (Suzuki, 2017). The Confucian community values have also the potential to explain this engagement, with historical examples of citizen co-creation evident in the literature (e.g., Benari, 1990; Suzuki et al., 2021). The relatively frequently observed role of universities reflects the historical Japanese industry-business-government based developmental model (Freeman, 1995). Finally, the high extent of intergovernmental collaboration in Turkish cases were between ministries to introduce large scale national innovations. Turkish cases also reported more collaboration with enterprises as suppliers and less citizen collaboration. This can be attributed to the NPM reforms Turkey has pursued since 2000s (Sezen, 2011), which necessitates the involvement of enterprises as suppliers and private sector values. On the other hand, our findings are in line with the limited participation of citizens and NGOs in policy processes in Turkey (Altan-Olcay & Icduygu, 2012).

## 4.2 | Collaboration across the innovation process

This section explores the extent to which collaboration activity differs across the stages of the innovation process. In doing so, we also aim to explore any further differences between

countries. We coded accordingly within the four stages to identify when the collaboration activity occurred. Overall, co-design was reported more frequently than co-implementation and co-diffusion, while co-initiation was not a common practice (see Table 3).

#### 4.2.1 | Co-initiation

The applications from all countries revealed that co-initiation occurred in only a few cases, with 16 reporting this activity. Most co-initiation activities were with other PSOs and universities. We identified evidence of citizens or NGOs' co-initiation in a total of only two cases, from Italy and Japan, while none occurred in the Turkish cases. This is significant as it confirms the findings of Voorberg et al. (2015) and Borins (2014), in different contexts, that governments begin to benefit from citizens' and NGOs' resources later within the PSI process.

#### 4.2.2 | Co-design

Our coding revealed that the co-design activity was the most common activity in all countries, while it showed divergence. In Italian and Japanese cases, citizens and NGOs were the frequently reported actor. In Turkish applications, enterprises as suppliers formed the main actor, as software developers or technical consultants, with collaboration based on competitive tenders. Close collaboration for co-design can be noticed from the articulated narratives. Interestingly, most of the Turkish applications specifically named the contractors, which is rare in contrast to other applications, showing a close collaboration.

#### 4.2.3 | Co-implementation

Within the co-implementation stage there was a high level of collaboration with other PSOs, alongside a decrease with citizens and enterprises as suppliers. However, the Japanese applications reported comparatively more citizen and NGO co-implementation. In line with the initial insights provided by Kudo (2015), Japanese local governments mobilized citizen resources for implementation rather than those of upper governments. Within Turkey, the resources of enterprises through tenders or voluntary contributions were still significant for co-implementing innovations.

#### 4.2.4 | Co-diffusion

Successful innovations often receive attention from PSOs, creating the additional potential for transfer and diffusion. In accordance with Borins (2014) we distinguish between domestic (32%) and international (20%) co-diffusion. These figures are significantly lower than HKS Awards in the United States, which by contrast identified transfer results of 54% and 58%. Hartley (2008) also found higher co-diffusion rates, with 66% of local governments attending events of the Beacon Scheme Award. The most distinguished difference in co-diffusion was in the Turkish cases, which contained the highest figure in international transfer. This was related to international aid activities to less-developed countries based on the historical interests in the ex-Ottoman geography.

