

Digitalization of Public Administration in Romania

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Abstract

Digitalization of public administration provides both employees and citizens with a multitude of advantages. Thus, at the level of public institutions, digitalization determines efficient management of resources and it generates opportunities of developing innovative public services.

The process of digitalization should give significant attention to citizens’ needs and clearly define these ones. Reality shows that lately clients have become very demanding in terms of public administration and require simple, fast and transparent services. Efficient digitalization must be an integrated process which creates a context favorable to the reviewing of administrative procedures and to making them simpler.

Key words: pandemic COVID 19, Public Administration, digitalization, global network, change
J.E.L. classification: H0, O3

1. Introduction

In the new world context, generated by the COVID 19 pandemic, the world is changing continuously, and Romania cannot make exception from this process. The future is already being built up now due to the imperceptible changes (psycho-social, economic, geopolitical ones) brought about by COVID 19.

The pandemic crisis has forced most employees to work in a virtual/digital environment. The fast computerization of activities (educational, economic) was followed by an unprecedented increase in cybernetics attacks, fact which intensifies the feeling of anxiety and insecurity. Practically, this pandemic will accelerate the technological evolutions that will be stimulated by tele-work and steadily rising need of digitalization and computerization in the IT field and probably will lead to new scientific discoveries and innovations. (Todorean, O, et.al, 2020, p.25).

In public administration, digitalization brings about a multitude of advantages that should be approached by strategic institutions and should be promoted by their managers. Therefore, digitalization can improve significantly institutional activity leading to efficient use of resources, costs and to technological and socio-economic progress of the institution in question. Also, digitalization can create new opportunities of making public services more accessible and directed to citizens (Roja, A, et.al, 2021, p.52)

Basically, any type of interaction with public administration may influence the citizens’ perception on the quality of public management, trust, competence, honesty and predictability of public institutions. But, the trust in institutions can be determined by their confidence and reputation and less by the direct interaction with the citizen (Moller, 2020), p.20

Digitalization has a decisive impact on the employees of public institutions as well as on citizens by making activities more efficient on the whole, by providing citizens with prompt answers.

2. Theoretical background

In the new global context, driven by the pandemic crisis, digitalization has an important role to play. The new restrictive measures, the isolation of individuals, have determined the employees of companies around the world to move their activity to the virtual environment. The process of digitalization involves rethinking of the way in which the public administration in our country must

be organized and be transparent in the relationship with its citizens in order to adopt practices that should comply with the socio-economic requirements in continuous change.

The literature addressed in this paper analyzes the importance of digitalization from the new perspective, generated by COVID 19 and captures the role of digital technologies and solutions in the global evolution of society. In this sense, the paper is based on the opinions of researchers on the impact of the virus on the world as a whole, but also a series of analyzes on how employees can manage their work in compliance with the required conditions. According to the studies in force, outlined by the specialized literature considered, in this paper, our country ranks last in terms of digitalization of public services. In this sense, it is necessary to pay special attention to the development of a flexible digitization model and adapted to the changes in the Romanian public administration, generated by the pandemic virus.

3. Research methodology

The strategic objective of digitalization of public administration is to transform the relationship between public administration and society so that citizens perceive the administrative act as accessible, transparent, responsible and adapted to the digital paradigm in which we find ourselves.

The research method is based on the evaluation of some characteristics regarding the evolution of a public administration under the impact of COVID 19. In this sense, it describes the role and importance of digitalization in public administration in our country in the current period. The role of the digitization process is to revitalize trust in the administrative process through transparency, accountability and closeness to citizens, while ensuring an efficient process of modernization of public institutions.

