

PUBLIC SERVICE MANAGEMENT AND DIGITALISATION

Florența-Diana Tănase *

Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences
1-4, Traian Vuia Square, Reșița, Romania

*Corresponding author: E-mail: diana.tanase@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract: This paper presents aspects regarding the role of authorities in implementing digitalisation in public services. The first part highlights the concepts of public services and digitalisation, and attempts at determining the relationship between the development of a society and digitalisation, discussing the administration role in implementing the digitalisation of public institutions.

Keywords: administration, public services, digitalisation, economic development, competitive advantage.

1. Introduction

Society has evolved and, therefore, we must keep up with it. Needs are correlated with society's dynamics and depend on a series of factors that influence our professional activity and life, as a whole. Needs determine the existence of various products, services, whether public or private. Therefore, progress has also conditioned the modelling of public services, which are essential for society. They are present in any state, regardless of its form of organization. Public services represent the link between citizen and administration, and their role is to provide individuals with what is necessary for the smooth running of life. Whether we are talking about the registration of persons, the issuance of passports, the payment of taxes, the issue of certificates necessary in various situations in which the individual relates to a given situation and needs supporting documents for various situations of daily or professional life, the state is obliged to provide services to its citizens.

The concept of public service emerged relatively recently, at the beginning of the 20th century, as a result of public law crystallization [1].

According to Teodorescu, "the public service is the service established and organized by the state or its administrative subdivisions to fulfil their executive duties" [2].

The administrative code is the document that indicates the institutions responsible for the provision/rendering of public services: the APC authorities (through normative acts), for public services of national interest, and the LPA authorities (through administrative acts), for public services specific to the local community [3].

Like private services, public services have the same characteristics: intangibility, non-storability, simultaneity of production and consumption, non-durability, inseparability of the provider from the user, heterogeneity [4]. However, unlike private services that aim to obtain profit, in the case of public services, the goal is the citizen's well-being, profit being secondary, the aim

being to control costs or reduce them, as the case may be, without compromising quality.

Therefore, after ensuring the existence of public services necessary for the optimal performance of the activities of citizens or other economic agents, the level of service provision quality is brought to light.

Service quality is essential for any developed society. In order to implement it, it is imperative to observe the essential aspects of quality management, in particular the application and observance of the stages of Deming's circle (fig.1):

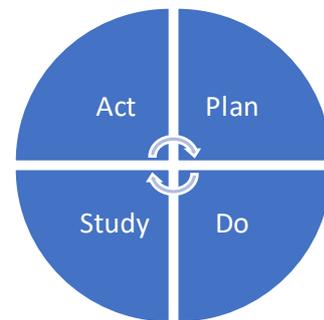


Fig. 1. Deming's circle [5].

It is obvious that a quality public service involves not only respecting the aforementioned stages of the cycle, but also correlating it with other specific quality management tools. At the same time, the existence of a trained workforce is a sine qua non condition in organizations. Its flexibility, the ability to adapt quickly to a new challenge [6] are other aspects that must be taken into account in order to keep up with the increased dynamism of society. Mincă also emphasizes that it is vital that the workforce is properly prepared and motivated to lead to the achievement of the organization's objectives [7]. Martin and Demyen reinforce the idea that education and training have a positive induced effect on local development, because human resources are one of the most important resources in the two sectors, public and private. [8]. To these conditions is added the central position of management accounting in public services, as

it facilitates and gives impetus to organizational transformation, significantly contributing to increasing accountability and strengthening decision-making processes [9]. Furthermore, in order to boost the economic and social performance of public organizations, a very important condition is the modernization of management [10]. If the above aspects are complemented by creativity, the organization will reach a higher level of performance [11]. In support of the same idea, other authors recommend the application of participative management [12] because, in this case, the expertise of the manager in office will be supplemented by the expertise of those who are directly involved in the various processes of the organization, an aspect leading to increased efficiency and effectiveness.