TABLE 3 Collaboration across the innovation process

Collaboration stage	Number of the cases				Total (N = 99)	
	Italy (N = 34)	Japan (N = 26)	Turkey (N = 39)			
Any co-initiation with	5 (14.7%)	5 (19.2%)	6 (15.4)	16 (16.2%)		
Public sector organizations	4 (11.8%)	3 (11.5%)	5 (12.8%)	12 (12.1%)		<i>In order to solve the problems occurred due to cash payment of customs taxes, the Ministry of X and the Ministry of Y decided to develop a joint project. (TR14)</i>
Universities	0	1 (3.8%)	1 (2.6%)	2 (2%)		<i>Upon the proposal made by the X University in 2010, and upon the swift consent of X, to establish a partnered education channel that will broadcast the open-university courses, the process started out. (TR27)</i>
Citizens and NGOs	1 (2.9%)	1 (3.8%)	0	2 (2.0%)		<i>The requirement to directly face problems arising from the condition of disability has risen from who live in first person the disability discomforts, and perceived from who, as a psychologist, faces these problems for professional reasons (IT31)</i>
Any co-design with	30 (88.2%)	22 (84.6%)	33 (84.6%)	85 (85.9%)		
Enterprises as suppliers	12 (35.3%)	11 (42.3%)	23 (59.0%)	46 (48.9%)		<i>Incoming information is evaluated through the special software designed by Y and recorded to the data bank on servers. The soft tender of the project has been made and T has been designated as the contractor firm (TR25).</i>
Citizens and NGOs	18 (52.9%)	16 (61.5%)	9 (23.1%)	40 (42.6%)		<i>The X has been ... built around the co-design paradigm. In this sense, the role of civil society and the stakeholder engagement has been essential in all the phases of the project, both in the transparency and the anti-corruption fields.(IT17)</i>
Public sector organizations	17 (50.0%)	5 (19.2%)	16 (41.0%)	38 (40.4%)		<i>In coordination with X, the Y Agency develops the database used in the public vocabulary framework.(JP03).</i>
Universities	5 (14.7%)	6 (23.1%)	7 (17.9%)	18 (19.1%)		<i>This policy program was planned together by the division of X City and Faculty of Policy Management of Y University (JP20))</i>
Enterprises	6 (17.6%)	4 (15.4%)	4 (10.3%)	14 (14.9%)		<i>During the design, Association of Turkish X Agencies, Y Airlines and Z Airlines worked closely (TR05)</i>

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Collaboration stage	Number of the cases			
	Italy (N = 34)	Japan (N = 26)	Turkey (N = 39)	Total (N = 99)
Any co-implementation with	26 (76.5%)	19 (73.1%)	32 (82.1%)	77 (77.8%)
Public sector organizations	20 (58.8%)	8 (30.8%)	20 (51.3%)	48 (48.5%)
Citizens and NGOs	11 (32.4%)	11 (42.3%)	11 (28.2%)	33 (33.3%)
Enterprises as suppliers	7 (20.6%)	5 (19.2%)	13 (33.3%)	25 (25.3%)
Enterprises	8 (23.5%)	5 (19.2%)	11 (28.2%)	24 (24.2%)
Universities	5 (14.7%)	5 (19.2%)	8 (20.5%)	18 (18.2%)
International organizations	3 (8.8%)	2 (7.7%)	5 (12.8%)	10 (10.1%)
Any co-diffusion with	17 (50.0%)	11 (42.3%)	19 (48.7%)	47 (47.5%)
Domestic PSOs	12 (35.3%)	9 (34.6%)	11 (28.2%)	32 (32.3%)
International organizations	7 (20.6%)	3 (11.5%)	10 (25.6%)	20 (20.2%)

...the X Prefectural Government called for the cooperation of the municipalities (cities and towns) (JP15) Collaboration with the Police department was established in order to protect children from the risk of being pushed into crime.(TR12)

...with the commitment of neighborhood associations and residents to helping bring up local children (JP09) with active participation of various private sector organizations, NGOs, academics and public administrations.(TR38)

“X Vehicle Tracking and Fleet Management Systems” and “Y Communication Services Inc.” have been operating as implementation partners. (TR06)

...economic associations (Industry, Craftsmen and Traders) are strongly and effectively involved in such a process.(IT29)

the initiative involved the following organizations: University of Y (IT02) The technical support was given from Professor X, Y University and Professor Z T University (JP20)

...through a partnership with the USA Y and Y of North America Foundation. (IT03)

Cooperation was established with the World Food Program (WFP) in the Food Card application (TR01)

awareness of the X program grew after it was certified by the national government as an after-school model program in 2007 (JP09) Additionally, codes were given to; Ministry of X, Ministry of Y, Undersecretary of Z with protocols as free for charge (TR33)

“...there have been cooperation activities so as to transfer some components of the UYAP to some countries such as Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, UAE, Jordan, Oman, Ghana, Syria(TR37)”

### 4.3 | Aspects of collaboration influencing positive outcomes

The UNPSAS survey asked the applicants about the “lessons learned” across the innovation process. Milton (2010, p. 15) described lessons learned as “an experience or outcome of a particular course of action – either positive or negative – that is important enough to be communicated to one’s peers”. Due to the nature of awards application, innovators reported a wide variety of factors related to their success for this question. In 66 of the cases, collaboration was reported as having contributed to success. Subsequently, we coded a total of 91 observations related to the constructs of the collaboration.