4. Findings

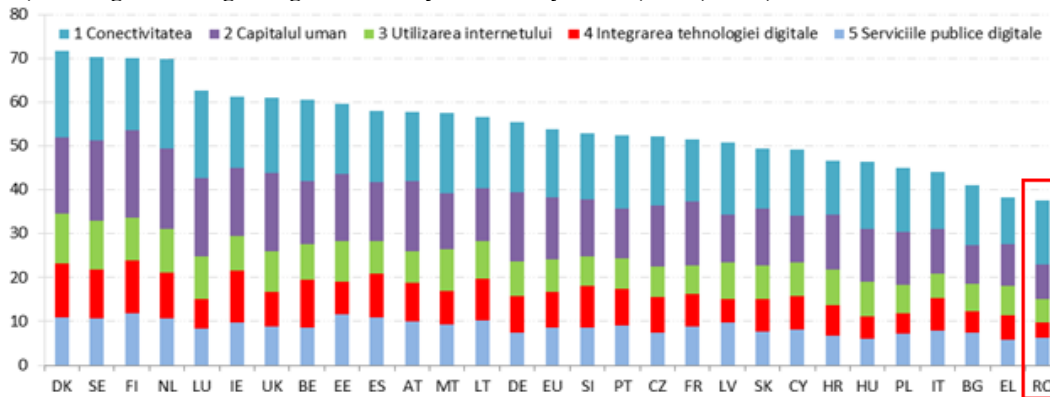
The tendencies of transforming and developing the public administration in our country have already begun since the period previous to the EU integration when major changes of the administrative system were made so that new administrative methods, concepts and processes occurred, when new institutions were set up to bring up to date the quality of public services and to prepare the administrative system to get Romania adapted to future legislation and requirements.

In view of a successful bringing-up-to date of the public administration in Romania it is necessary firstly to have a perspective on the problems hindering the development of administration and secondly to find some modern combating strategies of these ones by different techniques. The need for administrative reforms in Romania is important from the point of view of our country's image and credibility in its relations with European institutions, foreign traders and its partners in all the fields of activity. These are directly interested in the quality, efficiency and credibility of public administration. (Mureşan, 2012, p.27)

The process of digitalization is one of the main directions that public administration should be focused on, by providing public institutions with a high transparency and credibility level, as well as by providing citizens with a high degree of life quality. Digitalization is the promoter of an efficient activity within public institutions in Romania. For the European Commission, the adopting of the new strategy of digitalization has become a priority for the period post 2020 which actually will define the future of Europe. In this sense, to devise, to develop and to implement future technologies of digital solutions and to bring the existing systems up to date are the most important pursuits.

From the analysis of a report made by the European Commission in the year 2018, the DESI report (Digital Economy and Society Index) respectively, Romania holds a shameful last position in the ranking formed by the 28 member states of the European Union having a score of 33.21 as against the European average whose value is of 52.25 (Fig.no.1). This report shows the fact that in 2018 in Romania only 6% of the internet users accessed the digital public services of e-government, many of them, more precisely 55% of cases, did not solve their problems and did not satisfy their needs, but the information and application loading on sites done by the governmental authorities covered a percentage of almost 65%.

Figure no. 1. Digital economy and society index (DESI), year 2018
(Ranking according to digital economy and society index (DESI) 2018)