2. Digitalisation of Public Services in Romania

Today's society, based on technology, on the actual, visible and induced interconnection of various economic phenomena and processes, imposes new standards in organizations. Whether they are private or public, the incidence of technology is inevitable. If in the case of private entities the invisible hand of the market and the ratio between supply and demand regulate the economic mechanism, things are different in the case of public services. It is undeniable that, in most of them, the non-existent competition leads to a relaxation of management, which is reflected in the low quality of these public services, which generates dissatisfaction of citizens, and therefore a decrease in trust in State's institutions.

The management of public services becomes the responsibility of the providing institutions, either at the central or at the local level.

Public services must be of good quality because this increase citizens' trust in state institutions as the former will correlate the quality of these services with the importance that the State grants each individual. At the same time, they must be characterized, among other things, by transparency and accessibility.

The technologies used on a large scale, the time pressure correlated with profit maximization (in the case of private entities), the emphasis placed on the client and/or citizen, have led to the imperative need to create the possibility for them to access various information remotely. At the same time, the policies of the European Union come to reinforce this imperative, as convenience in acquisition is desired, considering the mobility of both companies and of human capital.

The European Union, by 2030, aims to ensure that businesses and citizens are prepared for a sustainable and more prosperous digital future, with the human factor as the reference element.

Thus, the EU is considering four main directions [13]:

skills, digital transformation of enterprises, secure and sustainable digital infrastructure, digitalisation of public services.

In order to reach these objectives, digitalisation must be one of the goals of the administration, irrespective of the level at which it operates.

The process of digitizing public services plays an essential role in the development of a region or country. Many services become more accessible faster, making citizens' lives easier (by eliminating the need to go to institutions) and streamlining the work of institutions, which not only save paper, but also manage flows better, avoiding crowding at counters and the pressure it brings.

"Digitalisation is equivalent to the integration of digital technologies into everyday life, which implies a profound change in the activity carrying out manner" [14].

The digitalisation of public services increases the transparency of public sector activity, and citizens' trust in state institutions increases.

Among other things, digitalisation means reducing the number of interactions with officials from various public institutions, along with optimizing citizen interaction with their representatives [15].

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated that institutions can adapt to extreme situations, some more slowly, others more quickly, depending on the openness of management, but also on the available funds and existing human capital.

The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) assesses the digital performance of European Union countries by reporting on four key components: connectivity, human capital, digital technology, integration and digital public services [16].

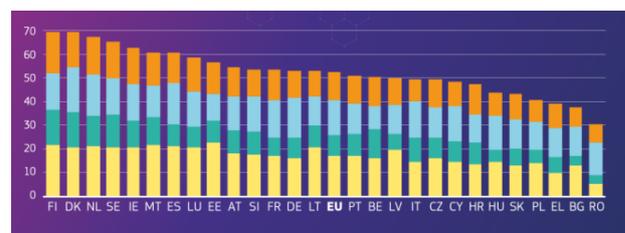


Fig. 2. Digital Society Index [16].

Romania has made significant progress in terms of digitalisation, overall, however, it can be seen that we are still at the bottom of the EU ranking when discussing the four indicators, far from Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands, the leaders in this regard.

The indicators analysed when it comes to public services are: e-Government users, pre-filled forms, digital public services for citizens, digital public services for business, open data (table 1).

Table 1: Digital public services indicators in DESI

	EU	
	DESI 2020	DESI 2022
4a1 e-Government users	61%	65%
% internet users	2019	2021
4a2 Pre-filled forms	NA	64
Score (0 to 100)		2021
4a3 Digital public services for citizens	NA	75
Score (0 to 100)		2021
4a4 Digital public services for businesses	NA	82
Score (0 to 100)		2021
4a5 Open data	NA	81%
% maximum score		2021

Source: DESI 2022, European Commission

We can remark the upward trend in the first of the indicators, against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has accelerated things in this regard.

It must be emphasized that national policies, central and local administration authorities are directly responsible for increasing the degree of digitalisation of the institution they lead.