Our preliminary findings uncovered three concurring themes that explained how different aspects of collaboration were important to success (see Table 4). The most frequently construct reported by applicants is a mutual understanding and shared goals to maintain effective relations. Second, problem-solving through collective creativity and learning. Applicants articulated that the gathering diverse opinions, harvesting creative ideas, understanding real needs first-hand, defining the right problem, mutual learning, and receiving feedback to improve the innovation concept. Third, collaboration gave the necessary capacity through integrated resources when innovators needed additional technical, financial and intangible resources to operationalize the innovative solution.

Considering the potential generative tensions and trade-offs of the different aspects of collaboration, it seems a resourceful environment through resource integration was a crucial aspect of successful collaboration. Similarly, the diversity and inclusion of collaboration could increase the capacity for creative problem solving via diverse opinions, feedback, and learning. However, critically we identified that to benefit from each of these, the applicants reported their perception and experience of the need to establish and maintain mutual understanding and shared goals across the process. This formed the most important aspect of successful collaboration.

### 4.4 | The governance of collaboration: Top-down or bottom-up

Table 5 presents the results of the coding for each type of the governance of collaboration. We have identified four arrangements. The most common arrangement was governance by a lead organization, as the owner of the innovation project. The dominant prevalence of a lead organization governing collaboration in cases from Italy and Turkey (both over 70%) is consistent with the historically path-dependent centralized administrative structure within each country. While Turkish PSOs maintain this central position-based status quo (Tan, 2020), change efforts in Italy seemingly have not eliminated the influential effects of centralized administrative structure (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Second, shared participant governance was observed in 23 cases. Most of these arrangements were accomplished through committees, councils and working groups. This was most frequent in Japanese applications, where citizen participation culture is most prominent. However, it is still the second most common arrangement in Japanese cases and as Tsukamoto (2013, p. 292) noted “local government always retains the upper hand.”

Third, our coding identified five cases where the major collaboration between two parties was governed through dyadic relationships and other minor collaborations were formed around this. Fourth, in a limited number of cases a network organization established for the purpose of a specific collaboration governed the network. Finally, while Torfing (2016) proposed the concept of self-governed collaboration, we did not find this arrangement in any of the cases.

TABLE 4 How collaboration can contribute to the success

Aspects of collaboration	Number of the cases			
	IT (N = 34)	JP (N = 26)	TR (N = 39)	Total (N = 99)
Mutual understanding and shared goals	15 (44.1%)	14 (53.8%)	11 (28.2%)	40 (40.4%)
	<i>...a deepened mutual understanding between the government administration, citizens and the private sector...(JP23) ...the importance of mutual cooperation and integration in producing projects have been observed once again... (TR14)</i>			
Problem-solving through collective creativity	8 (23.5%)	13 (50.0%)	11 (28.2%)	32 (32.3%)
	<i>...to know problems and the real needs of young citizens IT32) ... the difference of opinions means there are a lot of methods to improve the project(JP22) citizens contribute their ideas to help improve the quality and expand the scope(TR34)</i>			
Resource integration	8 (23.5%)	7 (26.9%)	4 (10.3%)	19 (19.2%)
	<i>...share resources in order to save money (IT04) By establishing a resourceful support environment, X aims to attract more participants and help them break their chains of poverty(JP07). The capacity of the public sector to undertake this massive task is limited. Private sector in Turkey is ... capable of providing the services. (TR22)</i>			

TABLE 5 The governance of collaboration

Governance type	Number of the cases				Total (N = 99)	
	IT (N = 34)	JPN (N = 26)	TR (N = 39)	Total (N = 99)		
Governance by the leading public organization	24 (70.6%)	13 (50.0%)	31 (79.5%)	68 (68.7%)		<i>The municipality has established the "Development and Opportunities Department" ... having a role of "Advisor" as concerning the processes of exchange of knowledge and information between stakeholders (IT13)</i>
Shared governance with other organizations	7 (20.6%)	10 (38.5%)	6 (15.4%)	23 (23.2%)		<i>...under the coordination of steering committee, these activities have been carried out (IT14) an industry-academic-government project team was established with the participation of organizations which support these activities.(JP12)</i>
Dyadic relationship	2 (5.9%)	1 (3.8%)	2 (5.1%)	5 (5.1%)		<i>the Agreement between the President of the X Region and the Regional Director of Y for the implementation of the Special Plan for the recipients of income support was signed.(IT08)</i>
Governance by a network organization	1 (2.9%)	2 (7.7%)	0	3 (3.0%)		<i>12 CSOs that were very active in the X formed the "Association for X" and signed an agreement with the Government for monitoring and improving the Testing. In 2009, the Association became a window of receiving the proposals...(JP23)</i>



## 5 | CONCLUSIONS

This research sought to shed light on the nature of collaborative PSI by exploring four crucial dimensions of collaboration: (i) collaborative actors, (ii) their variation across the innovation process, (iii) constructs of collaboration that contribute to PSI success, and (iv) the governance of collaboration. For this purpose, we studied 99 UNPSA semi-finalist applicants from Italy, Japan and Turkey between the years of 2009 and 2015.