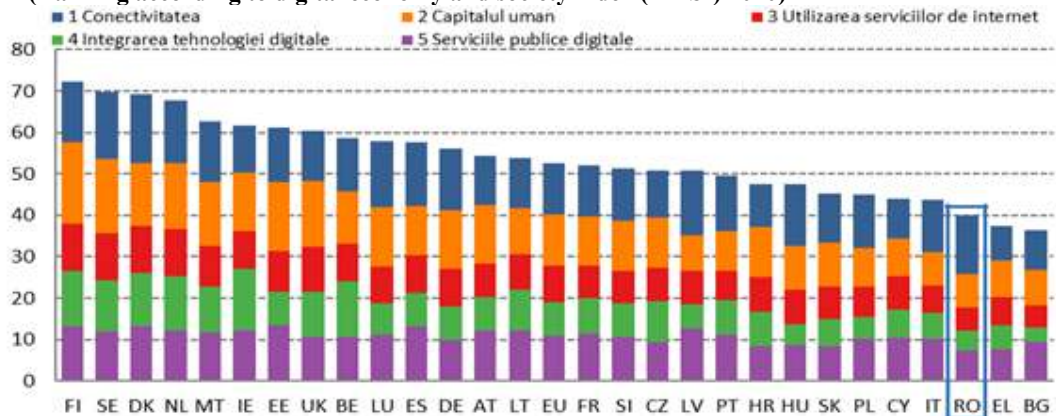


Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi>

The DESI study aims on the whole at five aspects of digitalization within the European Union: connectivity, human capital, utilization of Internet services, digital services and the integration degree of these ones. These five aspects specific to the DESI study have a major impact in the process of digitalization and they are convergent as regards the increase in the digitalization capacity. (Roja, A, et. al. 2021, p.52)

In the year 2020, a new DESI report was made and its results showed that Romania held the 26th position after a two-year period of the 28 EU member states, within the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI). As can be seen, Romania is at the ranking queue as regards the digitalization of public services.

Figure no. 2. Digital economy and society index (DESI), year 2020
(Ranking according to digital economy and society index (DESI) 2020)



Source: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/digital-economy-and-society-index-desi>

A distinctive aspect resulting from the DESI study is the fact that Romania has an ultrafast network of communications comparable to that of other EU countries. Also, mobile communications and their availability provide the citizens with access to digital public services irrespective of location, increasing the possibility of accessing them by means of mobile devices. (Roja, A; Boc, M, 2021)

The global Internet network has become the environment which intermediates the digital interaction between citizens and public administration. The network usage degree, the level of online activities and that of transactions are important factors for public administration in terms of the digitalization of services for citizens. (Roja, A, et.al. 2021, p.45)

Again the European Commission report since 2020 shows that before the Covid-19 pandemic broke-out, Romania registered a similar success in four out of the five DESI aspects taken into consideration. This fact is mainly determined by its slow evolutions, but also by its political changes because four governments have been changed in Romania over the last three years, thus leading to a profound political instability. The best position held by our country is the aspect of Connectivity, due to the fact that considerably wide ranges of very high speed and ample availability of very high capacity fixed networks, especially in urban areas, holding in this respect the fifth position.

However, under these conditions, economy has not made significant progress in terms of digitalization, having in view the fact that almost a fifth of Romanians have never used the Internet and less than a third have at least elementary digital competences.

As regards the Romanians' skills in the technological field, Romania holds the fifth position, by 5.6% of all graduates (EU average: 3.6%); but Romania has got the weakest performance of all EU countries when it comes to digital public services and Internet services.

The principle of good administration is seen as a compound of a good governing, a desideratum aimed at by every state, including international stake-holder, at world level.

Starting from the theoretical fundamentals of good administration which should also monitor, besides other issues, this field of digitalization, it is obvious that more seriousness should be given to it in order to support citizens, to respect their rights, to get them involved in the decision-making process in terms of public policies, with the intention of providing them with better governing. (Marinică, C., E., 2020, p.30)

Being aware of the fact that governments are in charge of providing citizens with good governing, it is considered that digitalization of public administration plays an important role and it is necessary for citizens to identify the best practices, instruments, technologies, services etc, but also governments should provide their citizens with efficiency and transparency.

The present day situation proves more and more the advantages of technological progress and of its use, as well as the opportunities brought about by digital public services for both citizens and employees within public institutions.

The state's development directions should foresee primarily this extremely important aspect. Although until the pandemic broke-out, the digitalization of public services in Romania was just an issue to be included in the governing programs, once the emergency situation was established, the digital services proved to be very useful and this practice was maintained also in public institutions, thus turning already into a strategy to be widely implemented.