Tab. 2. Digitalisation of public services, Romania

	Romania			EU	EU
	DESI 2021	DESI 2022	DESI 2023	DESI 2023	2030 target
4a1 e-Government users	NA	NA	24%	74%	
% internet users			2022	2022	
4a2 Digital public services for citizens	NA	44	48	77	100
Score (0 to 100)		2021	2022	2022	
4a3 Digital public services for businesses	NA	42	45	84	100
Score (0 to 100)		2021	2022	2022	
4a4 Pre-filled forms	NA	19	41	68	
Score (0 to 100)		2021	2022	2022	
4a5 Transparency of service delivery, design and personal data	NA	41	44	65	
Score (0 to 100)		2021	2022	2022	
4a6 User support	NA	72	68	84	
Score (0 to 100)		2021	2022	2022	
4a7 Mobile friendliness	NA	75	77	93	
Score (0 to 100)		2021	2022	2022	
4b1 Access to e-health records	NA	NA	57	72	100
Score (0 to 100)			2022	2022	

Source: Digital Decade Country Report 2023

Romania shows a significant gap compared to the EU values, 24% and 74% respectively (table 2). The discrepancy is evident, in particular, in terms of the digitalisation of public services for citizens (48%), but also for businesses (45%).

Analysing the situation of EU member states regarding e-Government (fig.3), the top is led by Estonia, Finland and Malta, and at the opposite pole we find Romania, Greece and Bulgaria.

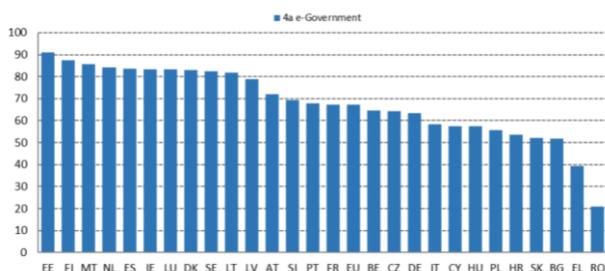


Fig. 3. Digital public services [16].

It is also worth noting the difference between Greece and our country, which is significant, unfortunately.

To reduce the gap, administrations will need to include the following aspects on their daily agenda:

- Acquisition of technologies necessary for optimizing processes and services provided;
- Preparing human resources for the use of technologies;
- Informing citizens about accessing various public services via the internet;
- Training individuals on how to use the platforms;
- Increasing the degree of trust of individuals in accessing various services online.

Managing the aforementioned aspects, supported by the examples given by the authorities in the use of digitalisation, leads to increased citizen trust in state institutions, because they will feel valued. Thus, the premises of economic development are outlined, by changing mentalities regarding the administration-citizen binomial.

The existence of digitalized services is correlated with the creation of the premises of competitive advantage, and therefore with economic development. This concept, involving a qualitative as well as a quantitative component, is closely linked to macroeconomic stability, one of the pillars of competitiveness. If State institutions are strong and will provide quality services and implement public policies beneficial to individuals, the effect will be to increase citizen confidence in the administrative system, which will also be reflected in the increased confidence of investors, who will inject money into the economy that are reflected in the creation of infrastructure and jobs in various communities.

3. Conclusions

It is well known that citizens' well-being should be the primary objective of any State, therefore, of both central and local administration.

The well-being of the citizen depends on the set of policies implemented in the respective state, whether we are discussing at the macro, meso, or microeconomic level.

Public services are essential for the proper functioning of a State entity, and state institutions have the role of managing their provision as best as possible.

The heightened dynamism of present times, the technology and the desire to perform tasks as quickly as possible, with high accuracy, lead to the need to adapt various categories of services to the needs of the citizen, the central element of the EU's digitalisation policy, a policy that is intended to be implemented by 2030 in the member states.

Therefore, public services depend on a series of factors to optimally achieve their main objective (citizen satisfaction):

- The existence of an infrastructure allowing the provision of the service;
- Trained and dedicated workforce;

- Suitable working conditions for carrying out various activities;
- Creativity;
- Efficient management accounting;
- Involved and participative management;
- Transparency;
- Accessibility.

Investments in education, infrastructure, and support for the adoption of technology, especially in rural areas and by older citizens [17], are essential for our country to implement digitalisation policies.

Romania has made important steps towards digitizing public services, despite the fact that we are ranked last in the top analysing this aspect in 2022 (fig. 3).