Our findings provide two principal contributions to the collaborative PSI literature. First, we build upon the findings of the extant literature on collaboration actors and process dynamics. In the unique contexts in which our analysis was conducted, the most common actors of collaboration were other PSOs. In contrast to recent collaborative PSI literature (e.g., Sørensen & Torfing, 2017), which places an emphasis on citizens and NGOs, within our findings collaboration still primarily occurred within the bureaucracy. Citizens and NGO's were reported more frequently as collaborators in Japanese cases, which can be attributed to local context, where local governments were suffering from austerity, and attempted to utilize civil society resources (Suzuki, 2017). This finding is consistent with the empirical collaborative PSI literature, which previously only studied local governments (e.g., Sørensen & Torfing, 2018). However, the notably higher frequency of collaboration within bureaucracy, evident in Italy and Turkey, indicates that collaboration with other PSOs is crucial for central governments initiating innovations with a broader national scope. In addition, the identification of limited involvement of universities as collaboration actors in all three countries is a key finding contributing to Demircioglu and Audretsch (2019).

Second, we provide empirical evidence on the dimensions of collaboration. We have uncovered the diverse nature of collaboration across the stages of the innovation process. Co-initiation was scarce in all three countries, which supports the findings of Sørensen and Torfing (2018). Even within the Japanese cases, where higher levels of citizen collaboration were evident, very low co-initiation figures were reported. Our findings suggest that co-diffusion, the secret weapon of public sector (Hartley, 2016), was not highly exploited across the three countries. The frequency of co-diffusion was comparatively lower than that reported by either Borins (2014) in the United States or Hartley (2008) in the United Kingdom. Our article also uncovered which constructs of collaboration are perceived as critical for positive innovation outcomes. This finding builds upon the recent empirical survey-based literature (Clausen et al., 2020; Torugsa & Arundel, 2017) and contributes to the fragmented collaboration literature in public administration (e.g., Bernier et al., 2015; Lindsay et al., 2018; Windrum, 2014): Shared resources and collective creativity through diversity were both perceived as success factors by the applicants. However, a mutual understanding and shared goals was the most frequently reported aspect of collaboration for fruitful outcomes. This led to the exploration of how innovators can govern the collaboration to ensure mutual understanding and shared goals. We identified a *top-down governance approach* (Vento, 2020) where the collaboration was governed by a leading public organization. This contrasts with Sørensen and Torfing's (2011, 2017) proposal that collaboration is managed by self-governed networks, through *bottom-up* governance, which was not reported in any cases.

The article open several new avenues for research. First, the contextualities of collaborative PSI should to be studied further in central or federal PSOs as we uncovered that the nature of collaboration in central PSOs from Turkey is different from Japanese local cases, and differs from previous literature studying local government dominant contexts. Second, how to involve collaborators to initiate the innovation process needs further examination. Successful cases of

co-initiation should be studied in detail. Similarly, the dynamics of co-transfer require further examination to uncover the motivation of innovators to disseminate their innovation. Finally, the collaborative PSI literature should seek to develop comprehensive governance arrangements for collaboration to integrate top-down and bottom-up governance approaches.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this article are available in Knowledge Base of UN Public Service Awards Initiatives at <https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Research/Case-Studies/unpsacases>. These data were derived from the following resources available in the public domain: Knowledge Base of UN Public Service Awards Initiatives, <https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Research/Case-Studies/unpsacases>

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### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Please see Supporting Information Appendix 1-2 for detailed information on United Nation Public Service Awards.
- <sup>2</sup> Please see Supporting Information Appendix 3 for a discussion on the use of innovation awards application forms.
- <sup>3</sup> Please see Supporting Information Appendix 4 for the data coding procedure.
- <sup>4</sup> Please see Supporting Information Appendix 3 for a discussion on the use of innovation awards application forms.

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**SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of the article at the publisher's website.

**How to cite this article:** Cinar, E., Simms, C., & Trott, P. (2022). Collaborative public sector innovation: An analysis of Italy, Japan, and Turkey. *Governance*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12673>