Two governmental decisions were made in view of the development of electronic communications and digitalization sector in Romania. It is about the Government Decision no. 89/2020 of 28 January 2020 which stipulates the organization and functioning of a new institution, the Authority for Romania's Digitalization (ARD). (The Government Decision no. 89/2020). According to this decision, ARD will take over the activities and structures of the Ministry of Communications and Information Society in the fields of information technology, information society and national interoperability framework.

The second Government Decision no. 90/2020 of 28 January 2020 abolishes the Ministry of Transports and the Ministry of Communications and Information Society and sets up a new entity, the Ministry of Transports, Infrastructure and Communications with tasks in the sector of electronic communications. (Government Decision no. 90/2020)

The use in digital format of public information, online trade, of different platforms to fill in forms, online tax payment as well as the submission of documents or of statements in electronic format towards different institutions are becoming gradually usual interactions with the public administration, especially in the context of this pandemic, but this practice is going to be normality in the period to follow.

At present, a few digital applications made by the public authorities are available for citizens to use, such as: the electronic system of public acquisitions (<https://www.licitatii-seap.ro>) ; national electronic system of public administration in Romania (<https://saad-backup.net>) as well as Ghiseul.ro.(<https://www.ghiseul.ro/ghiseul/public>)

In April 2020, The Government of Romania, by means of the Authority for Romania’s Digitalization, in partnership with Aurachain, the Association for Advanced Technologies, Bithat and Telekom launched the digital platform aici.gov.ro, a digital instrument to register documents addressed to the public institutions which do not have their own online registry office system

Digitalization is undoubtedly a means of progress which provides efficiency and responsibility. This means decrease in the interaction with office clerks within public institutions, an increased level of authorities’ responsibilities towards citizens; having in view its transparency, it is an irreversible process, all the economic activities should be adapted to this tendency and the faster and the more efficient it will be, the higher the performance will be. (Răboțu, A, et.al 2020, p.42)

Romania should focus more on the people’s improvement of technological and digital awareness and knowledge in order to develop completely its electronic and digital plan. Digital technology will increase significantly the quality level of the services provided by the Romanian public administration. Online efficient delivery of governmental services is an instrument to minimize the public administration expenses and costs, and to increase productivity efficiently and to enhance transparency and responsibility. (El Amar, et. Al, 2020, p 37)

5. Conclusions

The tendencies of transforming and developing the public administration in our country have already begun since the period previous to the EU integration when major changes of the administrative system were made so that new administrative methods, concepts and processes occurred, when new institutions were set up to bring up to date the quality of public services and to prepare the administrative system to get Romania adapted to future legislation and requirements.

In view of a successful bringing-up-to date of the public administration in Romania it is necessary firstly to have a perspective on the problems hindering the development of administration and secondly to find some modern combating strategies of these ones by different techniques.

The public administration in Romania must undergo a reforming process in which the entire attention is focused on a modern, long lasting, dynamic and efficient administration. Basically, the reform of public administration can be achieved through awareness of the importance and role played by technology.

Having in view that a digital administration reflects the image of the state in question and provides the European institutions with credibility in terms of relationships and partnerships in Romania in all fields of activity, the first ones being directly interested in the quality, efficiency and credibility of public administration, we can draw the conclusion that the image outlined by Romania regarding the digitalization of public services is not really an adequate one. Therefore, a significant reform is being required, including sustainable efforts and real involvement, with significant resources and well trained staff, are necessary in order to improve the position held by our country in the ranking of digitalization of public services.

So, digitalization of public administration is a very complex process which requires will and flexibility both from the part of public administration and that of citizens’. Among the benefits brought about by digitalization the following are mentioned: increase in labour productivity, decrease in tax evasion, increase in credibility of local public administration against citizens, transparency of decision-making, it stimulates economic growth, it prevents corruption etc. On the whole, the process of digitalization should satisfy the customers’ needs which are diverse and in a contiguous change. Therefore, the citizens’ trust in the administrative system will grow and they will perceive the administrative documents as being transparent and accessible.

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