The aspect of regional disparities should not be overlooked, as not all administrative or historical regions have the same degree of digitalisation. It is obvious that cities that have a SMARTCITY strategy will have more significant funds available and will boost digitalisation. Capitals, pole cities, county seats have the advantage of having a larger administration, which leads to a faster adoption of digitalisation. At the same time, large cities are more open to digitalisation because the level of education of the population is higher, and higher incomes allow the acquisition of various technologies. Added to this is the economic and social dynamism of the community to which they belong.

The digitalisation of public administration is a sine qua non condition for the economic and social development of the entire society, as well as for the adjustment to international norms.

Digitalised public administration and e-Government strengthens the ethical component through the correct use of various tools and the implementation of policies in force, both in the spirit and in the letter of the law, thus reducing corruption in the various systems. Therefore, citizens will have at their disposal various transparent public services that will facilitate their professional activity or activities specific to daily life, and the digital transition, targeted by the EU, will thus be achieved.

4. References

- [1] Dincă D.V.: "Public services" (in original in Romanian), Economic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2018.
- [2] Teodorescu A.: "Administrative law treaty" (in original in Romanian), vol. I, pag. 256, Institute of Graphic Arts "Eminescu" S.A., Bucharest, 1929.
- [3]. POCA: "Quality and performance of public services, Course of lecture", 2022 (in original in Romanian), [Online], chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://in.a.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/M2_Calitate-si-performanta_Suport-curs.pdf, accessed on April 25, 2025.
- [4] Ionciă M.: "Service economics. Theoretical approaches and practical implications" (in original in Romanian), Uranus Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006.
- [5] The Deming Institute: "Deming Circle", [Online], <https://deming.org/explore/pdsa/>, accessed at April 2nd 2025.
- [6] Bretcu A., Demyen S.: "Total Quality Management and the Collaborative Adhocracy", Annals of the University of Oradea, Economic Science Series, Vol. 27, nr.1., 2018.
- [7] Minică M.: "Theories Regarding the Human Capital", Annals of Eftimie Murgu University Resita, Fascicle II, Economic Studies, 2011.
- [8] Martin M., Demyen S.: "The role of education and professional training in local development. Historical lessons and contemporary evidence", In C., Hintea, B., Radu & R., Suci (Eds.). Collaborative Governance, trust building and community development. Conference proceedings (pp. 220-235), 2019.
- [9] Frumușanu N-M., Martin M.: "Managerial Accounting and its Role in Determining the Efficiency of Public Services", Robotica & Management, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp.60-64, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.24193/rm.2024.1.10>
- [10] Pau C., Ciurea J.: "Participatory Management and Good Governance", Robotica & Management, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp.42-46, 2020.
- [11] Demyen S., Ciurea J.: "The Role of Creativity for Achieving Performance in Management", Annals of Faculty of Economics, University of Oradea, Faculty of Economics, vol. 1(1), pp 906-913, July, 2016.
- [12] Andreș S.: "Managementul participativ - cale de creștere a eficacității managerilor și a eficienței organizației" (Participative management—increase managers' and the organisation efficiency)", Mirton Publishing House, Timișoara, 2006.
- [13] European Commission: "Europe's Digital Decade: digital goals for 2030", [Online], https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_ro, accessed on April 13, 2025.
- [14] Manda C.C.: "Digitalisation of public administration in Romania – between the needs and aspirations of a modern society of the 21st century" (in original in Romanian). Smart Cities International Conference (SCIC) Proceedings. 9, pp. 41–61., Apr., 2023.
- [15] SmartCity Magazine: "Digitalisation of public institutions – a look at Romania" (in original in Romanian), [Online], <https://smartcitymagazine.ro/digitalizarea-institutiilor-publice-o-privire-spre-romania/>, accessed on April 11, 2025.
- [16] European Commission: "Digital Economy and Society Index", 2024, [Online], <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/ro/policies/desi>, accessed on April, 15, 2025.
- [17] Business Magazin, "Digital Romania: between potential and challenges (in original in Romanian)", [Online], <https://www.businessmagazin.ro/business-tech/romania-digitala-intre-potential-si-provocari-22758191>, accessed on April 27, 2025.